

All about the LSC

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Who are we and how we help

Who we are

The Legal Services Commission (LSC) looks after legal aid in England and Wales. We also make sure that people get the information, advice and legal help they need to deal with a wide range of problems.

We work in partnership with solicitors and not-for-profit organisations to provide services to help people in need.

Our vision is to make sure clients can access the help they need to address their problems.

How we help

Each year the LSC helps more than two million people to deal with their legal problems.

We run the legal aid scheme, which safeguards some of society's most vulnerable and disadvantaged people.

Legal aid helps ensure access to justice by providing high quality advice, information and representation to people who would not otherwise be able to afford it.

It means clients can protect their rights by:

- getting early advice
- being able to defend themselves if accused of a crime
- taking a case to court when this is the best way to resolve a dispute.

Community Legal Advice (CLA) is our helpline offering free, confidential and independent legal advice. Further information regarding CLA is enclosed within this pack.

For more information

For further information regarding the LSC please visit our website www.legalservices.gov.uk.

Our Vision and Objectives

Our vision

Our core purpose is to help people in genuine need to get high quality legal advice, assistance and representation. Our vision is:

- fair access to justice is a cornerstone of society
- legal aid facilitates that access for those who would not otherwise have it
- legal aid must consistently deliver value for money and quality justice outcomes that meets needs within affordable funding
- legal aid has huge purchasing power that shapes the legal services market & must be used to benefit the public

To achieve our vision we are undergoing a transformation programme.

We spend £2 billion a year on legal aid and advice services. We use this money carefully to help as many people as possible deal with very real problems in their lives.

Our strategic objectives

Our three strategic objectives will ensure that we achieve our vision:

- maximise access to quality legal aid to meet the diverse needs of the clients we serve
- deliver a sustainable legal aid scheme and an efficient and diverse organisation
- ensure the efficient and effective delivery of justice and wider government priorities.

Our Structure and Our Staff

Our structure

We have restructured into three new directorates: Commissioning, Business Support and Corporate Services. We've appointed three new Executive Directors to head up these functions:

- Hugh Barrett, Executive Director for Commissioning
- Phil Lambert, Executive Director for Business Support
- Hazel Parker-Brown, Executive Director for Corporate Services.

The new Executive team and senior level structure came into effect in January 2009.

The Executive Directors report to our Chief Executive Carolyn Regan, who looks after the day to day management of the LSC.

Our Chief Executive is responsible to the Commission. Chaired by Sir Bill Callaghan, the Commission's role is similar to the board of directors for a public company.

Our staff

About 1,650 staff members work across 15 offices in England and Wales.

Our head office is based in London.

Our regional offices work with service providers (solicitors and not-for-profit agencies) in their local areas. Service providers contract with the LSC to provide legal aid to clients, and the regional offices manage the contractual arrangements with their local providers.

Applications for legal aid funding and claims for work undertaken are also processed in the regional offices.

Our work with the government and our commissioners

How we work with the government

We are a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). We play a big part in helping the MoJ achieve its aims of:

- promoting justice
- protecting the public
- increasing confidence in justice
- providing access to justice for all
- upholding rights
- safeguarding and modernising our constitution.

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice is accountable to Parliament for our activities and performance.

The MoJ agrees its overarching Public Service Agreement targets with the Treasury. We in turn set our objectives in discussion with the MoJ.

Our Commissioners

The role of Commissioners

A board of independent Commissioners oversees our work. Their role is similar to the directors of a public company.

The Commission's objectives are to:

- make sure the LSC fulfils its statutory duties under the Access to Justice Act 1999
- make sure the LSC fulfils the aims and objectives set by the Secretary of State
- establish and maintain the LSC's overall strategic direction
- ensure high standards of corporate governance
- promote the LSC's efficient and effective use of financial, human and other resources.

Who they are

The Commission is made up of a Chair and up to 11 members. The non-executive members are appointed by the Lord Chancellor following an open, competitive selection process. They work part-time.

Between them, our Commissioners have experience and knowledge in:

- providing services under the Community Legal Service (CLS) and Criminal Defence Service (CDS)

- the work of the courts
- consumer affairs
- social conditions
- management.

The current Chair is Sir Michael Bichard. We have 10 non-executive members.

Commission meetings

The Commission meets 10 times each year, once a month apart from August and December. All Commissioners usually attend, along with the LSC's Executive Team and other senior executives.

The Commission meetings allow the attendees to discuss the strategy and policy decisions of the LSC. Commissioners make sure that we are:

- fulfilling our statutory duties in the operation of the CLS and CDS
- achieving our corporate objectives.

The LSC also holds open meetings to allow people to find out more about our work and ask questions about our priorities, projects and objectives.

Transforming Legal Aid and Transforming Ourselves

Transforming ourselves - Redesigning our processes

We are undergoing a process of major change as we transform the legal aid system to maximise the number of people we help within our limited budget.

As part of this reform we are transforming our own internal processes. We are making efficiency savings as part of the new legal aid system to improve the way we manage the legal aid fund.

This includes redesigning our processes to reduce administration for our providers through:

- introducing simplified bill processing
- giving more power to our providers
- being less intrusive with our contracted providers
- introducing e-business with all our providers.

By 2011 we aim to reduce our administration budget by up to £30 million (about one third).

Simplifying our processes and moving to e-business will reduce our head count by about 600 to 1,000 staff by 2011.

Transforming legal aid - Creating a sustainable legal aid scheme

Through our dedicated advice providers, the LSC helps more than two million people each year get help with their legal problems.

But the growing demand for help and the fact that our budget is limited means fundamental change is necessary.

We must move to a system that pays for services delivered for clients rather than hours worked. We need to make sure that legal aid remains available to those who need it.

To meet this challenge our transformation programme will create a sustainable legal aid scheme that delivers:

- a network of providers who deliver quality, value for money and client focused services
- access to quality legal advice for clients
- value for money for the taxpayer.

For more information please visit www.legalservices.gov.uk/aboutus