

Top UK judge: No ban on Twitter in court

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(AP) -- It's the tweet smell of success for courtroom microbloggers in Britain.

The head of the judiciary in England and Wales ruled Monday that there is no ban on using Twitter in court.

Lord Chief Justice Igor Judge said the use of "unobtrusive, hand held, virtually silent" equipment to give live text updates was unlikely to interfere with the administration of justice.

Among the traditions of British justice - alongside lawyers' black robes and horsehair wigs - are strict restrictions on communications. Cameras and recording equipment are banned, phones are usually prohibited, and even court artists are barred from sketching in the courtroom - they must make notes and then go outside to draw.

Twitter has been a gray area. Last week a judge allowed journalists to tweet from a bail hearing for WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange - the first time it had been expressly permitted. But two days later the judge at another hearing for Assange said tweeting was barred.

The chief justice said there was no legal prohibition on using "a mobile phone, small laptop or similar piece of equipment, solely in order to make live text-based communications of the proceedings" - giving journalists a green light to tweet, text or liveblog from hearings.

But he said users would have to seek the judge's permission first, and

this could be refused in criminal trials if there was a risk that information posted on Twitter might influence witnesses or jurors.

Judge said final rules would be issued after a consultation process.

Fast-changing technology is challenging judicial custom around the world.

U.S. federal courts tell jurors to avoid Twitter, Facebook and other [social networking sites](#), but deciding whether journalists can tweet or blog from court has generally been left up to judges. Relatively few federal courts have embraced [Twitter](#), although last year a [federal judge](#) in Kansas allowed a reporter to use the microblogging service to provide updates from a gang trial.

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