



The Bar Council

BAR COUNCIL NEWS UPDATE – FRIDAY 11 OCTOBER 2019

Court guides

The Times – The Times reports that government guides aimed at helping defendants in criminal cases understand the court process have been criticised for “airbrushing” out the role of barristers.

Published yesterday, the four short guides use pictures and plain English in an attempt to help demystify the court process for individuals charged with criminal offences.

The idea for the guides followed a recommendation from a report by Justice, the law reform organisation, which found that people often went to court without a full understanding of what to expect.

Across the four guides there are only two references to barristers – one in the guide to legal terms and the other in the pamphlet designed for those attending the crown court.

Richard Atkins, QC, Chair of the Bar, expressed surprise at the publications and asked for a correction “as a matter of urgency”, reports The Times. He said: “Whilst I understand that they are meant to provide easily digestible information, to effectively airbrush out of history the role of barristers in the criminal courts is incomprehensible.”

Jon Black, president of the London Criminal Courts Solicitors’ Association, highlighted other omissions, including the failure to make any reference to disclosure or to tell unrepresented defendants that they were entitled to see the case against them as well as information from the prosecution that might help their defence.

Caroline Goodwin, QC, Chair of the Criminal Bar Association, said it was “regrettable” that there was also no information for defendants pointing out that

because of cuts to judges' sitting days, their case might not be heard for months, or even go ahead on the day they attend court.

"It is criminal barristers who are left to pick up the pieces and pass on all too often at the last moment to defendants that the broken process has denied them a hearing often just a day before a trial is listed ready to go," she said.

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