

The introduction of new Rules of Civil Procedure, the implementation of specialised technology and the construction of a new Judicial Centre are to be the central planks for the realization of key reforms that will transform the administration of justice in Barbados.

As part of an overall plan to improve the delivery of justice to the people of Barbados over thirty public officers from the Supreme Court recently attended an intense one-week training course conducted by the Royal Institute of Public Administrators (RIPA) on Case Management and Case Flow. The programme was conducted by the husband and wife team of Richard Woolfson and Joyce Plotnikoff, who sought to introduce participants to:

1. Current concepts of how to manage caseloads in the civil and family courts
2. Consider how case management should operate in the Barbados High Court and;
3. Techniques to plan and implement change.

The mixed group of participants consisted of all levels of the Supreme Court, from the Chief Justice and Justices of the Appeal, to the Registrar, Senior Legal Assistants, Senior Clerks and Clerical Officers. This unique mix allowed participants and facilitators to tackle all facets of the Courts operations.

Cultural Change

The main vehicle of reform in the administration of justice will be a change of court rules as opposed to changing legislation; this requires a major cultural change from Judges, Attorneys and the general public. Changing attitudes is not easy and in essence, the tone must be set by the bench. Essentially the Court will control the pace of litigation as opposed to the current system where attorneys tend to dictate the pace. The role of the court will be to (1) take early control, that is, set a timetable where possible or a trial window. The judge should set standards early and enforce a strict enquiring style, while still seeking to secure cooperation from all parties, and (2) court administrators must seek to enforce compliance of adjournments, lawyers must understand that there must be no abuse of the adjournment system.

Another consequence of the proposed changes will be the provision that *all* parties can be present throughout the case; this will allow the litigant to follow the legal proceedings. In addition it is anticipated that the language of court administration will be less complex and readily understood by all parties.

These changes and more have come about due to reform recommendations made by Lord Woolf who was commissioned to head an enquiry into the access to justice in the United Kingdom. Woolf concluded that the Civil Justice system in the UK was too slow, too complex and too expensive and as a consequence justice was available to too few. He recommended that the reforms needed to transform the British legal system, be less adversarial, less complex, shorter and more affordable. He also noted that where possible there should be less litigation, in other words parties should seek to avoid litigation.

Barbados' justice system, like those around the world has experienced unprecedented pressures to become more efficient and more responsive to the needs of our society. To meet this challenge the above reforms will be incrementally introduced.