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Family courts set to be opened up to the media

Wednesday, 17 December 2008

Divorce, custody and care proceedings in court will be opened to the media to increase transparency and accountability in the family courts, the Justice Secretary, Jack Straw, has announced. Accredited journalists will be admitted from April, and although reporting restrictions will be in place, the reporters may be permitted to identify social workers and doctors who give evidence.

The move would "lift the veil" on the family court system, and the greater scrutiny brought about by naming child protection professionals and medical experts involved in cases would raise standards, Mr Straw said yesterday. "I don't see any reason in principle why... other professionals in this field [child protection] should have their professional competence immune from public examination unless there are overwhelming arguments, which I think are unlikely," he argued.

Mr Straw also announced a relaxation in the rules which currently restrict the disclosure of information to third parties including members of parliament, relatives and doctors. This would allow people to discuss their cases in detail when seeking advice.

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