



## BAR COUNCIL NEWS UPDATE – FRIDAY 1 FEBRUARY 2019

### IT failure

[Global Government Forum](#), [IBB Law](#), [Hinckley Times \(print\)](#) - Further coverage of the news that major IT network issues caused huge disruption across courts in England last week as computers and phone lines went down, leaving lawyers and judges unable to work and causing cases to be adjourned.

Richard Atkins QC, chair of the Bar Council, which represents barristers, e-mailed lawyers to update them about “ongoing issues affecting IT systems in the courts”. he said that Tom Read, chief digital and information officer at the Ministry of Justice, and Susan Acland-hood, chief executive officer of HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS), had been in contact. Mr Atkins said he will be seeking assurances that IT systems “will be properly funded” so that “the chaos” experienced in recent weeks does not re-occur.

### Human rights

[PoliticsHome](#) - The Bar Council of England and Wales expresses grave concerns about the recent conviction of Chinese human rights lawyer, Wang Quanzhang.

Mr Quanzhang was found guilty of ‘subversion of state power’ and sentenced to 4 years and 6 months in prison by the Tianjin Municipal No.2 Intermediate People’s Court. Mr Quanzhang was one of the approximately 250 lawyers and human rights defenders detained in 2015 as part of the 709 crackdown, and was the last still awaiting trial. He had been held incommunicado for more than 3 years, posing serious risks to his health. The Bar Council of England and Wales has on a number occasions raised concern about his detention and repeatedly called on Chinese authorities to abide by its international obligations (see previous statements [here](#)).

**Christian Wisskirchen, Head of International at the Bar Council, said:**

“We are deeply concerned that despite repeated calls from the international community for Mr Wang Quanzhang’s release, the Tianjin Municipal Intermediate People’s Court have issued this decision, and particularly that the Court decided not to hold an open trial for the case. We once again urge Chinese authorities to reaffirm and ensure full respect of the fundamental rights of all human rights defenders in

China, as guaranteed under its Constitution, Chinese Criminal Procedure Law, international conventions and the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers.”

## Legal aid

[openDemocracy](#) – openDemocracy publishes one of the Bar Council’s Justice Papers on legal aid and homelessness, written by John Gallagher of Shelter.

Gallagher writes: “If advice is to have the best chance of preventing homelessness, it needs to be early enough to make a difference, and it must be holistic in addressing all the elements of a person’s situation – for example, one person’s case may involve elements of relationship breakdown, joint tenancy, housing benefit, rent arrears, homelessness and priority for social housing. There is no point in waiting until there is a threat of eviction and imminent homelessness, which is how LASPO currently works. There is a compelling need to bring early advice on housing and welfare benefit problems back within the scope of legal aid.”

## Student pro bono awards

[LawCareers.net](#) - The prestigious LawWorks and Attorney General Student Awards has opened for nominations. The awards recognise the vital work that students and law schools do to provide free legal advice to those in need who cannot afford a lawyer. All shortlisted nominees will be invited to attend a ceremony at the House of Commons in London on the afternoon of 1 May, where the Attorney General, Geoffrey Cox QC MP, will present the awards.

The judges for the 2019 awards include Leanne Targett-Parker, chair of the Bar Council Pro Bono Committee.

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🔔 Update: All court and tribunal buildings are open today, but there may be some disruption to hearings as a result of the weather. Please check Court & Tribunal Finder to see if your venue is affected:  
[courtribunalfinder.service.gov.uk/search/](http://courtribunalfinder.service.gov.uk/search/)

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🔔 Don't forget to check Court and Tribunal Finder before setting off to make sure the court or tribunal building you're attending is not affected by the weather 🌧️ [courtribunalfinder.service.gov.uk/search/](http://courtribunalfinder.service.gov.uk/search/)

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STUDENTS: missed our 2018 Pupillage Fair? Full sessions now available to watch on our YouTube channel.

Start with our #IAmTheBar panel & get tips from our Social Mobility Advocates on reaching the Bar from 'non-traditional' backgrounds:



**The Bar Council presents: I am the Bar**

The Bar Council's Pupillage Fair 2018, hosted at Bush House, held a session with four of the #IAmTheBar Social Mobility Advocates - Aadhithya Anbahan, Grace ...  
[youtube.com](http://youtube.com)

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Kick off LGBT History Month with LGBT+ barristers, solicitors and legal executives at the Law Society's speed networking event this Friday: [bit.ly/2WrrctW](http://bit.ly/2WrrctW)

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