

Government to scrap plans for mandatory mediation for separating couples

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Karen Jones

Ministers are preparing to scrap plans to make mediation mandatory for separating couples in England and Wales. Comments from Jessica Reid, partner and mediator at Dawson Cornwell.



Jessica Reid

Jessica Reid, partner and mediator at **Dawson Cornwell** said: “It is not all that surprising that ministers are preparing to scrap plans to make mediation mandatory for separating couples in England and Wales, particularly when you consider that the core principle of mediation is both parties coming to the table voluntarily. The voucher scheme is a far more sensible approach. Incentivising parties to mediate by reducing the cost of embarking on the process means that more separated couples will likely want to engage to see if it works. That is not to say the current voucher scheme is perfect. As it stands, the scheme provides families with a one-off contribution of £500 towards their mediation costs, but only with

an accredited mediator and only in cases where the dispute relates to children. The scheme should be extended to encompass mediators who are not accredited to ensure wider access to justice and should be open to all family disputes. A contribution of £500 also may not go very far. A voucher ensuring that an initial one-and-a-half-hour session is covered would be far more beneficial – a “try before you buy” system that will truly demonstrate the benefits to parties. The main issue around mediation is that many people are uneducated as to what it actually entails, and this would certainly help to demystify the process.”