



Association
of Costs
Lawyers

BUSINESS PLAN

2025

Approved by Council on 16/07/2025

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Foreword

Over the past three years, the Association of Costs Lawyers (ACL) has experienced significant growth—not only in membership numbers but also in its visibility and influence across the costs sector and the wider legal profession. As I begin my term as Chair, I do so with gratitude for the unwavering support and dedication of the ACL Council.

Member engagement continues to thrive, with record participation in special interest groups, regional meetings, and conferences. Our community is more connected than ever, and we are strengthening our relationships with key external bodies, including the Access to Justice Foundation and the Legal Ombudsman.

Looking ahead, we are committed to building on this momentum. The remainder of the year will focus on embracing new challenges and identifying opportunities for further development. At the heart of the ACL is its membership, and our ongoing promise is to represent your interests, uphold professional standards, and champion a profession that thrives through qualification and regulation.

Who are we?

The Association of Costs Lawyers (ACL) is the professional representative body for Costs Lawyers in England and Wales. Established in 1977 as the *Association of Law Costs Draftsmen*, the organisation was originally formed to promote the status and interests of law costs professionals and uphold the highest standards of practice. In 2011, following recognition under the Legal Services Act 2007, the Association adopted its current name and became the approved regulator for the profession.

Regulatory responsibilities are delegated to the Costs Lawyer Standards Board (CLSB), operating independently under the oversight of the Legal Services Board. The ACL remains the only professional body approved to provide training and qualification in costs law through its educational arm, ACL Training.

The Association is governed by the Council, who are elected by a vote of the membership (excluding instances where candidates run unopposed and without objection) and led by the Chair. The Council is supported by a dedicated Operations Team that manages day-to-day activities.

Our work is guided by three strategic priorities:

- **Modernisation** – Enhancing governance and operational efficiency to improve the member experience.
- **Engagement** – Strengthening special interest groups, regional networks, and digital communications to foster a more connected and resilient community.
- **Representation** – Advocating for and protecting the professional status and recognition of Costs Lawyers within the legal sector and beyond.

With a growing and increasingly active membership, the ACL continues to play a vital role in shaping the future of legal costs and ensuring the profession remains robust, regulated, and respected.

David Bailey-Vella, Chair of the Association of Costs Lawyers

2. MISSION & VALUES

The Association of Costs Lawyers (ACL) is dedicated to protecting and promoting the interests of Costs Lawyers across England and Wales.

Our mission is threefold:

- **To advocate for Costs Lawyers** within the wider legal profession and to the public, ensuring their expertise is recognised and valued.
- **To encourage growth and entry into the profession**, supporting those working in legal costs or aspiring to become qualified Costs Lawyers through education, mentorship, and professional development.
- **To contribute to the evolution of costs law**, engaging with policymakers, regulators, and stakeholders to shape the legal framework governing costs and access to justice.

We believe that a strong, regulated profession benefits not only our members but also the legal system and the consumers it serves.

Our Values

Set in 2022 and reviewed every three years, our values are the foundation of our strategic direction and operational culture. They guide how we serve our members, interact with stakeholders, and shape the future of the Costs Lawyer profession.

Community First

At the heart of the ACL is a commitment to community. We exist to represent and develop the Costs Lawyer profession, and everyone involved in the Association—whether Council members, volunteers, or staff—puts the interests of the community above personal, client, or employer interests.

- The Council acts as both representative and custodian, ensuring decisions are made with long-term sustainability in mind.

- We foster a culture of collaboration and mutual support, encouraging members to share knowledge, mentor peers, and contribute to the profession's growth.
- Our goal is to ensure the ACL remains a thriving, inclusive home for Costs Lawyers now and for future generations.

Inclusive

We believe that diversity strengthens our profession. Costs Lawyers come from a wide range of backgrounds, ethnicities, religions, and life experiences. This diversity enriches our community and enhances the quality of service we provide to clients and the legal system.

- We are committed to removing barriers to entry, whether financial, educational, or cultural, to ensure that anyone with the talent and drive to succeed can become a Costs Lawyer.
- We actively promote equality of opportunity, ensuring our events, communications, and governance reflect the diversity of our membership.
- Inclusion is not just a principle—it's a practice embedded in our recruitment, training, and member engagement strategies.
- We fund two scholarships per year, advancing our work on social mobility, for the CLPQ.

Proactive

We are a forward-thinking organisation. Representing our members means anticipating change, responding to emerging challenges, and seizing opportunities to advance the profession.

- We invest in modernising our operations, including digital platforms, governance structures, and member services, to ensure we remain agile and effective.
- We engage with regulators, policymakers, and industry bodies to influence developments in legal costs and access to justice.
- Our proactive approach ensures that the ACL is not just reacting to change but helping to shape it—keeping our members informed, prepared, and empowered.

3. BUSINESS OVERVIEW

Association of Costs Lawyers (ACL)

The ACL is the professional representative body for Costs Lawyers in England and Wales. Recognised by the Legal Services Board as the approved regulator, the ACL established and delegated its regulatory functions to the Costs Lawyer Standards Board, whilst continuing to play a central role in promoting, supporting, and advancing the profession.

It is governed by an elected Council, which includes the Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer, and other elected Councilors. The Council is responsible for strategic leadership and oversight of the Association's activities and direction.

To ensure effective governance, the Council operates through four key committees:

- Public Relations & Marketing
- Policy
- Education
- Operations

The Council also oversees the work of special interest groups, regional meetings, and the Operations Team, and liaises with the leadership of the Costs Lawyer Standards Board (CLSB) and ACL Training, both of which operate independently in practice.

Recent Achievements (2023–2025)

- **Membership Growth & Engagement:** ACL has seen a steady increase in membership, with more Costs Lawyers participating in special interest groups, regional meetings, and national conferences than ever before. These also include previous members, whose membership had lapsed.
- **Introduction of Fellowship:** 52 members signed up as Fellows since 1st April 2025, which is over 10% of the membership.
- **New Website & Member Hub:** A modernised website was launched, featuring a dedicated Members Hub, upgraded Costs Lawyer Directory, and exclusive access to the latest costs news and insights.

- **Professional Qualification Launch:** ACL Training introduced the Costs Lawyer Professional Qualification, a flexible, two-year, part-time online course. Plans are underway to allow students to enroll in individual modules for targeted learning.
- **Policy Influence:** ACL continues to have a seat at the table in major policy discussions, including participation in the Civil Justice Council's review of costs. Senior judiciary, including Lord Justice Birss and Master Cook, hosting and attendance at roundtables on the future of costs management.
- **ADR & Reform Advocacy:** The ACL's most recent member survey revealed strong support for alternative dispute resolution (ADR) in costs disputes, with over half of respondents favouring wider adoption. The ACL is also advocating for reforms such as updated guideline hourly rates and tailored costs budgeting.
- **Judicial Aspirations:** An overwhelming 93% of members believe Costs Lawyers should be eligible for judicial appointments, reflecting growing confidence in the profession's expertise.
- **Member Benefits Expansion:** New benefits include improved access to the Croner Business Support and services, discounts from retailers, an exclusive offer with Costs Law Reports, and HR updates via webinars and training sessions.

Operations Team

The Operations Team provides administrative support to the ACL, its special interest groups, and regional meetings. It also delivers corporate services to ACL Training. The team consists of two part-time employees covering a full working week.

Costs Lawyer Standards Board (CLSB)

The CLSB is a wholly owned subsidiary of the ACL and functions as the independent regulatory body for Costs Lawyers. It has been recognised as the best-performing legal regulator for three consecutive years. Key responsibilities include:

- Protect the interest of consumers and the wider public
- Set and uphold the professional standards that Costs Lawyers must meet
- Promote the nine regulatory objectives of the Legal Services Act 2007

The CLSB operations are handled by a lean executive team, with strategic oversight and governance provided by a proportionately sized Board of non-executive Directors.

ACL Training

ACL Training is the ACL's training subsidiary and the only approved Accredited Course Provider. It delivers the Costs Lawyer Qualification and is preparing to launch an Apprenticeship route in 2025/26. Course delivery is outsourced to an external provider, with operational support from the ACL.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

ACL supports several SIGs focused on key practice areas:

- Legal Aid Group (LAG) – Representing those working in legally aided costs
- Court of Protection Group (COP) – Supporting work related to Deputyship and the SCCO
- Solicitor/Client Costs Group (SOL) – Focused on disputes between clients and legal professionals
- Commercial Costs Group (CCG) – Supporting those in commercial litigation
- Fixed Recoverable Costs (FRC) – Assessing the impact and scope of FRC

Each group provides peer support, advocacy, and professional development.

Regional Groups

Regional groups offer networking and knowledge-sharing opportunities. Established groups include:

- South West (Bristol)
- North East (Newcastle)
- North West (Liverpool, Manchester)
- Yorkshire (incl. Leeds)
- London
- Planned expansions include: Midlands (Birmingham), East Anglia, South Coast, and Wales (Cardiff)

4. REPRESENTATIVE OVERVIEW

The ACL is one of five representative bodies for legally authorised individuals in England and Wales. While Licensed Conveyancers do not currently have a dedicated representative body, the ACL plays a unique and vital role in representing Costs Lawyers, both within the legal profession and to the wider public.

The representative landscape in which the ACL operates can be understood through three key lenses:

1. The Representative Environment

Although the ACL does not compete directly with another representative body for Costs Lawyers, it operates within a broader legal ecosystem. This environment includes a range of regulatory bodies, professional associations, and interest groups with which the ACL regularly engages—particularly through consultations, policy interventions, and collaborative initiatives.

Key stakeholders and organisations the ACL interacts with include:

- **Ministry of Justice**
- **Civil Procedure Rule Committee**
- **Senior Courts Costs Office**
- **Legal Services Board**
- **Legal Aid Agency**
- **Legal Ombudsman**
- **The Law Society**
- **Solicitors Regulation Authority**
- **Bar Council**
- **Bar Standards Board**
- **Chartered Institute of Legal Executives**
- **Institute of Legal Finance & Management**
- **Legal Aid Practitioners Group**
- **Association of Personal Injury Lawyers**
- **Forum of Insurance Lawyers**

These relationships are essential to ensuring that the voice of Costs Lawyers is heard in key policy and regulatory discussions.

2. The Costs Lawyer Profession

As of July 2025, there were 728 Costs Lawyers holding a valid Practising Certificate. Of these, 436 (60%) are subscribed members of the ACL. In addition, the Association includes:

- 14 Subscribers
- 29 Affiliate Members
- 5 Retired Members
- 118 Trainee Members

This growth in practicing Costs Lawyers reflects the success of ACL Training and the introduction of the new Costs Lawyer Qualification. However, the ACL recognises the need to remain relevant and valuable to all Costs Lawyers—whether self-employed, working in unregulated costs firms, or employed within Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA)-regulated firms.

More Costs Lawyers are now employed in SRA-regulated firms than in unregulated ones, although this figure remains below the 2020 peak of 47%. Understanding and responding to the evolving employment landscape remains a strategic priority for the ACL.

A key organisational goal is to **increase the proportion of practicing Costs Lawyers who are ACL members**, ensuring that the Association remains representative, influential, and sustainable.

3. Potential Practitioners and the Future of the Profession

The long-term viability of the profession—and the ACL itself—depends on attracting and retaining new entrants. Currently, only 3.1% of Costs Lawyers are under the age of 30, a figure that highlights the urgent need to engage younger professionals.

To address this, the ACL has taken several proactive steps:

- **Reduced the qualifying experience period** from three years to two, aligning with other legal professions.
- **Launched a new Costs Lawyer Qualification**, designed to be more accessible and better aligned with the skills needed in modern practice.
- **Developed an Apprenticeship Route**, expected to launch in 2025/26, aimed at attracting school leavers and early-career professionals.
- **Expanded Affiliate Membership**, allowing those regulated by other legal bodies to join the ACL. While uptake has improved following a fee restructure, further outreach is needed to grow this category.
- **Introduction of Micro-credentials**, to provide flexible, targeted, and accessible learning opportunities that help individuals gain specific skills or knowledge (e.g. Advocacy skills)

These initiatives are designed to ensure that the profession remains dynamic, inclusive, and equipped to meet the demands of the future legal landscape.

5. OPERATIONS OVERVIEW

Current Position

The Operations Team is the engine room of the ACL, ensuring the smooth delivery of services to members, supporting governance, and maintaining the infrastructure that underpins both the ACL and ACL Training.

The team currently consists of:

- **Head of Operations** – responsible for strategic oversight, project delivery, and operational planning.
- **Administrator** – provides essential day-to-day support, member services, and coordination of events and communications.

Together, they manage a wide range of responsibilities, including:

- Member communications and database management
- Event coordination (regional meetings, SIGs, conferences)
- Website and digital platform maintenance
- Governance support for Council and committees
- Corporate services for ACL Training
- Liaison with external suppliers and partners

The Year Ahead: Strategic Priorities

Member-Focused Initiatives

The ACL remains committed to enhancing the member experience through new opportunities for engagement, learning, and collaboration. Key initiatives include:

- **Launch of New Special Interest Groups (SIGs)**

Two new SIGs will be introduced in 2025/26:

- **Mediation SIG** – supporting Costs Lawyers involved in or exploring alternative dispute resolution.
- **Group Litigation SIG** – focusing on the unique challenges and opportunities in collective legal actions.

- **Ongoing Development of Existing SIGs**

Continued investment in the structure, governance, and activity planning of existing SIGs to ensure they remain relevant, well-supported, and member-led.

- **Expansion of Regional Meetings**

- Broader geographic coverage, including underrepresented regions such as the Midlands, East Anglia, South Coast, and Wales.
- Encouraging more **member-hosted events**, empowering local leaders and increasing accessibility.

Internal Enhancements

To support a modern, resilient, and secure organisation, the Operations Team is undertaking several internal upgrades:

- **Full Transition to Hybrid Working**

The team has now fully adopted a hybrid working model, improving flexibility and operational resilience.

- **Cloud-Based Storage Implementation**

Migration of internal files and systems to secure cloud platforms, enabling better collaboration, backup, and remote access.

- **Cybersecurity and GDPR Reassessment**

A comprehensive review of data protection practices and cybersecurity protocols to ensure continued compliance with GDPR and best practices in information security.

- **New Membership Database**

Replacement of the legacy Access Database with a modern, scalable solution that will:

- Improve data interrogation and reporting
- Enable better segmentation and member insights

- Support more personalised and strategic engagement

6. THE YEAR AHEAD

The start line

As we start the first in our three-year plan, we build on three key aspects; introducing new tasks and objectives, further improving our member offering, and ensuring there is a platform for growth over the next three years.

The remainder of the year has some key events to note and has been divided into quarters to provide measurable targets and to ensure that the Committees and Operations Team have sufficient capacity.

Key Events

- ACL Costs Conference – London – 07/11/2025
- Election of a new Council Member – November
- ACL Mid-year review and Townhall-style meeting
- CLSB Practising Certificates renewal – Q3
- ACL Subscription renewal – November
- Annual General Meeting – Q4

The focus in this period is to build on the objectives in the previous year, supporting groups within the Association, and ensuring capacity to address anticipated consultations.

The role of ACL Chair is pivotal in guiding the organisation through a year of continued growth, modernisation, and professional advocacy. The objectives for 2025 reflect a balance of strategic leadership, member engagement, and governance responsibilities.

1. Strategic Leadership & Vision

- **Understand and Align with Council and Member Priorities**
 - Engage with Council members to ensure alignment on strategic goals and committee objectives.

- Actively listen to the membership through surveys (early 2026), regional meetings, and direct feedback to ensure their needs and aspirations are reflected in ACL's direction.
- **Champion the ACL's Strategic Plan**
 - Ensure that all activities and initiatives align with the ACL's mission, values, and long-term vision.
 - Support the implementation of key projects such as the pursuit of Chartered status, expansion of SIGs, and digital transformation.

2. External Engagement & Representation

- **Establish and Strengthen Judicial and External Relationships**
 - Build and maintain relationships with key figures in the judiciary, regulatory bodies, and legal sector organisations.
 - Represent the ACL in consultations, roundtables, and public forums to advocate for the profession.
- **Support the Development of a Marketing Strategy**
 - Collaborate with the PR & Marketing Committee to shape and approve a marketing plan that raises the profile of Costs Lawyers across the legal sector.
 - Promote the value of Costs Lawyers in litigation, mediation, and judicial roles.

3. Governance & Oversight

- **Support Council Development and Succession**
 - Facilitate the onboarding and integration of new Council members.
 - Encourage leadership development and succession planning within the Council and committees.
- **Provide Oversight and Support to Committees**
 - Attend committee meetings as needed to offer guidance and ensure alignment with ACL priorities.
 - Act as a sounding board for committee chairs and help resolve cross-committee challenges.

- **Approve Annual Accounts**
 - Review and sign off on the Association's financial statements, ensuring transparency and accountability.
- **Lead Mid-Year Review**
 - Prepare and present a comprehensive mid-year progress report to the Council and membership.
 - Highlight achievements, address challenges, and recalibrate priorities where necessary.

4. Member Engagement & Visibility

- **Lead a Townhall-Style Meeting**
 - Host an open forum for members to ask questions, share feedback, and engage directly with leadership.
 - Use this platform to communicate progress, celebrate successes, and reinforce the ACL's commitment to its members.
- **Promote Inclusivity and Community**
 - Encourage participation across all regions and practice areas.
 - Support initiatives that foster diversity, wellbeing, and professional development.

Policy Committee

The Policy Committee continues to lead the ACL's engagement with legal reform, regulatory consultation, and professional advocacy. Key objectives:

- Precedent G Working Party - Reconvene the working group to develop a formal consultation document on reforms to Precedent G.
- Solicitors Act Consultation - Review statute invoice precedents and prepare a response to the Solicitors Act consultation.
- Civil Justice Council (CJC) Litigation Funding Consultation - Follow up on ACL's submission and monitor developments.
- Judicial Eligibility for Costs Lawyers - Continue advocacy for Costs Lawyers to be eligible for judicial appointments.

- Court of Protection Fixed Costs - Respond to proposals for extending fixed costs in COP matters.

Watching Briefs

- Inclusion of Costs Lawyers in SCCO Guideline Hourly Rates
- Progress on Chartered Status and Protected Title
- Implementation of the Cost Budgeting Lite Pilot Scheme
- Ongoing delays in Clinical Negligence Fixed Costs (up to £25k)
- Monitoring Legal Services Board (LSB) Consultations

Engagement & Follow-Up

- Consult membership on Precedent G and S reforms.
- Finalise and submit formal response to SCCO on Precedent G/S.
- Prepare a survey on Budgeting Lite Pilot (for its one-year anniversary).
- Provide updates to members on judicial eligibility and SCCO submissions.

Education Committee

The Education Committee supports the development and delivery of the Costs Lawyer Qualification and broader professional learning. Key objectives:

- Conducting a student satisfaction survey to inform improvements.
- Overseeing the application to the apprenticeship provider and assessment register.
- Supporting the preparation of the ACL Training business plan and budget.
- Producing the Annual Viability Report for the training programme.
- Assisting with student recruitment, business development, and marketing efforts.
- Scholarship applications for 2025/26.
- Micro-Credentials to ensure continued learning and professional development.

PR & Marketing Committee

This committee is responsible for promoting the profession, enhancing visibility, and supporting member engagement. Key objectives:

- Build on the Diversity & Inclusivity Report and collaborate with CLSB on promotion and wellbeing.
- Prepare a detailed report on the “Cost” of Costs Lawyers to support advocacy and public understanding.
- Work with the wider legal profession and judiciary to raise the profile of Costs Lawyers.
- Develop and publish Costs Lawyer case studies to showcase impact and expertise.
- Deliver the London Conference (November 2025).
- Analyse ACL subscription trends in preparation for 2026 planning.

Additional Considerations

- Explore the creation of a Housing Disrepair Special Interest Group (SIG).
- Promote the advancement of Costs Lawyers to judicial roles.
- Advocate for regulation and reservation of costs work.

Operations

The Operations Committee ensures the ACL’s infrastructure, systems, and services are fit for purpose. Key objectives:

- Preparing the ACL budget for 2025/26, balancing investment and sustainability.
- Supporting the development and governance of Special Interest Groups.
- Producing a report on legal firms employing Costs Lawyers who are not ACL members, to inform outreach.
- Continuing to enhance website functionality, including CPD tracking, event booking, and member engagement tools.

7. FINANCIAL PLAN

The Association of Costs Lawyers (ACL) has maintained a position of financial stability over recent years. In 2024, the Association recorded a net surplus of over £16,000. This reflects prudent financial management and a balanced approach to income generation and expenditure.

The Council remains committed to maintaining this stability while recognising the need to:

- Respond to inflationary pressures
- Invest in member services and infrastructure
- Support strategic growth initiatives

Income Streams

ACL's income is derived from a diversified set of sources, including:

- **Membership Subscriptions** – the primary and most stable source of income
- **Annual Conferences** – two major events generating revenue and engagement
- **Legal Aid Seminar** – a specialised event contributing to both income and professional development
- **E-Bulletin & Advertising** – monetised communications channel
- **Management Charge to ACL Training** – for shared operational and administrative services

This mix ensures a reliable financial base while allowing for targeted growth through events and partnerships.

Expenditure Profile

The Association's key areas of expenditure include:

- **Office and Staffing Costs** – salaries, equipment, and operational overheads
- **Costs Lawyer Bulletin** – a vital communication and engagement tool for members
- **Public Relations and Marketing Services** – supporting visibility, outreach, and member recruitment

While costs have increased since 2023, these rises are considered reasonable and are expected to be offset by higher income from events and subscriptions.

2025 Financial Outlook

In addition to routine operational spending, the ACL anticipates strategic investments in two key areas:

1. Capital Investment in IT Infrastructure

- Implementation of a new membership database
- Enhanced cybersecurity and cloud-based storage

2. Marketing Strategy Implementation

- Development and rollout of a comprehensive marketing plan
- Targeted campaigns to increase membership and engagement
- Support for new SIGs and regional expansion

These investments are designed to future-proof the organisation, improve operational efficiency, and enhance member value.

ACL Financial Budget Projections - 2025

	2024	2025	Variance
Subscriptions	159,487	170,876	11,389
Costs Lawyer magazine & e-bulletins	2,500	2,400	(100)
Conferences	65,936	66,105	169
Legal Aid Seminars	3,185	3,000	(185)
Intercompany Charges	7,500	7,500	-
Other Income	99	363	264
Gain on Revaluation of Investments	10,296	-	(10,296)
Total Sales	249,002	250,244	1,242
Costs Lawyer magazine & e-bulletins	48,876	48,382	(494)
Conferences	35,119	35,106	(13)
Legal Aid Group	1,269	1,400	131
Total Cost of Sales	85,264	84,888	(376)
Gross Profit	163,738	165,356	1,618
Advertising & Marketing	4,760	5,060	300
General Expenses	421	34	(387)
Total Direct Costs	5,181	5,094	(87)
Staff & Office Costs	62,760	63,103	343
Travel & Entertaining	6,983	5,266	(1,717)
Website & Software Costs	3,793	4,777	984
Legal & Professional Fees	48,927	48,641	(286)
Bank & Interest Charges	1,902	1,277	(625)
Depreciation	3,378	4,767	1,389
Subscriptions	1,058	1,301	243
Insurance	3,928	3,303	(625)
Total Overheads	132,729	132,435	(294)
VAT adjustments	(9,438)	(9,875)	(437)
Net Operating Profit/(Loss)	16,391	17,952	1,561