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PROPOSALS TO OVERHAUL CORONERS SYSTEM WELCOMED BY LAWYERS

A proposed radical overhaul in the appointment and training of coroners has been welcomed by personal injury lawyers.

Following publication today of the Coroners Review Group's report into the coroner's court system, the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL) said such an overhaul is long overdue and should go a long way to easing the burden on bereaved families.

"This is clearly a substantial report containing a huge amount of detail, all of which must be carefully considered," said Patrick Allen, past president of APIL and contributor to the consultation process.

"But we are delighted by the recommendation that coroners should be legally qualified, appointed by the Lord Chancellor's Department and – most importantly of all – subject to structured and mandatory training.

"These moves, and the general emphasis on modern judicial and public service standards, are crucial if the current archaic, fragmented system is to be brought into the 21st century."

Proposals for a more streamlined complaints system, and the involvement of senior members of the judiciary in exceptionally complex inquests is also welcomed, along with a stronger bias towards verdicts which offer greater explanation than the current forms of verdict commonly used.

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“A streamlined complaints system and more informative verdicts will be a great benefit for bereaved families who can well do without unnecessary complications when they are most vulnerable,” said Patrick Allen.

“The suggestion that criteria for deciding whether bereaved families are entitled to legal aid should be interpreted more liberally in cases where a public authority has the advantage of legal representation at the inquest is certainly a step in the right direction,” he went on.

“We believe public funding must be made available on such occasions, when unrepresented families are often unfairly faced with intimidating legal teams hired by the other party.”

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