

Regional Provider Reference Groups (PRG) Terms of Reference

Objectives

- To create a formal channel for two-way communication with providers, with whom the LSC holds contracts.
- To hear at first hand the views of legal aid fee earners, with the aim of taking account of those views in implementing change.
- To bring a representative range of LSC providers into discussions at an earlier stage in the planning of policy implementation. It is not intended to replace the existing consultative channels or that the PRG should reopen Policy debates.

At a regional level¹, provider reference groups will be established to cover civil contract holders and crime contract holders. The Legal Services Commissioner, chairing the PRG, together with the Regional Director may wish to decide that the geography of the region makes it sensible to have more than one PRG per region.

Duties

The groups are authorised to:

- help the LSC develop good practice in implementing change
- provide the LSC with practical recommendations with regard to the implementation of change, advising in particular on what is and what is unlikely to work
- test both new ideas as they emerge and the practicability of proposed new processes
- improve and assist in the dialogue between providers and the LSC (to assist) in the development and implementation of best practice in implementing change
- through the Chair and LSC executive members, ensure the issues arising at a more local and regional level are referred to centre for debate

Agendas

It is important that all regional PRG's discuss similar items that are relevant to forthcoming implementation issues and Chairs will therefore agree common agenda items in advance. Each proposed agenda will list topics for discussion at the next meeting and group members can contribute additional items to the agenda.

¹ The LSC's English regions are: London & South East (London and Brighton), Midlands (Birmingham, Cambridge and Nottingham), North East (Leeds and Newcastle) North West (Liverpool and Manchester), South and West (Reading and Bristol).

Expectation of attendance

Where possible, meetings will be arranged so that all group members can attend. The groups are expected to meet on average three times a year and be no more than ½ day in duration.

Confidentiality

Personal matters discussed in the group meetings will be deemed confidential to the group. A summary of items discussed and issues referred to the centre will be posted as PRG minutes on the LSC regional Internet pages.

Membership

Members of each group will be invited to apply; the goal will be to have a balance of experience, skills knowledge, a representative cross-section of providers and coverage of client groups.

Membership of the group does not confer any formal status. The LSC will keep membership of the group under review to ensure its relevance to the aims and objectives of the group, and may request that an individual's membership of the group come to an end if that is appropriate. After 12 months, membership will be reviewed by the Chair to provide the opportunity for other providers to become involved. Any member may withdraw his/her membership of the group at any time.

Members will not be paid for their attendance but can claim re-imbusement of travelling expenses at the same rate as Funding Review Panel members.

Chairing and Administration

An LSC Commissioner will chair the Group or in the absence of a Commissioner a nominated member of the relevant region's Senior Management.

The LSC will take responsibility for organising dates and venues for the meetings, and for agendas and minute taking. Agendas and any documents will be circulated at least one week prior to the agreed meeting date.

A summary of items discussed will be circulated to members not more than two weeks after the meeting and posted on the regional LSC website.

Recruitment process for provider reference groups

- The recruitment process will start with an email alert sent to all providers on 22 November 2007, informing providers of the initiative and guiding them to the LSC site where terms of reference and application forms can be downloaded together with information on how the application process works.
- The application form will ask for details about the individual, areas of law they work in, membership of professional bodies if relevant, demographic details of their organisation and legal aid history together with three questions focused on their perspectives and ideas for change within publicly funded legal services.
- Closing date for applications will be the 6 December allowing providers 2 working weeks within which to complete and submit their application.
- Short-listing will commence on the 10 December against the attached set of criteria agreed with Lionel Joyce – Commissioner representative. Short-listing will be structured to ensure representation of groups identified on page 2 of this report.
- Short-listing will be completed by 24 December and the final list of providers agreed by the Commissioner Chair in discussion with the Regional Director in discussion with the relevant Commissioner Chair. Applicants will be advised of the result of their application during January 2008.
- Initial meetings will be timetabled for from February 2008 after Crime BVT consultation.
- An indicative timetable of meetings for 2008 is:
 - Initial meeting Feb 2008
 - June 2008
 - Oct 2008

PRG Selection Criteria

- (1) Is the applicant a legal aid fee earner? *Yes/(No – Reject application)*
- (2) Does the applicant work in the region? *Yes/(No – Reject application)*
- (3) How well do the answers in questions 5a and 5b show a commitment to a constructive engagement to implementing policy changes? *High/Medium/Little Evidence*
- (4) What category of law does the applicant cover?
- (5) Does the applicant work with any specialist client groups in the region? If so which?
- (6) What is the structure of the business the applicant works in?
- (7) What is the size of the business and Legal aid take?
- (8) What is the geographic base of the applicant?

In deciding successful applicants the Chair of the PRG will first decide whether the applicant is eligible under item 1 and 2. Using the rating from item 3 the Chair will then look to select successful applicants that provide a representative coverage of categories of law, type of business, geography and client groups served. Preference will be given to applicants with a rating of High on item 3, although to provide representative coverage it may be necessary to include applicants rated Medium.

The 12 monthly review of membership provides the Chair with the chance to call for new applications that may address areas where the PRG does not have full coverage.