

E.R

Friday, 8 May 2009

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IMMIGRATION APPEALS

The Minister of State for Borders and Immigration, Phil Woolas:

I am today publishing, in conjunction with my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Ministry of Justice, the government's response to our consultation "Immigration Appeals, Fair Decisions; Faster Justice", published in August last year. Copies of our response have been placed in the libraries of both houses.

The government intends to transfer the functions of the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal into the First-tier and Upper Tribunal, to ensure that the system is fairer and faster, and that its decisions are respected and final. This will mean replacing the existing High Court review stage with an appeal to the Upper Tribunal, which will speed up the process significantly. The pressure on the Administrative Court will also be dramatically reduced, which will free up time to deliver justice for other users of the court.

Although the benefits of the unified tribunal system will apply to all immigration appeals, the response we are publishing today also includes a number of measures which focus on asylum cases. Taken together, we expect these measures will ensure that 90 per cent of asylum applications have either been granted or have exhausted their appeal rights within 18 weeks. This is a significant improvement over the current system, where it can take up to 42 weeks for cases to reach this stage.

The proposals in our consultation stemmed from a small working group chaired by Lin Homer, Chief Executive of the UK Border Agency and Lord Justice Richards, a Court of Appeal Judge. I am grateful to the members of the working group for their valuable insight and to all those who responded to the consultation. We have taken their comments on board and they are reflected in our response.