

# Deceased estates now on new online system

## Chief Master sets up public access to tracking

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**T**RACKING what's happening with the estate of a deceased person has been made easier with a new online system.

Deceased estates are managed through the office of the Chief Master of the High Court. But knowing where to go has never been easy with estates being filed at 14 Masters' Offices or 400 magistrate's courts around the country.

But now, the Chief Master has set up public access to an online system for tracking the administration of estates and trusts.

"Masters' Offices spend too much time drawing files and answering questions by members of the public relating to the contents of files. Sometimes it is not clear in which office a certain file is kept, and this leads to frustrations and delay," said the Chief Master in Joburg, advocate Lester Basson.

"Steps have been taken to ease these problems by giving members of the public access to a public portal with information on the Master's Office integrated case management system. Information on the portal is updated daily.

"Members of the public will now know exactly in which Master's Office a deceased estate is being administered and have the reference number." Basson said the system was a work in progress.

"More information will be available soon, for instance details of the executor, and

accounts lodged and examined by the Master."

The system was initiated and guided by Tienie Cronjé, a researcher of the South African Law Reform Commission. "I couldn't sleep one night," said Cronjé. So he took the forms required to report an estate and started working out what fields were needed in a database to generate the forms.

Some of this information is now available to the public on the internet.

Cronjé said the system would help battle corruption as it made information more public and accessible.

For instance, a family will easily be able to find out that a

### System should help to battle corruption

relative who died had a will that has been filed, and which office is dealing with it.

The Fiduciary Institute of SA (Fisa) welcomed the news.

"This system will not only improve efficiencies, but will also assist executors in many other ways. A nominated executor will, for instance, be able to establish if a later or earlier will was lodged with the Master's Office before he proceeds with the administration of the estate. This will save time and prevent family members from having to attend unnecessary meetings during a very emotional time," said Fisa chairman John Gibson.

The system focuses on the

administration of deceased estates, but as the Master's Office also deals with trusts, liquidations and the Guardians' Fund, Basson and Cronjé hope information on these matters will be added as the system expands.

Basson called it an innovative idea that would help speed up the administration of matters by reducing the amount of time staff spend dealing with public enquiries.

He is determined to provide the most efficient service possible. "You pay our salaries and we must deliver better for you," said Basson. "I fight this inefficiency with a passion."

Basson emphasised that the online system was a group effort that involved the office's key partners, such as Legal Aid SA, Fisa, the SA Revenue Service and the Department of Home Affairs.

Nationally, the Master's Offices deal with matters involving a total of about R2 billion to R3bn every month.

There are about 850 new matters filed every day.

"Our estimate is that, per hour, there is R15m under our supervision," said Basson.

Speedy administration is thus crucial. This is the online address of the public-access site: <https://icmsweb.justice.gov.za/mastersinformation>

The Master's Office also has information available on the Department of Justice website, at [www.justice.gov.za](http://www.justice.gov.za) under "special interest areas - Master of the High Court". This website also contains information on how matters are processed.