



01/06

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## **LOCAL COURT OFFICER WINS NATIONAL EXCELLENCE AWARD**

The outstanding work of Simon Madden, Small Claims Support Officer at Reading County Court has been recognised at the first Her Majesty's Courts Service National Awards ceremony in Birmingham on Tuesday (28<sup>th</sup>).

Simon was joint winner for the individual award for customer service.

He won for showing great commitment to the Small Claims Support Service advising unrepresented litigants facing small claims hearings.

The support service, one of three small claims pilots operating around the country, has been set up to help customers in small claims cases who do not have a solicitor. This free service gives people the chance to talk to the small claims support officer, a trained member of court staff, who will explain court procedures and help prepare them for their hearing. The support officer also encourages them to consider resolving their dispute before the hearing by dealing directly with the person, company or organisation with whom they are in dispute.

Simon has conducted over 320 appointments and the service has now been extended to Slough, Newbury and High Wycombe County Courts

The pilot was launched on 6 June 2005 and runs for 12 months.

Peter Hammersley, Thames Valley Area director, said:

“The award made to Simon represents a significant acknowledgement of the hard work and enthusiasm which he has shown in taking forward this innovative new scheme. In assisting court users to settle their cases without the need to appear in court, the scheme provides a more cost-effective way of settling cases and also frees up the court to deal efficiently with more complex cases. It thus improves the speed by which all matters can be settled. The work Simon has started is to be continued during the coming year and refined further in order to develop this type of scheme for the future in The Thames Valley Area and beyond”

Sir Ron De Witt, HMCS Chief Executive Officer, said:

“I am delighted to reward the hard work of Simon. This honour marks HMCS’ first anniversary. From my visits to courts, I have come away with a real and abiding impression that everything we do is for the public – the victim, witness, juror, defendant and plaintiff – they come first. Building the service around their needs is what defines us and establishes our reputation.”

**[A photo is available on request]**

#### **NOTE**

Her Majesty's Courts Service brought together, on 1st April 2005, 42 independent magistrates' courts committees and the Court Service into one single organisation for the first time. It is an executive agency of the Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA). Its purpose is to deliver justice effectively and efficiently to the public. It is responsible for the management of the civil, family and criminal courts in England and Wales.