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CAMPAIGNERS SAY SPECIALIST JUDGES ARE NEEDED FOR SPECIALISED CASES

An explosion of cases going through the county courts will reinforce the need for specialist judges in injury claims, a not-for-profit campaign group says.

The Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL) has warned the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) that when the financial jurisdictional limit is doubled from £15,000 to £30,000, the current need for specialist judges will also be increased.

“It is essential that county court judges are able to fully understand the complexities of higher value injury cases,” said Martin Hanna, a Belfast-based lawyer who sits on APIL’s executive committee.

“We have not got them at the moment and when the jurisdictional limit is doubled, the situation is only going to get worse.

“It is paramount that plaintiffs, who can be vulnerable as a result of their injuries, are made to feel reassured that there is a level of consistency between the courts and a full and fair access to justice.”

APIL made its submission to the NICTS in a response to a consultation from the County Court Rules Committee. In the response, APIL called for a ticketing system to be introduced in which judges, who have undertaken specialised training, are allocated cases relevant to their specialisation.

“A similar system is already in place for family and criminal law in England and Wales,” added Mr Hanna. “There is no reason why a similar one cannot be implemented for injury cases in Northern Ireland.



“Not only would it help ensure that the courts are used effectively and efficiently, but it would also provide injured people with the peace of mind that their cases are being dealt with by judges who are experts in dealing with their types of claim.”

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Notes for editors:

- The NICTS County Court Rules Committee stops taking responses to its Consultative Document on Scales Costs today (30 September 2011).
- For more information, please contact Chris Birkle, press and communications officer, t: 0115 943 5409, e: chris.birkle@apil.org.uk, or Jane Hartwell, assistant press and communications officer, t: 0115 943 5416, e: jane.hartwell@apil.org.uk.
- APIL (Association of Personal Injury Lawyers) is a not-for-profit organisation, whose members are dedicated to campaigning for improvements in the law to help people who are injured or become ill through no fault of their own.
- Further information can be found at www.apil.org.uk.