

Kings Court Trust condemns Government's decision to increase probate fees

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- Probate fees set to rise by up to 93 times their current level for families
- Fees would reach £20,000 for the most valuable estates, constituting a stealth tax on death
- Families face having to pay these bills upfront in order to gain access to their inheritance

The Government's decision to increase probate fees from £215, or £155 if families are using a solicitor, to a tiered system based on the value of the estate is patently unfair for many families according to Kings Court Trust (<http://www.kctrust.co.uk/>), one of the UK's largest estate administration specialists.

While those inheriting estates worth less than £50,000 will no longer pay for probate, all other estates will be subject to increased fees in line with the value of the estate in question. For example, the fees associated with an estate valued at £150,000 will increase by 40% to £300, while a family inheriting an estate worth £500,000 would need to find £4,000 to cover the cost of probate. The fees increase dramatically on a sliding scale, up to a maximum of £20,000 for the wealthiest estates.

Christopher Jones, sales and marketing director of Kings Court Trust, said: "At first glance, you may think that an individual or family inheriting several hundred thousand pounds should have no problem paying the increased probate fees. However, just because a family is due to benefit from an inheritance doesn't guarantee that they will be able to find the substantial funds that will now be required to access what is rightfully theirs. Funds cannot be released from the estate until the Grant of Probate is extracted, so this is a real 'chicken and egg' situation for the family.

"Not only does this cause a significant financial headache for a bereaved family coming to terms with the loss of a loved one, but it is even more galling for them to know that they now face paying a premium of up to 9000%. Despite the hike in fees, there has been no indication from the Ministry of Justice that service levels will be quicker or more efficient. In fact, the service that some families will have to pay £20,000 for is exactly the same as the one currently provided for £155.

"This tiered fee approach is exactly the type of charging structure that the legal sector is being encouraged to move away from. As a business, we pride ourselves on offering a service based upon the interests of the family and the actual work that needs to be done to administer an estate. The Government's plans fly in the face of this approach and appear to be nothing more than a stealth tax that is funding the court service at the expense of bereaved families.

"Unfortunately, families will now face an additional administrative and financial burden at one of the worst times in their lives, and this is something that we are strongly opposed to. We are currently looking at practical ways we may be able to assist families in dealing with this difficult situation so that we can offer them much needed support when the rule change comes into effect from May 1."

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