

Responses to “Making Legal Rights a Reality- the Legal Services Commission’s Strategy for the Community Legal Service” January 2006

We received over 260 responses in total, which have been analysed to find out the key themes which are emerging. This document contains headline points representing the views of respondents to the consultation.

Overall, respondents welcomed the draft strategy and supported the direction of travel it outlined. Respondents were overwhelmingly supportive of the vision for the CLS and the three priority work areas. All key stakeholders broadly agreed with proposals to pilot Community Legal and Advice Centres and Networks. They looked forward to seeing more detail on how this vision would be realised and shared with us their views for implementing the strategy.

Several different types of organisation responded to the consultation:

- a- Local Authorities (52 responses)
- b- Other publicly funded bodies (13 responses)
- c- CLSPs (59 responses)
- d- RLSCs (5 responses)
- e- Clients or groups representing clients (10 responses)
- f- Solicitors (19 responses)
- g- NfP Agencies (84 responses)

When percentages of respondents are used below, they refer to the percentage of those responding to that particular consultation question, rather than a percentage of those responding to the consultation as a whole.

Q1. Do you agree with the flexible definition of the CLS as we have outlined in paragraphs 1.5 – 1.16?

111 organisations responded to this question. Responses focused on:

1. The type of service which should be delivered

The most common response to question 1 (given by 28% of respondents, particularly Local Authorities and CLSPs) was to agree that a flexible definition for the CLS is sensible, and that this would allow services to be delivered flexibly to respond to changes in clients' needs. Many respondents felt that the CLS should be defined in terms of outcomes which a client could expect from the service. A few respondents also felt that the definition should include specific reference to specialist legal services.

2. The overall function of the CLS

Whilst agreeing that the definition of the CLS should be flexible, several respondents (14%) thought that the definition in terms of the function of the CLS should be clarified.

3. The role different organisations should play within the CLS

Several organisations, of all types, commented on the roles of different organisations within the CLS. The most common of these comments (each given by 10% of respondents) were that the role of the LSC itself should be clarified, and (particularly from CLSP respondents) that a wide range of organisations should be involved in the CLS. NfP agencies particularly mentioned that if roles and duties were not clarified organisations could not be forced to carry out their duties, referring specifically to the absence of a duty on local authorities to fund advice services.

4. The brand that services are delivered under

6% of respondents highlighted the fact that the CLS Brand is not well known either within the (non-legal) advice sector or by the public. 7% of respondents, however, felt that it is not important for the CLS brand to be recognised so long as clients know where/how to get legal advice.

Q.2. Do you agree that our primary focus for the CLS should remain as defined in paragraphs 1.17 - 1.23?

76% of respondents agreed with our primary focus. There was particularly strong support from Local Authorities and solicitors. Respondents particularly welcomed the focus on social exclusion and on holistic services. NfP agencies and solicitors especially welcomed a focus on individual rights, and NfP agencies, CLSPs and Local Authorities in particular welcomed a focus on strategic action.

Responses to this question centred on:

1. How the LSC should implement this focus

The most common suggestion (from 9% of respondents), particularly from NfP agencies and client group representatives, was that the LSC should focus on how to implement services which are suited to the needs of different client groups. There were also thoughts that the current contracting structure would not be suitable for implementing the focus, and that it might be difficult for funders with different funding priorities to focus jointly on the same things.

2. Suggestions for additional service delivery methods we should focus on

The most common suggestion (from 9% of respondents) for an additional area of focus relating to service delivery was to add a specific focus on developing accessible, local services. Another common suggestion (6% of respondents) was to add a specific focus on representation.

3. Suggestions for additional areas of law/client groups the LSC should focus on

The most common comment under focus on client groups (from 9% of respondents) was a concern that the LSC focuses too narrowly on eligible clients. The main suggestion was that the LSC should focus more strongly on public law.

Q.3. Do you agree that the vision set out in paragraphs 2.1 - 2.16 is the right one for the CLS? If not, what would you change or add?

Overall, 83% of respondents agreed that our vision is the right one for the CLS. Comments on the vision can be grouped into six themes:

1. Accessibility

12% of respondents, particularly CLSPs and NfP agencies felt that accessibility was the most important part of the vision. These and other respondents also felt that when looking at accessibility, the LSC should consider “pockets of deprivation” and patterns of how clients access suppliers. Similar organisations and several of the other public bodies stressed that the definition of cost-effective should not affect access to services.

2. Implementation of the vision

This theme attracted the largest number of comments and requests for more detail on how the vision would be implemented. 12% of respondents, particularly from CLSPs and NfP agencies, sought reassurance that resources would be available to implement all different areas of the vision. 16% of respondents, especially from Local Authorities, NfP agencies and other public bodies stressed the importance of working closely with other agencies to implement the vision, but many NfP agencies added that closer working should not compromise independence of advice services. There were some concerns from suppliers that implementation of the vision should not place too great a burden on them.

3. Providing seamless and integrated services

The most common response on this theme was from respondents (mainly CLSPs, Solicitors and NfP agencies) supporting the inclusion of seamless and integrated services in the vision. A few mentioned the role of specialised services within an overall integrated services and the role which second tier services could play.

4. Quality

Many respondents welcomed the inclusion of quality assurance and reference to National Occupation Standards in the vision. 12% of organisations, particularly CLSPs and NfP agencies, asked for clarification on the role of the quality mark in the LSC's strategy for quality assurance.

5. Prioritisation of services

The most common response on this theme was to agree that prioritisation of services was necessary. Several respondents felt that the priorities should be changed in various ways, such as to specifically include lobbying of Treasury and other government departments and the importance of strategic action and test cases.

6. Additional areas to include in the vision

The question asked respondents what areas they would want to add to the vision, and seven were suggested. The most common suggestion (16% of respondents) was for eligibility for public funding to be considered in the vision. Some (4%) also suggested that recruiting and retaining quality staff should be part of the vision. Other suggestions (given by one or two respondents) were to consider brand recognition, client choice, general help level work and engaging service users.

Q.4. Do you agree that these are the main challenges that the CLS faces? Are there others? (see paragraphs 3.1 - 3.13)

The most common response to this question was from respondents who agreed that these were the main challenges that the CLS faces (38%). Many respondents suggested additional challenges and some felt that the challenges in the draft strategy should be differently emphasised. There were six main themes in responses to this question:

1. Funding

28% of respondents felt that securing sufficient funding was the biggest challenge facing the CLS. The majority of these respondents felt that the biggest challenge to availability of funding came from pressure from increased criminal spending. Other funding challenges were to make funding sustainable, to ensure that funders worked together and to make funding flexible to suit the needs of different services and client groups.

2. Needs analysis

11% of respondents felt that needs analysis should be added as an additional challenge the CLS faces. Translating needs analysis into service provision was also mentioned. Other challenges mentioned included the links between needs and access problems, and the advice needs of specific client groups.

3. Service provision

24% of respondents (mainly from solicitors and NfP agencies) felt that recruitment and retention of trained lawyers and advisers should be included as a main challenge. Geographical challenges to service provision, especially in rural areas, were suggested by 13% of respondents. Other suggestions were the need to consider not just the physical aspects of access to services, the need to ensure choice and flexibility in service provision and the tension between building on existing work and setting up new services. 8% of respondents wanted to include the challenge of how to ensure that there were sufficient services for non-eligible clients. 6% of respondents, mainly other public bodies and suppliers, disagreed that the advice maze was a problem, stating that there were insufficient services to constitute a "maze".

4. Roles of CLS members

Some respondents felt that the roles of members of the CLS posed additional challenges. 6% of respondents (mainly CLSPs) felt that lack of LSC support for CLSPs posed a challenge. The same proportion also felt that keeping partner agencies involved in the CLS was a significant challenge. 5% of respondents (mostly from CLSPs) disagreed with the view that CLSPs had failed.

5. Quality

8% of respondents thought that balancing the sometimes conflicting priorities of quality, quantity and cost was a significant challenge. A few felt that measuring the quality of advice and use and audit of the quality mark was a significant challenge.

6. Strategic action

There were three main challenges added under this theme: difficulty of joining up the Commission's advice agenda with government initiatives on social exclusion; ensuring that impacts on legal aid from other government initiatives were considered; and the fact that the CLS has no power to compel other organisations (such as local authorities) to fund services.

Q.5. Do you support the proposal to establish a national stakeholders group? Do you have any comments on the initial remit and proposed membership as outlined in paragraphs 5.3 and 5.4?

40% of respondents to this question supported this proposal. However, 12% were sceptical that it would add value to the CLS. Responses to the question centred around the remit and membership issues in the question:

1. Remit

The most common comment (17%) about the group's remit and function was a fear that the group would override local issues and concerns. Other issues which several respondents commented on were the need to ensure that the group has a clear remit, concerns over the group's accountability and the need for the group to have "teeth" and a genuine ability to influence the policies of other departments and agencies.

2. Membership

33% of respondents (mostly from NfP agencies and CLSPs) felt that it was important for providers or their representatives to have some role in the group, or at least some way of feeding information into it. Another common comment, from 18% of respondents (Local Authorities and CLSPs in particular) was the need for local information to be able to feed in to the work of the national group. Many respondents (17%) were also concerned that service users be represented on the group, in particular representatives of minority groups. 7% of respondents felt that there could be a conflict between the LSC and Local Authority representatives on the national group. Another suggestion was for there to be some sort of regional stakeholders groups in addition to the national group. There were many other individual suggestions about who to involve, including trades unions and various umbrella bodies.

Q.6. Do you agree that the planning function of CLSPs should be undertaken by a different body? Do you agree the appropriate body should be agreed between the LSC and local authorities? (see paragraph 5.6)

There was a wide variety of responses to this question, which often reflected the type of organisation responding. 19% of respondents (particularly, of course, from CLSPs) felt that CLSPs had not failed to the extent expressed in the draft strategy. 40% of respondents (including most CLSPs, several NfPs and some Local Authorities) felt that the LSC should continue to support CLSPs, especially where they were working well, or at least should build on their strengths when developing new planning arrangements. Responses generally focused on 4 themes:

1. Local authorities

17% of respondents felt that there should be a strong, formal relationship between the LSC and Local Authorities. 5% of respondents suggested using Local Area Agreements as a planning mechanism. Other comments mentioned the need for a two-way relationship between the LSC and Local Authorities and the fact that Local Authorities often have no additional funding to put into advice services.

2. Roles of different bodies in planning

30% of respondents (from providers and local authorities) felt that there needs to be good communication between funders and providers in the planning process, and many of these (particularly providers themselves) felt that providers should be directly involved in service planning. Several providers also felt that they should have a direct role in governance of the CLS. 22% of respondents felt that Local Strategic Partnerships should play a lead role in service planning, though 17% also felt that LSPs do not have the capacity to take on this role as envisaged. 6% of respondents (who were all NfP agencies) were concerned that if local authorities had too large a role in the planning process their agenda would dominate service planning.

3. How planning should be carried out

The most common comment under this theme was that conflict of interest within bodies with both a planning and service provision function could be managed locally and was not a problem. 12% of respondents (who were CLSPs or NfP agencies) gave this response. Other comments were that the new planning bodies needed to be locally accountable, that the LSC regionally and nationally is too far removed from local circumstances and that in altering planning arrangements there is a risk of damaging trust within the advice sector. Most of these comments came from CLSPs and NfP agencies.

4. Commissioning services

The most common comment on this (from 17% of respondents of all types except local authorities, though especially from NfP agencies, solicitors and client representative groups) was that if the LSC and Local Authorities jointly commission services they will not be thought of as independent of government. Almost as many respondents (13%) felt that funders, including Local Authorities should be responsible for commissioning services. Some other respondents, from Local Authorities and CLSPs, felt that services should be commissioned based on outcomes which clients could expect from the CLS.

Q.7. Paragraph 6.3 outlines steps to ensure that appropriate resourcing is available for the CLS. Are there other steps that the Commission should take?

Most respondents agreed with the steps outlined for ensuring that appropriate resourcing is available for the CLS, without suggesting other steps. Responses were grouped around four main themes.

1. How to increase the amount of money available for the CLS

15% of respondents stated that the CLS needed to have an increase to its overall budget and various alternative sources of funding were suggested. The most common comment on this theme (from 7% of respondents, mainly CLSPs) was the importance of securing long-term, sustainable funding. Several respondents felt that additional funding would be needed for the pilot CLACs and CLANs. Other suggestions for new sources of funding included Big Lottery Fund, charities, commercial sponsorship, EU funding and making better use of existing funding streams such as Neighbourhood Renewal Fund's money for advice. Local Area Agreements and Local Strategic Partnerships were suggested as methods for securing funding from other bodies.

2. Working with other funders

7% of respondents stressed the importance of working closely with other funders, in particular local authorities. There were concerns from 9% of respondents (CLSPs and NfP agencies) that working together could be difficult, because different funders have different priorities, and that close

working between funders could compromise the independence of the CLS. 6% of respondents felt that it was important to find local as well as national steps to increase available funding. There were comments from respondents of all types about the importance of creating guidelines/protocols for working with local authorities so that everyone knew who funded what services. 7% of respondents (from CLSPs, Solicitors and NfP agencies) felt that Local Authorities have very little money and could not therefore be relied upon as a source of additional funding for the CLS.

3. How to ensure that funding is available for increased legal aid costs resulting from other government policies

19% of respondents felt that it was important to ensure that funding was available to cover increases in legal aid costs as a result of the policies of other government departments. 21% of respondents felt that the CLS budget ought to be ring-fenced or otherwise protected from increases in CDS spending. 6% of respondents wanted the CLS to use research on the impact of advice in order to influence other government departments. Some respondents felt that the national stakeholders group should work on this issue. Other suggestions included passing increased costs of legal aid directly on to the government departments involved and giving other government departments a PSA target to reduce the amount they cost the legal aid fund.

4. What the LSC should/should not fund in order to reduce spending

Many respondents had comments on the ways suggested in the draft strategy for reducing spend and prioritising resources. 16% of respondents (of all types) were concerned that the LSC intended to make face-to-face services available only in deprived areas. 7% of respondents disagreed with the view that clients should be expected to travel to access services, and a few felt that the LSC should look in more detail at how to provide services in rural areas. Respondents of all types felt that we should keep a balance of focus on both priority clients and the wider community. A few respondents pointed out that an increase in telephone advice could lead to referrals to face-to-face services which could need additional resources. Suggestions for other services to fund to increase value-for-money were more telephone and web-based services, ADR/mediation, preventative services and making services more flexible. 5% of respondents felt that to reduce spending the LSC needs to look at reducing its own administrative costs and getting best value for money internally.

5. How the LSC contracts with suppliers and commission services

There were several concerns that the current contracting regime does not give good value for money. 6% of respondents felt that the LSC should look more carefully at balancing quality, quantity and cost of services, and look at access issues when considering economies of scale. 9% of respondents (mostly solicitor and NfP suppliers) felt that the LSC still needs to increase remuneration rates and incentives to suppliers in order to ensure the continuation of a quality service.

Q.8. Do you agree with the three priority work areas for the CLS as outlined in paragraph 7.1? If not, what should the priority work areas be?

76% of respondents agreed with the three priority work areas for the CLS. Respondents gave some comments on the three areas and suggested additional priorities. These additional priorities included ensuring sustainability of services (4% of respondents), developing the service, and simply administering the fund reactively as was the case 20 years ago (1 respondent).

There were some comments about how work was to be carried out to meet these priorities. Several respondents from different types of organisation wanted more information on how money was to be allocated between priorities and how performance against these priorities would be measured.

Q.9. Do you agree with our proposal to expand our telephone service? Is it right to make a basic level of service (such as information on legal rights and self-help packs) available to everyone regardless of means? (see paragraphs 7.12 - 7.17)

62% of respondents agreed with some expansion of telephone services. 10% of respondents (from NfP agencies in particular) specifically emphasised how increasing telephone services would increase access to legal and advice services. Other comments related to the relationship between telephone and face-to-face services and suggestions for running the telephone service.

1. Telephone and face-to-face services

47% of respondents stressed that telephone services are not suitable for all clients and 33% of respondents were concerned to emphasise that face-to-face services should not be replaced by telephone services entirely. A few respondents also mentioned, however, that telephone services were in some cases better than face-to-face services for some vulnerable client groups. 21% of respondents (particularly local authorities and NfP agencies) felt that telephone services should be closely linked to face-to-face services and be able to make referrals, but 19% were concerned that an increase in telephone services would lead to an increase in referrals to and demand for face-to-face services, and that there might not be sufficient funding to pay for this.

2. Suggestions for the telephone service

30% of respondents (of all types) agreed that there should not be a means test for the basic level of telephone service. Two respondents disagreed, feeling that having no means test for some services meant that the CLS would waste money on ineligible clients. 5% of respondents felt that it should be an entirely freephone service, but one respondent suggested making it a premium rate service for those ineligible for legal aid- this would raise additional money for the fund and would be cheaper for the client than visiting a solicitor face-to-face. Two NfP respondents felt that the service should be seen as an entirely separate service and therefore receive separate funding from government in addition to the current legal aid budget. 17% of respondents, particularly from Local Authorities, CLSPs and suppliers, felt that it was important to provide a specialist level telephone service which was quality assured. 5% of respondents, from NfP agencies and CLSPs, emphasised the importance of training staff to deal with vulnerable clients over the telephone, for example those with mental health problems or speech impediments.

Q.10. Do you agree that over time we should develop the greatest concentration of face-to-face services in the most deprived communities? (see paragraphs 7.18 - 7.21)

46% of respondents broadly agreed with the idea of developing the greatest concentration of face-to-face services in deprived areas. Responses were under the following themes:

1. Pockets of deprivation

30% of respondents were concerned that the strategy's proposals would lead to a reduction in services for those living in areas which were in general affluent, but had pockets of deprivation. 9% of respondents specifically disagreed with a definition of "need for legal advice" which could be linked to geography. 5% of respondents felt that people who were deprived because of disability could live in any area and therefore needed services in any area. 22% of respondents had specific concerns about service provision in rural areas, and 9% were concerned about services in small towns. One strong element (from 10% of respondents) of these concerns was about transport, and the difficulties of travel in a rural area, especially for people with disabilities. There were also concerns (from 8% of respondents, of all types) that concentrating services in deprived areas would create a two tier CLS, or a "postcode lottery" situation in advice services. Two NfP respondents particularly feared that this would alienate those who could not access CLS face-to-face services and make them less supportive of the system as a whole.

2. Defining "deprived areas"

28% of respondents were concerned about methods used to define deprived areas and determine need for legal advice services. In particular, 14% felt that the LSC should not use Neighbourhood

Renewal Areas alone, but should consider other areas and other ways of measuring need. 3% of respondents felt that local communities should be involved in assessing local needs for legal and advice services.

3. Difficulties of setting up services concentrated in deprived areas.

There were not many responses which fell into this theme. Issues mentioned included the need for services to be in places which people felt confident accessing and staffed by approachable advisers. Some respondents suggested using problem noticers and local contacts, or using the face of established, trusted agencies. Some respondents mentioned potential difficulties in making funding available across local authority boundaries and fitting with other funding streams for deprived areas.

4. How to deliver a service in deprived areas

The main comment under this heading (from 10% of respondents) was that telephone advice was not a suitable substitute for face-to-face services in deprived areas, especially not for vulnerable clients. Several respondents from local authorities, CLSPs and NfP agencies felt however that telephone services would be useful for referrals. Some respondents also mentioned the need to improve referral systems and triage of clients.

Q.11. Do you agree with the proposals to pilot Community Legal and Advice Centres and Community Legal and Advice Networks, as outlined in paragraphs 7.22 - 7.32? Do you agree with their proposed remits and the broad descriptions of the services they will provide?

Overall, 47% of respondents across all types supported the proposals to pilot CLACs and CLANs. 22% did not agree with the proposal and 10% supported CLANs but were concerned about CLACs. 23% of respondents felt that CLACs and CLANs would not add anything to current service provision and 12% wanted more detail on the proposals.

1. Services provided by a CLAC/CLAN

11% of respondents (mainly from local authorities and NfP agencies) felt that outreach services would be very important within CLACs and CLANs, and two mentioned home visits specifically. 10% thought it was important that CLAC and CLAN services should be flexible to suit the local area. 7% of respondents, mainly from CLSPs and NfP agencies, stressed the importance of working out how to deal with clients who were not financially eligible for CLS funded services.

2. Difficulties which could be encountered in piloting CLAC/Ns

26% of respondents thought that pilot CLAC/Ns should not take money away from existing services, and 19% asked whether additional funding would be available for them. 17% of respondents felt that urban centres do not necessarily have the most need for legal services and the LSC should look at how to provide services in rural areas (see responses to question 10). 7% of respondents (mainly local authorities and NfP agencies) asked questions about how the lead supplier system would operate. Other responses included: concern that CLAC/Ns would not be seen as independent of government; the view that LSC contracting arrangements needed to change for them to work; and questions around how outcomes would be measured.

3. Roles played by different agencies in CLAC/Ns

The biggest concern (mentioned by 16% of respondents, mostly suppliers) about roles of different agencies was that the CLS could lose the expertise of small specialist organisations who might not become part of a CLAC or CLAN. 6% of respondents (mainly NfP agencies) stated that the suppliers in a CLAC/N needed to be specialists who are quality assured. Whilst some respondents welcomed the role of local authorities in CLAC/Ns, some were concerned that the local authority agenda could dominate and that the CLAC/N might not be seen as independent. A similar number of CABx or Law Centres felt that the money for a CLAC/N in an area should simply be given to the CAB or Law Centre in that area.

Q.12. Do you agree that there should be an increasing presumption in favour of services that work across several areas of social welfare law? (see paragraphs 7.33 and 7.34)

70% of respondents agreed with the increasing presumption in favour of such services. Themes arising in the responses were:

1. Access to services

12% of respondents wanted to know how this would fit in with making services accessible, especially to clients in rural areas.

2. Quality of services

15% of respondents, of all types, stressed the need to ensure that those providing services across several categories had appropriate training and qualifications. One local authority suggested that the LSC's main role in this area was to assure quality of suppliers.

3. Categories of law

There were a few suggestions for additional categories of law to add into the "social welfare law" group. Four respondents wanted to include asylum/immigration and three stressed the importance of enabling Family suppliers to work across social welfare law categories.

4. How to develop services that work across several categories of law

Many respondents felt that it should be the service, not the individual supplier, which should be able to work across several categories of law. 25% of respondents therefore felt that the most effective way to do this was to have several specialists working together in an effective referral network. 13% of respondents, mainly suppliers, complained that this presumption went against what the LSC has been encouraging for the last five years. In looking at how to incentivise suppliers to take on other categories, 8% of respondents felt that higher fees and less LSC bureaucracy were necessary. Some respondents suggested that the way to develop services across different categories should depend on what suits local circumstances.

5. Effect on suppliers

19% of respondents (mainly from CLSPs, NfP agencies and local authorities) were concerned that if the presumption lead to smaller numbers of larger suppliers, this would restrict client choice. 17% of respondents felt that small specialist suppliers had an important role to play in the CLS and should not be forgotten. 10% of respondents mentioned incentives to suppliers, such as higher fees, less bureaucracy and support from second tier services.

Q.13. Do you agree that the CLS should put more resources into taking strategic action? What other approaches could be taken beyond those outlined in paragraphs 7.37 - 7.47?

63% of respondents agreed that the CLS should put more resources into taking strategic action. 28% of respondents sought reassurance that resources would be carefully balanced between individual acts of advice and strategic action. Some respondents mentioned the need for clear strategic objectives to guide the strategic action, and ways of measuring its effectiveness. Respondents gave suggestions for how to do this and who should work at a national and local level.

1. Work at national level

15% of respondents suggested working with other national social policy organisations, though several (6%) were keen that existing social policy work should not be duplicated. The same number suggested that the LSC should also work with national representative bodies of practitioners. Several respondents felt that the LSC should undertake strategic action work at national level. Respondents of all groups felt that the LSC is in a good position to collate data nationally, including that from CLS Direct.

2. Work at a local level

26% of respondents felt that we should use information from suppliers and local bodies, and that local bodies should carry out some strategic action, such as test cases. 13% of respondents suggested that the LSC should provide specific additional funding to suppliers to carry this work out locally. 8% of respondents thought that CLSPs, or whatever equivalent bodies there are, should take the lead in this work. Other suggestions were to work with government offices, client representative groups and service users, and to use Local Area Agreements and Local Strategic Partnerships to achieve strategic aims.

3. What type of strategic action work should the CLS focus on?

The most common responses under this theme were suggestions to focus work on policies of other government departments which cause additional legal needs and to use test cases. Other suggestions included looking at problems with the justice system itself, educating public bodies on their legal obligations and using the statutory powers of bodies like the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Q.14. What other ways can the Legal Services Commission promote information about legal rights and responsibilities? (see paragraphs 7.48 - 7.52)

104 organisations responded to this question. Responses centred around four themes.

1. Who within the LSC or CLS should be responsible for information provision

Many respondents, particularly Local Authorities and NfP agencies, felt that the LSC should use existing providers or provider networks such as CLSPs to provide information. Many of the same respondents also felt it was important that agencies work together in partnership and build on existing good practice in information provision. Other suggestions for who should do this work included CLACs and CLANs, service user/advocacy organisations and, at a national level, the national stakeholders group.

2. What groups outside the mainstream CLS/advice sector we should work with

The most common answer to the question of whom we should work with (given by 21% of respondents to this question) was that we should engage with schools and the citizenship curriculum. Second to this was the suggestion that we should work with “problem noticers”, such as GPs, youth workers and social services. Several respondents, from CLSPs, solicitors firms and NfP agencies felt that it was important for information to be available in places commonly accessed by our clients, such as GP surgeries, public libraries and community centres. Some respondents from CLSPs and NfP agencies felt that many people needed help to access information and find out what was relevant for them, and that assisted information should be specifically promoted. Some respondents from solicitors firms and NfP agencies also stressed that for many vulnerable clients, information was not enough and that they would be unable to act on the information without further advice.

Another common theme in responses, especially from NfP agencies, was that the LSC should work nationally with DfES and other government departments on a programme of public legal education for all ages, and to include in public information on other government initiatives information about its legal aspects.

3. What media we should use

The most common medium suggested (by 14% of respondents) was the use of websites, with many respondents also saying, however, that many people found websites difficult to access and use, so other media should be used in addition. The next most commonly suggested medium was radio and TV advertising and programmes. Specific suggestions included using advertising slots during daytime TV, as favoured by loan companies etc. Respondents also suggested the wider distribution of CLS Direct leaflets, use of the local press and many other methods.

4. The content/style of information provided

Most of the suggestions about content and style of information related to the client groups it was targeted at, with many respondents saying that the information should be targeted rather than

generic, and should be accessible to particular client groups by being written in plain clear language (whether English or other languages). Several respondents mentioned the need for information accessible to particular client groups, for example by being in audio form, or subtitled. In terms of content, several respondents felt that the most important thing was to keep information up-to-date. Some mentioned that the CLS needs to provide information both about what people's legal rights are, and about what people can do to get advice on how to protect these rights.

Q.15. Have we identified the key issues in developing the appropriate links between the social welfare areas of the CLS, Children and Family services and the Criminal Defence Service? (see paragraphs 8.1 - 8.11) What other steps could be taken to facilitate these links?

78% of respondents agreed that developing links between social welfare areas, Family and CDS was important, and that we had identified key areas. There were not many additional or detailed suggestions. The most common referred to integrating Family and CDS services with CLAC/Ns (including having services within CLAC/Ns and outreach) and to improved referral systems being the key to linking services. Some respondents suggested that the LSC should specifically monitor referrals.