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News Release

Supreme Court approaches fifth anniversary with publication of latest annual report

A record number of hearings and judgments – and visitors coming to see them taking place – define the Supreme Court’s fourth full financial year, described in detail in the Court’s Annual Report and Accounts laid before Parliament today.

The Supreme Court has seen its busiest year to date, hearing 45% more appeals (120) than during 2012/13 – partly due to the large number of ‘linked’ appeals where different cases about the same legal issues are heard together – and giving 49% more judgments (115).

The number of applications for permission to appeal received was down slightly (by 12%, from 259 in 2012/13 to 229). The proportion of applications granted permission to appeal remained at just over one third.

Breakdowns of the Supreme Court’s caseload by topic indicate that applications for permission to appeal relating to immigration, judicial review and procedural cases continued to form a significant proportion of the pipeline of possible hearings. There is, however, evidence of fewer applications in family and employment cases compared to 2012/13.

Appeals determined during the year continued to include a large proportion relating to immigration among a broad range of topics covered by the Court’s judgments. There were notably fewer judgments relating to extradition than during 2012/13, but significantly more relating to human rights. The report also reveals that criminal cases formed a larger proportion of the Supreme Court’s caseload (10% last year compared to 6% in 2012/13).

The report indicates a further slowing of the trend for the Justices to sit in panels of larger than five, with the number of appeals upon which seven or nine Justices sat falling to approximately 9% of the total hearings during 2013/14 (as opposed to 11% in 2012/13 and around 24% in both 2011/12 and 2010/11).

The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (JCPC), which is co-located with the Supreme Court and shares that Court’s administration, also heard more appeals during 2013/14 (51 compared to 36) though gave fewer judgments (32 compared to 43).

In her introduction, Jenny Rowe, Chief Executive of the Supreme Court, describes how the Court administration has “continued to deliver our core function of processing casework and providing support to the Justices, against a background of a workload which has become more demanding... During the year we completed the review of our external contracts, to ensure that we were receiving the most appropriate service for our specific needs and delivering best value to the taxpayer. Undoubtedly the biggest challenge has been the procurement exercise for our new IT support and facilities. These contracts also have the potential to deliver the biggest change in our working methods and the largest savings.”

The Annual Report and Accounts explains that a number of new contracts have been negotiated over the last two years, as agreements originally established before the Court opened in 2009 have come to an end. The major IT changes introduced new hardware, office software and case records systems, all hosted on a new combination of on-site server and cloud storage.

The most significant savings are due to come into effect over the next financial year, but the effects on the Court’s bottom line are already being seen. The Court’s net operating cost (excluding diminution in the value of the building) fell by over £0.7m to under £5.2m when compared with the £5.9m recorded in 2012/13.

The accounts show that the Supreme Court and JCPC spent £12.7m during 2013/14 (more than 40% of which was judicial and staff costs), and recouped over £7.5m in court fees, contributions from the UK court services, and other income.

The report also reveals that, despite lower costs, the Court is exposing and explaining its work to many more people. Almost 80,000 people visited the building over the course of the year, among whom 370 school and college parties were given a guided tour – both the highest annual figures since 2009. More than 75,000 people now follow the Supreme Court’s official Twitter feed, and films of judgments on its YouTube channel were watched 85,000 times over the twelve months.

Other initiatives undertaken by the Court’s administration are reviewed, with highlights of the financial year including the introduction of new HR and payroll systems giving the Court far greater control of these services; a further reduction in the building’s use of gas and electricity; and a major maintenance project to improve the acoustics of the courtroom most regularly used by the JCPC.

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