

Technology in the courtroom – the road to virtual reality ?

by David Riggall, a leading UK - legal IT - consultant !

The 21st Century Digital Court [conference](#) (28/5/03),

held in Court 21 at Leeds University's Law department, offered a unique insight into the actual and potential application of information and communications technology in the courts of England and Wales. Delegates and speakers came from an eclectic mix of backgrounds, i.e. academics, administrators, barristers, consultants, judges, police, solicitors and suppliers, from around the British Isles and America. The agenda, chaired by Jeremy Barnett (a Barrister and chairman of [CourtCom](#) Ltd),



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simply zipped along starting with “The courts & technology” presented by Lord Justice Henry Brooke and concluding with “Internet access to the courts” from Professor Clive Walker, of the Department of Law at Leeds University. Other speakers included :- Matthias Kelly QC (Chairman of the Bar) and Professor Fred Lederer, from the William & Mary School of Law in Williamsburg, Virginia, USA.



The [Court](#) 21 venue, in Leeds, is a UK sibling of [Courtroom](#) 21 in the US, which is designed to facilitate the teaching and learning of the use of technology in the court room. Actual courts, in the UK, are currently being upgraded so as to be able to better support the use of technology. Examples of ICT usage already include :- digital audio recording, video conferencing, the electronic presentation of evidence and online access to the status and progress of trials. Technology can record and present the dialogue & words, as they are spoken, whilst the evidence and proceedings can be viewed online, either in court, by the judge(s) & jury, prosecution & defence teams, defendant(s) and witness(s), as well as by the public & press and those beyond the walls of the court. The potential benefits for the public purse, the courts & related services and society in general are becoming increasingly well understood. Effective and efficient and accessible justice is of benefit to everyone. Trials can take less time and judgements can be accurately published within minutes rather than days. Consider for example, the savings in cost and time from using video links and the advantages of being able to see the exhibits on individual screens. Even “virtual reality” is being deployed to assist the process of giving evidence; rather than taking everyone to the scene, a “VR” reconstruction can be used to avoid the disruption. Technologies that are commonly used in other fields are gradually featuring more and more in our court systems. Of course, there are numerous issues to be considered and resolved, but most of these have already been aired, such that the courts of England & Wales are now as well placed as any, anywhere in the world, to enjoy the benefits of using technology !

You must be joking, I hear you cry, not in my lifetime, murmurs another; well the technology exists and all of our courts are being plumbed, so we only need time and government support & vision to get us there, hopefully long before court 22 opens ☺.