



## Broadband Saves Time and Money for Barristers and Taxpayers

The words 'barristers' chambers' rarely feature in the same sentence as networking and videoconferencing. But Atlantic Chambers provides both in its modern, hi-tech, offices in central Liverpool.

Allan Weston, the Chambers' Head of Support Services, contrasts "our state of the art facilities" with "the profession's traditional image of cramped and paper strewn Dickensian premises. Many of the London Chambers are still like this because there's not much reasonably priced modern accommodation available near to the Temple, Old Bailey or other legal centres. Our investment in technology - and the extra efficiency and time savings it provides - is strengthening our competitive edge and so bringing more work into the Northwest."

### Hotdesking reduces office costs

Atlantic Chambers provides flexible 'hot desks' as an alternative to permanent desks or offices. Almost half of the 55 barristers who work from the Chambers make use of this system - and thereby make considerable savings on the rent they pay. Allan Weston notes that "our charges to our members are partially based on the facilities they use - so hot-desking saves money."

"It's often no real hardship," he continues, "because Family and Criminal practitioners in particular spend most of their time in court or with clients. And when they aren't doing this, they're often reading their next brief or researching case law - which many find easier



*Barrister Mark Chester hotdesking at Atlantic Chambers*

*"A more level playing field when we compete against chambers from the South"*

### Key Facts

- **Broadband is changing the Dickensian image of barrister's chambers**
- **Video and audio conferencing enable virtual meetings and even court hearings and reduce costs and the time required**
- **Many legal resources are now accessible on-line rather than in dusty tomes.**



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to concentrate on at home. I think this will increase as we switch more of our legal library from paper to on-line resources. And our sophisticated telephone system - which transfers incoming calls to home phones or mobiles - means that clients are not even aware that the person they're speaking to isn't in our office.”

Atlantic Chambers is also proud of its videoconferencing equipment. This uses a state-of-the-art camera and an in built computer which uploads and downloads the pictures and sound over a high speed broadband link. Two plasma screens allow both people and documents or computer data to be viewed simultaneously.

### **Conferencing avoids the time, money and environmental impacts of travel**

Barrister Ann Beattie recently used the video equipment to discuss a case face-to-face with an expert witness in Ipswich. This was turned into a three-way discussion by the inclusion of a second witness over a telephone audio conference link. She observes that “the links worked perfectly, and I was able to get everything I needed from the discussion. This avoided the hundreds of miles of travelling and associated costs required to meet in person. As the case was publicly funded, this saved the taxpayer hundreds of pounds. It also gave all parties a few hours of extra time which could be used in other ways.”

Allan Weston calculates that another use of the equipment “saved between £5-10,000 for the public purse.” The occasion was a hearing in a complex child care case which was being handled by a High Court judge. A court hearing had been scheduled in Newcastle, where the judge was presiding, but “Mr John Benson QC suggested the appointment be dealt with via a videoconference link in our Chambers. The alternative would have involved around 15 people

- barristers, solicitors, clients, social workers and other interested parties - making the 350 miles round trip from Liverpool to Newcastle. The video link solution resulted in saving a substantial amount of travel costs and fees - which would have been paid by the local authority and legal aid.”

### **Video links assist professional skills**

A link to the London-based Bar Council also enables all the Liverpool barristers to hear, and participate in, its open forums. And Atlantic Chambers' Scott Donovan, a member of the Council's executive committee, will be using it to participate in meetings without needing to take a day out to travel to London. Allan Weston believes that this use of videoconferencing makes “the professional skills and knowledge of our barristers even better. We also get an earlier understanding of developments that might affect our business - and therefore a more level playing field when we compete against chambers from the South.”

### **Further Information**

The Northwest Regional Development Agency wants the region's people and businesses to benefit from the new opportunities created by the digital revolution. It has worked with partners to establish Digital Development Agencies in Cheshire and Warrington, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Greater Merseyside and Lancashire to achieve this at local level. The agencies help identify ICT priorities for their areas, work with local organisations to identify projects to address them, and secure the resources to make these projects happen.