

CORONAVIRUS – INFORMATION FOR QUEEN’S BENCH DIVISION COURT USERS
QUEEN’S BENCH MASTERS HEARINGS AND QB ACTION DEPARTMENT

During the current COVID-19 outbreak the work of the Queen’s Bench Action Department and the Queen’s Bench Masters will continue so far as possible. However, it is inevitable that the outbreak of the virus, and the Government and NHS guidelines on self isolation, means that there are, and will continue to be, absences of both Masters and court staff.

In order to deal with court business in the most efficient way possible, taking into account the current constraints, we are making certain changes to our usual procedure.

Steps to be taken by the Queen’s Bench Action Department and QB Masters Listing

1. All court counters will close except for the Fees Office Counter. Should court users need to file documents that cannot be filed electronically, such as Foreign Process applications, Deed Poll applications, documents relating to Children’s Funds and Bills of Sale, they should be left in the drop boxes that will be installed at the Fees Counter.
2. The Urgent and Short Applications List will be suspended from Monday 23 March 2020. Urgent and short applications will be re-listed/listed before any Master as soon as possible. There will be no Clerk Walk In period, and all documents usually brought in by clerks must be filed electronically.
3. Hearings currently listed in the Asbestos list will be given priority
4. We may have to adjourn non-urgent hearings if we do not have sufficient Masters available to hear them. If so, we will try and list them as soon as possible either before the assigned Master, another Master or a Deputy Master.
5. To accommodate any backlog of adjourned hearings we plan to list during July and in the Long Vacation in August and September, as far as we are able, depending upon the availability of Masters or Deputy Masters sitting.
6. Hearings may take place in a court room rather than in the Master’s chambers, to provide some distance between all court users.
7. Where possible, we will have hearings by telephone or Skype, either direct to the court, or where a Master is working from home, to the Master’s home. The Queen’s Bench Masters’ Listing Office (“QBML”) will provide the parties with the relevant details. The burden will be on the parties to arrange the telephone conference and ensure that it is recorded. Skype hearings will be instigated by the court. CPR 39.3 (3) (g) permits the court to hold a hearing in private if ‘the court considers this to be necessary, in the interests of justice’.

8. For hearings taking place in court, bundles and any hard copy skeleton arguments should continue to be lodged at the ushers' desk in the Bear Garden.
9. Where it is not possible to lodge a hardcopy bundle, or where a Master is conducting a hearing by telephone or Skype at home, an electronic bundle must be provided at least one day before the hearing. **The guidance set out in Annex A to this note must be followed in respect of an electronic bundle.**
10. A Cause List will continue to be produced but it may be subject to change at short notice.
11. There are likely to be more problems than usual in answering telephone enquiries. Please communicate with the court via email. If the matter is very urgent please copy in the Master before whom the hearing is listed, and the Master's clerk.

Professional Court Users

1. Court users should continue to E-File as usual but are likely to experience significant delays due to a reduced workforce.
2. Please let us know as soon as possible if a hearing is likely to be vacated or a representative cannot attend through illness/self isolation.
3. If you consider that a hearing is not urgent please liaise with your opponent to see if agreement can be reached for it to be adjourned, and if so, let QBML know as soon as possible.
4. If any party wishes a hearing to be by telephone or Skype, please apply for permission by email direct to the Master before whom the hearing is listed, copied to the Master's clerk.
5. By issuing claims and applications electronically, there should be no limitation issues, even if we have to close the remaining Action Department counter.

Litigants in Person

Litigants in person are encouraged to use E-Filing, but if this is not possible documents should be filed at the drop boxes provided adjacent to the Fees counter

The position may change in the forthcoming days /weeks as we respond to developments and future government guidance, and we shall provide details of any changes as soon as possible.

Senior Master Fontaine

18 March 2020

ANNEX A

QB Masters - Electronic hearing bundles

If an electronic bundle is ordered or requested by the court the bundle **must** be prepared as follows and be suitable for use with Adobe Acrobat Reader:

1. The document **must** be a **single** PDF.
2. The document **must** be numbered in ascending order regardless of whether multiple documents have been combined together (the original page numbers of the document will be ignored and just the bundle page number will be referred to).
3. Index pages and authorities **must** be numbered as part of the single PDF document (they are not to be skipped; they are part of the single PDF and must be numbered).
4. The default display view size of all pages **must always be 100%**.
5. Texts on all pages **must be selectable** to facilitate comments and highlights to be imposed on the texts.
6. **The bookmarks must be labelled** indicating what document they are referring to (**best to have the same name or title as the actual document**) and also display the relevant page numbers.
7. The resolution on the electronic bundle **must** be reduced to about 200 to 300 dpi to prevent delays whilst scrolling from one page to another.
8. **The index page must be hyperlinked** to the pages or documents they refer to.