



**SUPREME COURT**  
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## **CIRCULAR TO ALL CHAMBERS**

29 May 2026

Circ. 5 of 2026

### **REGISTRY SEARCHES AND INSPECTION OF COURT DOCUMENTS**

Practitioners are reminded that the Registry operates in accordance with the applicable rules of court in relation to searches, inspection, and copies of the contents of court files.

Part VII of the Supreme Court Rules governs Records. Rule 48 provides that the records in Part I of Schedule 5 are open to public inspection on payment of any prescribed fee. These records comprise registers and books, including the appearance books and judgment books for civil, probate and admiralty matters and the probate caveat book.

Because it is the appearance book (not the action book) that is publicly searchable, the Registry cannot confirm the existence of an action unless an appearance has been entered. In the absence of an appearance entry, no confirmation of the existence of proceedings will be given to a member of the public. This restriction falls away only where the enquirer is a named party to the proceedings, in which case the existence of the action may be disclosed and copies taken, subject to the Civil Procedure Rules.

The action books and other records in Part II of Schedule 5 are not open to public inspection as of right. Access to those records or to the court file requires that the person is a named party, or that leave is obtained. The position in the main categories of proceedings is as follows:

- Civil proceedings: entitlement to inspect within the file is governed by the Civil Procedure Rules as applicable.
- Probate proceedings: a grant of representation once issued is a public document and may be inspected and copied. Other documents on the probate file are not automatically available.
- Insolvency and liquidation: the English Insolvency Rules apply, as confirmed by Jack J in *Bowies & Dickinson* (30 June 2016, paragraph 57). The winding-up registers are publicly searchable; access to the file beyond that requires party status or leave of the court.

- Criminal proceedings: access to information is governed by the Criminal Procedure Rules. There is no general right of public access to the criminal file.

Where a practitioner attends in person as an officer of the court and represents that they act for a named party to identified proceedings, the Registry will act on that representation without further authority. Where requests are made through a messenger, trainee, or otherwise indirectly, written authority will be required from the firm confirming the client's identity, the proceedings concerned, the basis of entitlement and authority for the person attending to conduct the search.

Registry staff carry out their duties in accordance with the rules and directions of the Registrar. Where a practitioner disagrees with a position taken by counter staff, the matter should be referred to the Registrar whether in person, by telephone, or in writing. If uncertainty exists about entitlement before a search, practitioners are encouraged to seek clarification in advance.



**Karl Tonna**  
**Registrar**