

# Online evaluation

**Tim Wallis**, independent chairman of RTA Portal Co, evaluates the first 12 months of the Portal and examines the future of the online system



#### **Tim Wallis**

is the independent chairman of RTA Portal Co, which is responsible for the management of the settlement portal

*It is now over 12 months since the Portal that was put in place to support the pre-action protocol for low-value personal injury claims in road traffic accidents went live.*

*Introduced as part of Ministry of Justice (MoJ) reforms to speed up RTA claims between £1,000 and £10,000, there have been highs and lows in its short lifespan. Some technical problems were strongly criticised in the early days but a successful 'Release 1' update in March 2011 was completed without a hitch.*

*So, with the Portal back in the news following the MoJ's announcement that it is considering a proposal to extend the upper limit to £25,000 and to add all personal injury claims under £25,000 (including clinical negligence claims), we ask Tim Wallis, independent Chairman of RTA Portal Co, to examine the past, present and future.*

#### **Are you pleased with the Portal's progress since going live?**

In broad terms, yes, although we remain aware that there was a large degree of frustration and difficulty at the outset

and that the transition from the well-established paper system to the electronic portal has had its difficulties.

#### **Has the Portal largely been a success and is the board happy with what has been achieved so far?**

The initial signs have been positive and good progress has been made. There is now a very real potential to deal with matters more quickly – and to get claimants their damages earlier.

It is still early days to evaluate 'success' overall. Initial complaints may have died down but in many ways it is too early to give sound statistical feedback on performance. For example, the Management Information system is still being developed and more claims need to be completed before a representative picture can emerge.

Further, it might be helpful to note that the Portal was designed to function as a specialised electronic post box and not as a case management system.

#### **What were the main teething problems and how successfully were these overcome?**

The bumpy start to the Portal's life was very largely due to a massive IT infrastructure

development and implementation being undertaken over a very short time-span. The concept of the Portal may be straightforward, but delivery has been less so, not least because of the need to give a high priority to the security of the data. Simultaneous provision of the Portal service via both web browser and application-to-application (A2A) software produced additional challenges.

These issues were overcome by applying resources, upgrading the help desk facility, making technical changes and working with users and software houses to understand and then comply with their requirements.

#### **Have any pre-defined targets been met?**

The Portal continues to make good progress and can be relied upon to support the MoJ requirements introduced in April last year. Users and software suppliers are now being supported appropriately and given fair notice of system-critical changes and updates. The first major update of the system took place in March – this involved various amendments and upgrades to bring the portal into more complete alignment with the Civil Procedure Rules (CPR). The update seemed to go very well with very few comments from anyone and, in this respect, no news is good news.

