



OPIA

CASE STUDY

Opia supports MoJ in
delivering an innovative
solution for reducing strain on
family courts

The UK Ministry of Justice (MoJ)

Post-pandemic, family courts across the UK faced an exacerbated backlog of Private Law cases, creating delays in resolutions. To help alleviate this, in March 2021, the government implemented an innovative family mediation voucher scheme, encouraging families to resolve their disputes through mediation, where safe and appropriate to do so. This is often quicker, cheaper and less stressful than attending court. It involves them working through their differences with a trained and experienced mediator to create a solution that works for everyone, rather than one imposed by a judge. The resulting agreement is not a binding contract, but the parties can ask the court to make their agreement into an enforceable court order if they want. Initially managed by the Family Mediation Council (FMC), the administration of the mediation vouchers scheme's contract was awarded to Opia in June 2023.

Using mediation to ease the pressure on family courts

In a House of Commons Justice Committee **report** published in July 2020, the then Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, Robert Buckland QC, stated that he was “concerned” about the backlog in public and private family law cases, after a significant rise following the Covid-19 pandemic. The impact of these delays on families prompted the government to devise and implement an innovative solution to ease the pressure on the family courts.

In 2021, the government introduced the family mediation voucher scheme to help families reach agreements on childcare and finances without needing to go to court. Successful mediation can reduce the burden on courts and provide a faster, less stressful route of resolution for the families involved.

An independent, trained mediator can help couples find a mutually acceptable solution for their dispute and, where appropriate, make the resolution legally binding.

Authorised mediators can apply for up to £500 toward the cost of mediation on behalf of families. Eligibility is determined by the issues the family seek to mediate. These are:

- Private law proceedings relating to children; or
- Proceedings for a financial remedy, where the person is also considering private law proceedings relating to children.

Only mediators authorised by the **Family Mediation Council (FMC)** can participate in the voucher scheme. Once a claim is approved, mediators submit case details and their invoices to claim back the cost of their services.

The mediation scheme saw significant success in its first year and continues to grow.

Analysis of the first 7,200 cases completed under the scheme suggests 69% of participants reached whole or partial agreement and did not need to go on to court. Mediator surveys further suggest 51% of participants would not have attempted mediation without the financial incentive offered by the scheme.

The scheme began with £1 million funding and the intention of helping approximately 2,000 families. By March 2025, over 39,800 families had taken up its offer of assistance, and the scheme had grown to an investment of up to £23.6 million, which will allow it to continue to March 2026.

The Administration of the Mediation Vouchers Services contract is awarded to Opia

With the scheme growing in size and reach, the government put the contract for The administration of the Mediation Vouchers Scheme out to tender in April 2023. The contract was awarded to Opia on 19 June 2023, with a rapid implementation phase of 6 weeks.

The MoJ was looking for an expert administrator that could rapidly process claims with high quality and accuracy, had robust fraud detection and prevention mechanisms, and strong customer experience.

Opia works primarily in the private sector, supporting commercial businesses in delivering their sales promotions. However, its infrastructure, expertise and resources are directly relevant to the requirements of the Mediation Vouchers Scheme contract, with key USPs that stand out as offering value to the scheme.

These include:

- Expertise in the end-user customer journey (in this case, the mediators), with an established Gateshead-based contact centre in the North of England and experienced customer service agents to support mediators with their queries
- Resources for fast voucher disbursement, with proven processes for claim fulfilment, background checks and fraud prevention
- A real-time dashboard providing data of vital statistics, including the number of claims uploaded and the amount of budget allocated – an essential feature when using public money to fund the scheme
- The capability to continuously improve our solution, collaborating closely with the MoJ to build a catalogue of queries and resolutions bespoke to the requirement
- The agility to adapt and grow the solution alongside the evolving needs of the scheme and meet its specialist requirements
- The option to TUPE previous employees from the Family Mediation Council (FMC)

With these existing resources, Opia could rapidly launch the service. In just two months, we delivered a fully functioning platform and support team and fully onboarded key Family Mediation Council (FMC) experts.



The ongoing partnership with Opia, the MoJ and the mediators

The initial response to Opia's solution has been positive, with good feedback from a user survey and many commenting on the user-friendly interface and value of the account area. In the first six months, Opia provided the MoJ "warranty period", during which any required tweaks and updates could be made to ensure the solution runs seamlessly.

Over 580 mediators have registered on the platform. Opia has been working with the six key mediator organisations to make accredited mediators and those working towards accreditation in Family Mediation aware of the scheme and their eligibility to continue its growth.

Opia continues to work closely with the MoJ, the FMC, key stakeholders and the mediators, having regular meetings to ensure the services run smoothly. Key members of our team also attend mediator conferences and industry-related events to remain up-to-date with the developments in this area.

OPIA

Our teams are present in New York, London, Paris, Milan and Melbourne and we operate in over 40 countries.

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