

Ministers ignore charities and experts with huge hike in probate fees

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Probate charges will soar

Ministers ignored the protests of more than 800 charities, trade bodies and businesses before increasing probate fees by 3,771%.

Last week the Ministry of Justice announced that probate fees would rise from a set fee of £215 — £155 if a solicitor is employed — to more than £6,000 for the largest estates. About 270,000 estates apply for probate — the process of dealing with a deceased person's finances, property and assets — every year.

Of the 831 organisations that responded to the fee changes — including the Law Society — 810 disagreed with the proposals, branding them “excessive” and “unjustified”.

The government, which had originally wanted to increase the fees to more than £20,000 but backed down after protests from campaigners, did not attempt a second consultation before unveiling the new charges.

Charities have called on the Ministry of Justice to reconsider the proposals because they fear missing out on donations as a result.

Matthew Lagden, chief executive of the Institute of Legacy Management, said: “The new fees would significantly reduce income for charities reliant on legacy gifts, to the tune of £10m a year, at a time when many charities are struggling to meet increasing demand for their services.”

Patrick Connolly, chartered financial planner at the adviser firm Chase de Vere, said: “These fee increases are an excessive and unnecessary kick in the teeth for those who are already bearing the brunt of ongoing increases in inheritance tax receipts.”

The Ministry of Justice said the fee rises were fair and progressive and were needed to pay for the rising costs of running the courts system.

Ian Bond, chairman of the Law Society’s wills and equity committee, told Radio 4’s Money Box programme yesterday: “It is . . . inherently unfair to place a tax upon the more wealthy estates purely and simply because they have more in their asset pool.”