

6 March 2024

An update for court ushers

An update from PCS MoJ Group Vice President, Jackie Green, and Assistant Group Secretary, Ros Hewitt, on the issues currently facing ushers and the work PCS is doing to represent their views.

Following concerns raised by ushers, PCS held TEAMS meetings with usher members from across HMCTS. We then met with the employer and set out those concerns.

It is clear that, in the main, ushers enjoy their role, however in the meetings we were told that recently they have been expected to undertake more than their role requires and that their goodwill is being tested. The jobs they are being given on top of their own work sit outside what can be reasonably expected and is masking the core problem that there is a lack of suitably trained correctly graded staff to undertake admin and managerial roles.

The ushers' concerns are:

- Ushers are required to work outside their grade on work outside their primary role;
- Ushers are expected arbitrarily to travel long distances to cover courts elsewhere;
- Ushers are being denied flexible/flexi-time working;
- Ushers in some extreme cases have been threatened with the Conduct Policy for questioning the expectations placed upon them.

We asked the employer to:

- Examine the usher job description across regions to determine what work ushers are undertaking and whether this is strictly in line with an usher's job description;
- Revisit expectations of ushers travelling to other locations and adopt a standardised approach;
- Financially compensate ushers where they routinely complete tasks that fall outside of their duties;
- Restore the right of ushers to work flexibly;

- Ensure there is no detriment to any usher who declines to complete tasks outside of their job description.

We were clear our position is that ushers must not be left covering courts and completing the tasks of higher grade staff. In the main this appears to happen in Crown Courts when ushers are left to cover crown court clerks' duties, but also outside of that, admin officers tasks are also given to Ushers. It was generally accepted that ushers maintain courtrooms, they should not be responsible for the administrative functions inside the court. We explained where Ushers wished, for their development, to undertake admin duties of the next grade we were content, but that no usher was to be forced to do this or penalised for refusing to undertake a duty outside of their role.

The employer was very open to looking at the points raised and has agreed to investigate. It was noted some issues are reflected nationwide and that this will require some greater time. For the localised instances members had raised, it was agreed the employer would advance these with the managers concerned.

PCS will reconvene a meeting of the ushers upon the conclusion of the investigation and a further update will be issued.

If any of this information resonates with you and you wish to share your experiences as an usher please contact both jackieg@pcs.org.uk and ros.hewitt@justice.gov.uk