

Ms Emmy Butlin

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request-614046-ff1bdae4@whatdotheyknow.com

18 November 2019

Dear Ms Butlin

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Request – 191022010

Thank you for your request dated 22 October in which you asked for the following information from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ):

- “1. How many Court Rooms exist***
- 2. What are specific arrangements for the Press attending a court hearing***

How many members of the press can be accommodated inside the court rooms, per court room.

What is the process they have to follow to attend the court hearing.

Can the Press live tweet during the court hearing.

Is there a ticketing system to regulate how many members of the press can attend the court hearing.

- 3. What are the specific arrangements for members of the Public attending a court hearing. Members of the public include: family members, current and former politicians, members of the press who cannot get into the area for the press due to space limitations, general public.***

How many members of the public can be accommodated inside court rooms, per court room What is the process the public has to follow to attend the court hearing.

Is there a ticketing process to regulate the members of public entering the public gallery.

Can the public take notes during the court hearing.

Can the public live tweet during the court hearing.

- 4. Are there rooms at Belmarsh Magistrates Court with live feed broadcast linking up to the Court rooms where the press and or members of the public can follow court proceedings without being physically inside the court room. If yes what is their capacity.***

- 5. What is the area outside the court where the press and camera crews can set up and do their filming?***

6. What is the area outside the court where the press and public can hear and film the Defence Lawyers making statements at the end of each day of a court hearing.

7. What are the exact arrangements the court is putting in place to accommodate the high interest among press and public in the Julian Assange US Extradition Case scheduled to be heard in February 2020.

8. There will be a high number of people who wish to await outside the court during proceedings.

Please specify the exact location where these members of the public can congregate safely.”

Your request has been handled under the FOIA.

I can confirm that the MoJ holds some of the information that you have requested and I have provided the answers in bold below each question as set out in your request. Some of the information are already in the public domain. For your ease, I've given the website links where you can get the requested information. I've also confirmed the information we do not hold. This is because there is no legal or business requirement for MoJ hold the requested information.

1. How many Court Rooms exist

Answer: Belmarsh Magistrates Court can sit in any of the 12 courtrooms at Woolwich Crown Court

2. What are specific arrangements for the press attending a court hearing.

Answer: Specific arrangements vary from court to court but all courtrooms have designated media areas.

How many members of the press can be accommodated inside the court rooms, per court room.

Answer: Courtroom capacity for press at Woolwich Crown Court:

Court 1 – 11 seats for press (subject to the need of other users)

Court 2 -24-34 seats for press (subject to needs of other users)

Court 3 -23-34 seats for press (subject to need of other users)

Court 4 -1 seat for press

Court 5-1 seat for press

Court 6- 1 seat for press

Court 7-1 seat for press

Court 8-1 seat for press

Court 9- 1 seat for press

Court 10 – 1 seat for press

Court 11-1 seat for press

Court 12- 1 seat for press

What is the process they have to follow to attend the court hearing.

Answer: Accredited journalists are free to follow open court proceedings from the media area with no prior notification. Press passes (ID) will be required to access press area's and courtrooms. Should there be space, journalists are also permitted to sit in the public gallery. Journalists are also permitted to attend youth court and family cases, though must seek permission from the judge to report proceedings from the latter.

Can the press live tweet during the court hearing.

Answer: In 2011, the Lord Chief Justice gave permission for journalists and legal commentators in England and Wales to tweet, text or email from court without asking permission.

Further information can be found here: <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/tbc-guidance-dec-2011.pdf>

Is there a ticketing system to regulate how many members of the press can attend the court hearing.

Answer: In cases with a significant amount of media interest ticketing systems are sometimes put in place. This ensures representation from a variety of outlets.

3. What are the specific arrangements for members of the Public attending a court hearing. Members of the public include: family members, current and former politicians, members of the press who cannot get into the area for the press due to space limitations, general public.

Answer: This information is publicly available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/advice-on-coming-to-court>

How many members of the public can be accommodated inside court rooms, per court room
What is the process the public has to follow to attend the court hearing.

Answer: Space in each court varies although most locations can accommodate up to 12 members of the public. At Woolwich Crown Court, most courtrooms have 10-12 seats in the public gallery, 3 Large courtrooms have up to 24 seats in the public gallery. Where a hearing is held in open court the public are permitted to attend.

Is there a ticketing process to regulate the members of public entering the public gallery.

Answer: Spaces in the public gallery are filled on a first come, first served basis.

Can the public take notes during the court hearing.

Answer: It is accepted that justice is administered in open court where anyone present may listen to and report what is said. There can be no objection to note taking in the public gallery unless it is done for a wrongful purpose.

Can the public live tweet during the court hearing.

Answer: A member of the public who is in court may make an application for permission to activate and use, in silent mode, a mobile phone, small laptop or similar piece of equipment, solely in order to make live text based communications. The application may be made formally or informally (for instance by communicating a request to the judge through court staff). Further information can be found here: <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/ltbc-guidance-dec-2011.pdf>

4. Are there rooms at Belmarsh Magistrates Court with live feed broadcast linking up to the Court rooms where the press and or members of the public can follow court proceedings without being physically inside the court room. If yes what is their capacity.

Answer: Court 1-3 all have video capacity and Court 2 and 3 have video link to the press annex. Up to 60 members of the media can follow proceedings via video link if necessary.

5. What is the area outside the court where the press and camera crews can set up and do their filming?

Answer: This is a designated filming area for accredited media outside Belmarsh court.

6. What is the area outside the court where the press and public can hear and film the Defence Lawyers making statements at the end of each day of a court hearing.

Answer: This is a designated filming area for accredited media outside Belmarsh court.

7. What are the exact arrangements the court is putting in place to accommodate the high interest among press and public in the Julian Assange US Extradition Case scheduled to be heard in February 2020.

Answer: One of the two largest courtrooms at Woolwich Crown Court will be used in order to accommodate the highest number of media and public. A media annex can also be accommodated if needed.

8. There will be a high number of people who wish to await outside the court during proceedings.

Please specify the exact location where these members of the public can congregate safely.”

Answer: Information not held. Specific information regarding where the public can congregate is not held.

Appeal Rights

If you are not satisfied with this response you have the right to request an internal review by responding in writing to one of the addresses below within two months of the date of this response.

data.access@justice.gov.uk

Disclosure Team, Ministry of Justice, 10.38, 102 Petty France, London, SW1H 9AJ

You do have the right to ask the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) to investigate any aspect of your complaint. However, please note that the ICO is likely to expect internal complaints procedures to have been exhausted before beginning their investigation.

Yours sincerely

Knowledge and Information Liaison Officer
London Regional Support Unit | HMCTS