

4 December 2025

Our ref: LP:DAN:ED

The Honourable Helen Bowskill
Chief Justice
Supreme Court of Queensland
PO Box 15167
City East QLD 4002

By email: [REDACTED]

Dear Chief Justice

Accessibility in the Courts

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on practical measures to address challenges for people with disability accessing courts.

This response has been compiled with input from the QLS Disability and Accessibility Network, members of the QLS Equity and Diversity Committee and QLS members with expertise and lived experience in these areas.

QLS is committed to promoting the principles and practices of diversity, accessibility and inclusion in the Queensland legal profession and in the community more broadly.

This correspondence seeks to provide an overview of considerations which might arise for legal practitioners with disability and/or other inclusion needs in the courtroom setting. Its aim is to assist the court in identifying accessibility issues and possible options for improvements.

We recognise accessibility is essential for all persons with disability who use court facilities and community members requirements may also differ from those for legal practitioners.

QLS recommends further consultation with practitioners and court users with lived experience and other peak bodies¹ and community organisations at the earliest stages of building design and refurbishment.

We also note many of the key accessibility issues identified in this submission mirror issues examined by the Disability Royal Commission and underpin Recommendation 8.11, which calls for clear, practical guidance on adjustments and supports for people with disability in the criminal justice system.² Acknowledging existing demand on Queensland courts across the State, where

¹ E.g. Vision Australia who support people who are blind or have low vision.

² Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability Final Report, Volume 8: Criminal Justice and People with Disability (2023) rec 8.11

<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au>

the suggestions below are likely to have an increased resource or budgetary impact, we intend to write separately to the Attorney-General seeking additional funding to support their implementation. We welcome the Court's input in this regard.

Introduction

We preface our submission with the caveat that the Queensland legal profession is diverse, as are the needs of our individual practitioners. In addition, there may be intersecting attributes and requirements which can have a compounding impact.

While this correspondence seeks to reflect the experience of the members who informed it, we acknowledge there may be issues or barriers that we have inadvertently overlooked.

To assist the courts in identifying accessibility issues, the Disability and Accessibility Network compiled the **attached** overview (**Attachment A**) of potential issues and suggestions for improvement.³ Steps to address these issues would meaningfully enhance accessibility in the courts for our members, and we anticipate, would be of similar benefit to all court users.

We also raise the following matters for the Court's consideration.

1. Resource sharing from other departments

All government departments are required to develop a Disability Service Plan under the *Disability Services Act* (Qld).

For example, the Department of Health has published its Disability Service Plan 2025-2028 which outlines barriers experienced by people with disability when attempting to access health care. These include systemic barriers, communication barriers, physical and financial barriers. The plan lists key actions for accessibility and those divisions who are responsible for implementation.

The Department of Justice's Disability Service Plan 2022-25 is due for review. It may therefore be timely to consider how courts accessibility will form part of the new plan and should be underpinned by a co-design process with people living with disability who access the courts.

We would be pleased to offer any assistance required.

2. Queensland Courts website

QLS supports the Disability and Accessibility Network's call for easily accessible information and improved awareness about existing accessibility arrangements to support all court users. We understand existing accommodation options may not be widely known.

We agree it would be of considerable benefit if these arrangements and contact points were easily identifiable on the Queensland Court's website. This information, might for example, be listed under the "Practitioners" heading under "Court users" where a range of tools and resources are currently linked.⁴

The Queensland Courts website should also detail who to contact (e.g. a centralised accessibility liaison as discussed below), with accessibility queries and requests for reasonable adjustments. Clear processes for these requests will enhance accessibility and inclusion.

³ Which has also had input from members of some of our QLS policy committees.

⁴ [Practitioners | Queensland Courts](#)

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Network members have emphasised the information should be published in an accessible format suitable for screen readers (or similar technology) and identify any unavoidable restrictions or limitations to enable practitioners to plan in advance when attending court. The information should be regularly reviewed to ensure accuracy.

QLS can facilitate the sharing of this information with our members via our various communication channels. The information could also be disseminated via other professional bodies and District Law Associations.

We note accessibility information will also need to be available in other formats (e.g. hard copies) to support members of the community who may not have access or adequate access to the internet or an online device.

3. Central contact point – accessibility liaison

QLS notes the Disability and Accessibility Network has previously proposed the option of an ‘accessibility liaison’ at courthouses.⁵

QLS also supports a central contact point for practitioners at their respective courthouse to speak to regarding accessibility concerns. This contact could inform the presiding judicial officer as needed. An accessibility liaison may also assist judicial officers where resources or support is needed for a self-represented party.

This role could be supported by training (delivered by experts especially those with lived experience) for all court staff about disability awareness, accessibility and reasonable accommodations (in line with Recommendation 8.11 of the DRC above).

QLS would be pleased to assist the court in developing uniform policies and procedures to support and promote accessibility requests and to make confidential disclosures if required.

4. Hidden Disabilities Sunflower lanyard

The Court might also consider implementing the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower lanyard which can be used to discreetly communicate the need for accessibility and reasonable adjustments.⁶

5. Flexibility in the court room setting

In addition to promoting accessibility in the courts for practitioners with disability, members have highlighted there may be additional (and intersecting) reasons flexibility is required in the court room setting.

Many of our members are managing long term illnesses, have caring responsibilities (whether towards children or elderly parents/family members) or are navigating stages of life such as pregnancy, breastfeeding, and menopause.

Our members have reported such needs may include:

- lawyers with medical conditions such as stomas, diabetes, incontinence or chronic pain, who may require unscheduled or frequent breaks to attend to their medical needs
- breastfeeding lawyers needing time sensitive breaks to express milk
- pregnant lawyers experiencing nausea or fatigue
- menopausal practitioners with fluctuating symptoms

⁵ [Disability amplifies court nerves – Proctor.](#)

⁶ [A symbol for non-visible disabilities, also known as hidden disabilities or invisible disabilities.](#)

Accessibility in the Courts

- single parents or primary carers, who may need strict court adjournment times to meet childcare responsibilities.

Currently, practitioners with disabilities or those facing health or other barriers have no formal or confidential mechanism to communicate with the judiciary about their needs for upcoming court appearances. Members have reported practitioners may not wish to specify their requirements in open court or to their opponents.

Clear communication mechanisms (as discussed above) would support legal practitioners by increasing awareness of existing processes and as far as possible, facilitating any necessary adjustments whilst maintaining practitioner confidentiality.

6. Regional practitioners and court users

The availability of online hearings allows lawyers (and clients) to participate in proceedings in a way that reduces costs, travel times and impacts on other commitments. Importantly, appearing remotely can also assist practitioners with disabilities or other needs to access the courts, particularly if they are located far away from the courthouse. However it is important that both technological and physical infrastructure is accessible and functional to remove barriers to participation and inclusion.

Some of our members have also highlighted that geography can impact accessibility for practitioners and clients based in the regions. For example, members have reported:

- Cost barriers where clients are required to fund attendance in Brisbane for a Land Court review or Court managed expert evidence conferences. Where practitioners are instructing counsel remotely, Webex is not always available and we understand there is sometimes limited capability to dial out to practitioners directly. Sound quality can also vary between court rooms.
- Increased costs in requiring a town agent to attend with counsel to overcome technology issues/unreliability.
- Delays and associated costs in receiving transcripts can be a barrier.
- A need for improved court security for practitioners, particularly in regional courts.

We note some of these issues are also likely to impact metropolitan practitioners and should be considered in those locations, too. However, as with many issues, the brunt of the impact can be more acutely felt in regional areas. It may be that a specific review is needed into enhancing accessibility in regional courthouses to determine access to justice and barriers including adequate technology.

QLS would be pleased to undertake further enquiries with our members in this regard.

7. Breastfeeding Facilities Directory

Lastly, to further support inclusive participation, we suggest it would be helpful to compile a directory of available facilities for breastfeeding lawyers across all court locations in Queensland. This directory could include:

- the location of private rooms suitable for breastfeeding or expressing milk
- information about the security (or ability to lock those rooms) to ensure privacy
- information on the location of refrigeration facilities for expressed breast milk
- any conditions or booking processes required for use

Accessibility in the Courts

We note refrigeration and quiet rooms may also be required for other health-related needs.

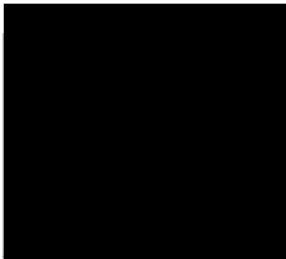
This information could also be available on the QLS website as a resource for members – particularly those who may not be familiar with certain court locations in advance of a matter.

We highlight the Brisbane Supreme Court facilities information on the Courts website states: “A Family Lounge is located on level one, containing a private area for feeding, kitchenette, baby-changing table and toilet amenities.”⁷ This is helpful and could be replicated elsewhere where facilities exist.

Please let us know if there are any existing Queensland Court facilities which we could list or a process for legal practitioners to ask, for example, whether contact should be made to the Registrar, Registry or Bailiff.

We welcome the Court’s willingness to receive feedback on these matters and would be pleased to have the opportunity to discuss our member’s feedback and to assist the Court in any way.

If you have any queries regarding the contents of this letter, please do not hesitate to contact our Legal Policy team via policy@qls.com.au or by phone on (07) 3842 5930.



Genevieve Dee
President

⁷ [All courthouses | Queensland Courts](#).

Attachment A:

People with physical mobility constraints

- Inclusion of universal design principles in new buildings or when existing buildings are being refurbished.
- Accessible parking and/or safe, accessible drop-off zones.
- Modification to existing buildings to include:
 - step-free access to all locations suitable for users of mobility aids, including walking frames, wheelchairs or mobility scooters
 - access to all locations sufficiently wide and/or unrestricted to accommodate mobility aids, including walking frames, wheelchairs or mobility scooters
 - accessible toilets (which could include the availability of 'over the toilet' chairs)
 - accessible toilet with Changing Places facilities
 - sitting areas for people who walk short distances with rest stops
- Access for legal practitioners to all parts of the building required for them to perform their work, suitable for users of mobility aids, including walking frames, wheelchairs or mobility scooters. Members report that some wheelchairs may not fit under the bar table and suggest that height adjustable tables could be utilised.
- Appropriate accessible exit routes for evacuation, suitable for users of mobility aids, including walking frames, wheelchairs or mobility scooters.
- No parts of the building prohibited to users of mobility aids, including walking frames, wheelchairs or mobility scooters.
- Publish information about any unavoidable restrictions on access, narrow doorways or corridors, etc.

People who are blind or with low vision

- Accessible parking and/or safe, accessible drop-off zones.
- Access to adequate technology which supports use of accessibility tools in all court rooms⁸.
- A blind or visually impaired person may wish to notify the judicial officer and request audio communication cues in advance, as they may be unable to pick up on facial expressions and body language.
- Appropriate accessible exit routes for evacuation.
- Information available online, in accessible format suitable for users of screen readers or similar technology.
- Publish information to include any unavoidable restrictions or limitations (i.e. not just what is available, but what is not available).
- Clear signage – especially outside each court room, ideally avoiding poor colour contrasts and small print, with braille options best practice.
- Any court brochures to be accessibly available in larger print.
- Avoid any obstacles around the doorway and poor carpet colour contrasting within the court room.
- Accessible lift options (noting for example, the difficulty of calling lifts that nominate a lift number to find).
- Clear markings on any steps in a courthouse.
- Ensure any information desk/registry is easy to find at the front of the courthouse to clarify accessibility or request directions to a specific location.
- Ensure court staff are aware of legislative requirements with respect to guide and hearing dogs in all court buildings and courtrooms.

⁸ Such as audio describers.

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- Consultation with relevant community organisations (e.g., Vision Australia) during policy development and building design.

People who are deaf or hard of hearing

- Ensure court staff are aware of legislative requirements with respect to guide and hearing dogs in all court buildings and courtrooms.
- Provide designated relief areas for service animals near court facilities.
- Qualified AUSLAN interpreters should be available for all court proceedings, including pre-trial meetings and legal consultations.
- Real-time captioning services should be offered during hearings and trials.
- Assistive listening systems (e.g., hearing loops, FM systems) should be installed in all courtrooms and public areas.
- Remote participation options (e.g., video conferencing with captioning and interpreter support) should be available for those unable to attend in person.
- Training for court staff and legal practitioners on communicating effectively with Deaf and hard of hearing individuals.
- Install visual emergency alerts (e.g., flashing lights) in all areas, including restrooms and waiting rooms.
- Ensure emergency procedures are communicated in visual formats and available in AUSLAN videos.
- Ensure court websites provides AUSLAN video guides explaining court processes and rights.
- Court signage should include visual symbols and be easy to understand for people with varying levels of literacy or language proficiency.
- Publish information on all the above online, in accessible format suitable for users of screen readers or similar technology.
- Feedback mechanisms for Deaf and hard of hearing users to report accessibility issues or suggest improvements.
- Consultation with Deaf community organisations (e.g., Deaf Australia) during policy development and building design.

People who are neurodivergent

- Safe/low stimulation spaces for practitioners or information as to where quiet rooms or rest areas are available to access.
- Incorporate subtitles or written communication wherever feasible to complement verbal exchanges. Members have reported that neurodiverse individuals may experience challenges in processing verbal information and written formats can be more effective for understanding and retention. In the courtroom setting, these difficulties can be amplified, making accessible written communication an essential support.
- Consider colour use of templates to support those with dyslexia (e.g. off-white not white)⁹.
- Allow additional time and other adjustments to support participation in both virtual and in person proceedings and allow verbal directions to be provided where an inability to understand visual cues or body language is an issue.
- Consider courtroom acoustics where these may interfere with sensory or neurodivergent difference.¹⁰

⁹ [Contrasting advice – what colours are best for accessibility? | Dyslexia Scotland - Dyslexia Scotland.](#)

¹⁰ [Disability amplifies court nerves – Proctor.](#)

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The court might also consider whether further clarity is needed as to what other types of assistance animals are permitted in court buildings and courtrooms.