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# Positive response to training for Crown Court means testing



**Mark Workman, Editor**

## Editorial

*Crown Court means testing starts in January 2010 and providers have been praising the training sessions to bring them up to speed with how it will work.*

There are five early adopter courts and litigators and advocators in the areas affected have been gearing up to the 11 January launch date.

We've reviewed the preparations and how it will work on pages 4-5.

Feedback from providers who have benefited from the training can be seen on page 6.

**"...providers have been praising the training sessions to bring them up to speed with how it will work"**

## Canadian bail reform project and the LSC

The land of Mounties and the maple leaf may not immediately spring to mind when thinking about our legal aid system. But an LSC backed pilot on prison to court video links has been benchmarked for a Canadian bail reform project.

You can find out more on pages 8-11.

## Online networking resource for providers

A free online environment where members can use the web to meet their peers and exchange information is to be piloted.

Legal Aid Link (LAL) is being supported with funding from the LSC and developed by London-based Matrix Chambers. Providers are being invited to contribute to its development. You can read more on pages 15.

## Understanding new youth sentencing options

A new community sentencing structure for children and young people came into force on 30 November, 2009.

Solicitors working in this area are being urged to make sure they are fully up to speed with how this will work. See pages 18-19.

## Grand finale for Legal Aid 60 roadshow

Nearly a million people have now seen our Legal Aid 60 roadshow, which has been a focal point of our commemorations for the 60th anniversary of legal aid.

The exhibition attracted a lot of interest for its final event on the road when it was set up at the National Assembly for Wales in Cardiff. Find out more about the event and the success of the roadshow throughout the year on page 13.

## Reading Focus

Remember that Focus is now only available online. So it's worth checking to make sure you are using the latest version of Adobe Acrobat Reader.

## Contact info

**focus** is produced for service providers by the Communications & Marketing Department of the Legal Services Commission.

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## Useful links

### Corporate News -

Corporate announcements, including policy reforms and new consultation announcements

### Civil News -

News and updates for service providers working within the Community Legal Service (CLS)

### Crime News -

News and updates for service providers working within the Criminal Defence Service (CDS)

### LSC Update -

The Legal Services email alert for all service providers

### Focus Magazine -

Homepage for the Focus magazine, containing the latest issue and recent back issues

## Crown Court means testing on the starting blocks

*Crown Court means testing starts in five early adopter Crown Courts on 11 January 2010. The final countdown has begun...*

Hundreds of solicitors, barristers, court staff and judiciary in five early adopter Crown Courts are preparing for the launch of means testing early in 2010.

The launch will affect Crown Court trials, committals for sentence and appeals.

More than 400 solicitors have attended training events in the five early adopter areas – Blackfriars, Preston, Swansea, Bradford and Norwich.

Court staff at the early adopter Crown Courts and the magistrates' courts that feed them (see table) have now started their training.

The LSC's National Courts Team and key regional staff have been preparing for 11 January.

### Project team

A joint project team from HMCS, MoJ and the LSC is working flat out to ensure that everything goes as smoothly as possible.

The scheme will be phased in across the rest of England and Wales from next April in the South West and Midlands. Following on will be the North East, North West and Wales in May and the South East and London in June.

From 11 January 2010 defendants in the early adopter areas will be subject to the new regime and solicitors working there will be advising their clients accordingly.

In practice it's believed that only one in four defendants will have to pay towards the cost of their defence in the Crown Court. But the scheme – targeted at those defendants who can afford to contribute – is designed to save £50 million a year.

### Representation

Under Crown Court means testing, all defendants who complete a legal aid application on the revised CDS forms will get representation – regardless of whether or not they must contribute towards their defence costs.

Payment towards defence costs for Crown Court trials will come from two possible sources

– the defendant's income and/or their capital.

Defendants who aren't passported and who have a household annual disposable income of more than £3,398 will have to pay up to six, monthly contributions while the case is under way. They receive their money back with 2% interest if found not guilty.

But if they are convicted, have outstanding defence costs and have more than £30,000 of capital assets (e.g. savings, equity in property, shares or premium bonds), they may face further payment for the remaining defence costs.

This includes all fees to litigators, advocates and expert witnesses. See accompanying article – 'Working out who pays'.

It's a big change that cuts across the justice system. Changes include:

1. Revised CDS legal aid application forms for all cases committed to the early adopter courts from 11 January. The forms will be distributed to firms in the next few days.
2. Phasing out the CDS 17 – self-certification has been incorporated into the CDS 15
3. New information and evidential requirements relating to income, capital and equity (even where defendants are in custody)
4. New sanctions and penalties to enforce the payment regime will include possible car clamping and removal
5. A specialist collection and enforcement agency to ensure payment compliance
6. A hardship route to ensure fairness for those who believe they can't afford to pay – cases will be considered by the National Courts Team
7. New evidence provision fees for solicitors, payable at the end of the case for helping clients to provide the additional evidence needed for the scheme to work

### New guidance and support materials

We have published new support materials to help solicitors and clients in the early adopter areas in the contact and information box.

### Online guide for solicitors

An online interactive guide – 'Legal aid in the criminal courts – a solicitors' guide' explains the scheme. It includes guidance on the current legal aid scheme in the magistrates' court so you won't need to carry two documents around.

With the new online guide solicitors can:

- view a page at a time on a laptop or palmtop
- jump forward and backwards through the document using hyperlinks - making it easy to use
- advise clients using easy to use checklists and means assessment information
- help clients to complete the revised CDS application forms using evidence checklists (for use after 11 January in early adopter courts).

Training notes, a Q&A about the scheme and consolidated criminal legal aid guidance will also be available on the website from January 2010.

You can also order additional material, which will be useful for clients and solicitors – see below.

### Ordering materials

You can phone, fax or email your order for the pocket guides and handbook from the CDS forms provider, Dsicmm. The code numbers are below with the contact details

- Code: CDS/YDC - Your defence in the courts (for clients – English version)
- Code: CDS/YDC/BIL - Your defence in the courts (for clients – bilingual English/Welsh version)
- Code: CDS/LACC - Legal aid in the criminal courts - a solicitors' guide

### Contact & Information

- » lsc > cds > cds news > interactive guide
- » lsc > cds > cds news > update on CCMT
- » lsc website: interactive guide

### Ordering supporting materials:

- » 0845 3000 343 or fax 0845 5438 258
- » cdsforms@legalservices.gov.uk

# Early adopter courts

*Crown Court means testing* All cases that start at the magistrates' courts listed below and which are subsequently committed or sent to a Crown Court will be subject to means testing from 11 January 2010.

For example, at Highbury Corner Magistrates' Court, Class 1 offence committals will continue to be sent to the Old Bailey and all others to Blackfriars Crown Court.

But as with all early adopter magistrates' courts, all cases that originate from Highbury Corner will be subject to the new regime.

The 'feeder' magistrates' courts and the forms required are as follows:

Crown Court	Feeder magistrates' courts
Preston Crown Court	Blackpool (Fylde Coast); Preston; Lancaster; Blackburn, Darwen and Ribble Valley; Chorley (South West Lancashire); Furness & District; Fleetwood
Norwich Crown Court	Great Yarmouth; Kings Lynn (West Norfolk); Norwich
Blackfriars Crown Court	Highbury Corner magistrates' court
Bradford Crown Court	Bradford; Calderdale & Halifax; Huddersfield; Keighley (Bingley); Skipton
Swansea Crown Court	Swansea; Neath; Llanelli; Aberaeron*; Haverfordwest (Pembrokeshire); Port Talbot; Aberystwyth (Ceredigion); Cardigan

From 11 January defendants appearing at these courts must apply for legal aid using Version 6 (EA) of the CDS 14 and 15 forms.

\* Aberaeron is an admin centre only - not a magistrate's court

## Magistrates' courts not covered by the regulations

Eight satellite magistrates' courts within the five early adopter areas are not covered by the CCMT regulations and will not be early adopter courts.

These 'satellite' magistrates' courts, which do not perform their own administrative functions, were not included in the Parliamentary regulations.

They will continue with existing arrangements, including Recovery of Defence Cost Orders (RDCOs), until the rest of their HMCS Region is brought into the Crown Court means testing scheme from April 2010.

The non-early adopter magistrates' courts are:

- Hyndburn, Ormskirk and South Ribble – commit to Preston Crown Court
- Cromer (North Norfolk), Swaffham and Thetford – commit to Norwich Crown Court
- Dinefwr (Ammanford) and Carmarthen – commit to Swansea Crown Court.

Defendants appearing at these courts may apply for legal aid using either the Version 6 (EA) forms or Version 5 forms.

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IS  
CHANGING**

## Working out who pays

*Eligibility for free legal aid in the Crown Court is based on the same means test calculator as currently used in the magistrates' courts.*

It's free for all defendants in the Crown Court if:

- they are under 18
- they would be passported in the magistrates' court (all new Crown Court cases pass the interests of justice test).

### Income payments for Crown Court trials:

Defendants don't pay from income if:

- annual disposable income is less than £3,398 (£283 a month)

They do pay from income if:

- annual disposable income is more than £3,398.

If they have to pay, they:

- pay 90% of their monthly disposable income
- make five, monthly payments or
- pay a lump sum equivalent to five months' payments or
- make six payments if they don't pay on time.

All payments are refunded with 2% interest if they are found not guilty.

### Capital payments for Crown Court trials

Only paid by defendants at end of case if:

- found guilty
- have assets of £30,000 or more
- defence costs not already met from income payments.



## Training sessions win praise from providers

*Crown Court means testing* Our training scheme to prepare litigators and advocates for the introduction of Crown Court means testing in January 2010 is proving useful and popular with solicitors...

Crown Court means testing starts in January 2010 and training sessions have been taking place across England and Wales. The response to this training has been very positive so far. We asked solicitors at our first event in Chorley, Lancashire for their thoughts:



**Senior principal Mike Mackey – Burton Copeland, Manchester**

*Mike Mackey is senior principal at Burton Copeland – a large firm based in Manchester.*

We're the largest LSC crime provider in Greater Manchester and have defended a number of nationally reported cases. I act in class one criminal cases.

In a nutshell I thought it was the best LSC training I have ever been on. I did not have any understanding at all before the event. It was very focused and informative.

The training explained it all very well indeed. There was a powerpoint presentation, which was

excellent and I'm now organising some in-house training.

There did not seem anything that was overly complicated but that may be a tribute to the way the training was organised.

I think the biggest challenge when CCMT starts will be going through the implications to clients.

Defendants face a situation where the opinion of the jury could result in them losing the equity in their homes. So there will be a lot to explain.



**Partner Steve Dawson – Forbes Solicitors**

*Steve Dawson is managing partner at Forbes Solicitors – a large firm with nine offices across the north of England*

I'm a higher court advocate and duty solicitor on the Chorley, South Ribble and Preston duty solicitor schemes. I represent both private and public funded clients in both the magistrates and Crown Court.

I found the training very useful. I already had a fairly good grasp of what CCMT was about but there were a few gaps that needed plugging and I thought the event was a good overview.

I've asked to take part in a CCMT focus group

that the LSC is putting together. I'm sure there will be a few things that crop up in the future that need looking at. So I'd like to make my voice heard.

These events are very important for solicitors like myself. Anyone who does not attend is really missing out.

It's vital that our firm has a good understanding of the potential pitfalls of means testing. For example, clients will need to be properly briefed about the potential financial implications of electing for trial at the Crown Court.

# 'Easyread' offers support for client discussions

*Crown Court means testing* We are conscious that those with learning difficulties or non-English speakers will need particular support through the new scheme.

So we have been working closely with LSC's Client Diversity group to produce an easyread dictionary that uses simple language and pictures to help explain legal terms.

An easyread pocketguide is being produced and posters and leaflets explaining the importance of having a solicitor have been translated into easyread too.

These will be distributed in the New Year and the pocketguide will be available to download on our website.

**LEGAL AID IS CHANGING**

**YOU NEED A SOLICITOR**

A solicitor is a lawyer who will help and support you.

**They are on your side.**

Ask the court staff for free advice from the independent duty solicitor.

You have the right to get help from an independent solicitor. It does not matter if you did or did not do a crime.

The duty solicitor works on criminal cases. A criminal case is a court case about someone accused of breaking the law.

If you cannot afford a solicitor, you may be able to get **legal aid**. Legal aid is money to help you pay your legal costs.

community legal advice  
0845 345 4 345  
www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk

Court staff or the duty solicitor can give you more information.

**YOU NEED A SOLICITOR**

## Easyread Materials

Above: An easyread booklet explaining the legal process

Above right: The easyread magistrates' court poster. Posters for Crown Court and CABs are also available



## Atlantic crossing for Northumbria video trials

### *Prison to court video links*

*Canadian bail reform project benchmarks LSC - backed pilot on prison to court video links...*

Our efforts to improve the efficiency of the criminal justice system through video technology are being watched closely for a bail reform project in Canada.

of communities in British Columbia where the director of criminal justice transformation projects is James Deitch.

He said: 'We had a close look at the trials,

'The Lower Mainland includes Vancouver and has a population of more than two million. The specific pilot location is in the suburban area of Surrey and Delta, which have a combined population of approximately one million.

'We have "accused interview units" in police cells in five communities in the province and "defence counsel interview units" at four courthouse locations.

**"...we've found lots of advantages in terms of costs and cutting back on travelling, lawyers and court time"**

Video links are now being used by the Provincial Court of British Columbia to:

- allow counsel to interview the accused
- permit bail hearings
- schedule bail hearings.

Pilot projects have been set up in a number

which were run in Northumbria to increase the number of pre-trial hearings using video links.

#### **Interview units**

'We've been using video technology for a year now in the Lower Mainland area of British Columbia, as well as in the north-east area called the Peace River Region.

#### **Potential benefits**

'We're very optimistic about the potential benefits of video technology. Like the Northumbria trials, we've found lots of advantages in terms of costs and cutting back on travelling, lawyers and court time.'

'Our defence lawyers typically arrange remand interviews in court cells because the



## Looking at what works around the world

The bail reform project in British Columbia is one of a number of criminal justice system initiatives in the Canadian province.

Agencies are working together in new ways to prevent and reduce crime. The idea is to promote better collaboration and co-ordination between health and social services and the criminal justice system.

Rather than reinventing the wheel, a lot of emphasis is being put on searching out evidence of what has been shown to work in other parts of the province, country or world.

Director of criminal justice transformation projects, James Deitch: 'I think there is a lot to be gained from cross-fertilisation between different criminal justice systems. Looking at the Northumbria model is one example of this.'

'It would be good to build more links to countries around the world to see what we can learn from one another. There are many issues which are pretty similar in terms of costs and efficiency.'

## "People respond in different ways to the technology. But some people prefer the video links and are more engaged"

detention centres are not in good locations for them – so video links provide another option.

'People respond in different ways to the technology. But some people prefer the video links and are more engaged.'

'This appears to be because they don't have to talk to through the blue glass or security barrier that are typical of our detention centres.'

'It's often hard to hear the client through the barrier – as I found when I was a defence lawyer.'

### Stakeholders

A wide spread of stakeholders have been brought together from the criminal justice system in British Columbia for the bail reform project.

These include the Crown, defence bar, Public

Prosecution Service of Canada, justices of the peace, police, corrections, victim services workers and the judiciary.

### Feedback

Evaluation work has brought encouraging feedback. Comments from defence counsel include:

- 'Interview time is more efficient allowing more time to confer with Crown counsel.'
- 'It helps considerably to communicate with the accused in custody.'
- 'I find clients are much more focused and less distracted using the video-conferencing equipment and overall much easier to interview and communicate with.'
- 'I have found that the equipment does

facilitate access to the clients. It tends to speed up the interviews.'

Criticism from one defence counsel focused on 'depersonalisation of the process' and 'glitches with the equipment.' Also, 'a tendency to run through interviews too quickly – making it necessary to re-interview clients.'

### Contact & Information

- » British Columbia Bail Reform Project
- » [www.criminaljusticereform.gov.bc.ca/en/justice\\_reform\\_projects/bail\\_reform/index.html](http://www.criminaljusticereform.gov.bc.ca/en/justice_reform_projects/bail_reform/index.html)



## Technology offers **great cost savings**

### *Prison to court video links*

*Defence solicitor Jules Purdon is part of the project team that has been trialling prison to court video links (PCVL) in Northumbria.*

Newcastle defence solicitor Jules Purdon is optimistic about the future for video technology but would like to see greater national co-ordination.

Jules works for Michael Purdon – a legal aid firm based in the city centre.

He said: 'I'm part of the project team that has

### **Short walk**

'It works really well for us. It's just a short walk down to the court complex where we can use the video links to talk to our clients and take instructions on prison law or criminal matters.

'The alternative is a 90 minute round trip to the prison. On top of that it takes 20 minutes to

### **Economic climate**

'Obviously, that will cost a lot of money. In the current economic climate there will be a reluctance to invest in something that will take some time to return savings matching the initial outlay.

'I've enjoyed taking part in the project. Northumbria Criminal Justice Board has shown a lot of commitment to making it work.

'But I think we need better co-ordination nationally. Each of the regions currently using video links has a slightly different system in place. So they can't talk to one another, which is very disappointing.

'There is also an issue with the times that the video links are available. At the moment they shut down at 4pm. So if a solicitor is in court all day that makes it very difficult.'

## **"...I think it can bring great cost savings"**

been trialling the technology and I think it can bring great cost savings.

'My firm is using the technology every week and it is a very good way of getting instructions outside of the trial period.

'The only caveat in terms of video interviews is that the client does need to be of moderate intelligence with no mental health issues.

get into the prison to see the client – all for the sake of a 45-minute interview.'

Jules would like to see a commitment to rolling out the technology nationally and ironing out minor problems identified in the trials.

He said: 'I think the only thing holding it back is the limited number of prisons offering the facility. Every prison needs to be hooked up for it to be used nationally.



## International links a benefit to all

### *Prison to court video links*

*Northumbria was one of eight pilot areas, which successfully increased usage of prison to court video links during trials in 2008...*

Partnerships between different countries can be very valuable for new initiatives like video technology says the LSC's Paul McArdle.

Paul was part of the project team for the Northumbria trials and he said: 'We were very pleased to see our work recognised in such a faraway place as British Columbia.'

'Talking to people in other criminal justice administrations about their work allows for fresh perspectives.'

#### **Advantages**

'In British Columbia they found similar advantages to ourselves.'

These include:

- improved access to defendants for defence firms and probation officers with more time for consultations
- savings in travel time and costs
- savings in time spent gaining access to prisons
- prison service sees more efficient and flexible use of visiting facilities.

Paul said: 'We now have seven courts in Northumbria with video links to prison. After the first pilot Northumbria LCJB has since run

a second project. This gives free use of PCVL equipment to all CJS agencies in Northumbria.'

#### **Important role**

'The LSC played an important role in making sure the scheme happened, ensuring defence representation on the project group. We also persuaded the group to move away from charging for the service.'

'Defence lawyers have a diary booking system for interviewing prisoners and the system is saving a lot of time and money. The next step will be to carry out an evaluation of the project.'

'We'd be happy to share our findings with our Canadian counterparts. It's always useful to exchange information and we'd like to hear how their work progresses.'

#### **Contact & Information**

- » lsc > cds > criminal justice system initiatives > our work with her majesty's courts services
- » [www.legalservices.gov.uk/criminal/magistrates\\_court\\_listing\\_practices.asp](http://www.legalservices.gov.uk/criminal/magistrates_court_listing_practices.asp)

## Steady rise in virtual court volumes

*Trial scheme for virtual court goes from strength to strength...*

The virtual court pilot schemes in London and Kent are building up steam with an increasing volume of cases being heard.

Cases are heard and disposed of without the need to produce the defendant physically in the court building.

Volumes are likely to rise more swiftly in future because the need for a defendant to give consent to appear before a virtual court has now been removed.

Instead there is a new 'interests of justice test'. This requires the court to be satisfied that it is not contrary to the 'interests of justice' for the hearing to take place by live link.

This change came into force on 14 December 2009 (see information box).

#### **Phased introduction**

There has been a phased introduction since May 2009 at the 15 London police stations taking part in the trial scheme. Cases are heard via a video link at Camberwell Green Magistrates Court.

The Kent scheme began in August 2009 and is run from a single site – North Kent police station – with cases being heard at Medway Magistrates Court.

Access to representation is provided by dedicated virtual court pilot duty solicitor schemes in London and North Kent. Defendants still have the choice of using their own solicitor.

The LSC project manager for the virtual court Steve McGowan said: 'Since the start of the pilot the volume of cases heard through the virtual court has steadily increased.'

'Requests by defendants for representation are being met and the virtual court duty scheme is working well. Two thirds of represented clients in London are being represented by providers on the scheme.'

#### **Contact & Information**

- » lsc > cds > criminal areas of work > magistrates court
- » lsc > cds > cds news

# Civil and Social Justice Survey enters new phase

*Important changes are being made to the influential English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Survey says Professor Pascoe Pleasence ...*

The English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Survey is to start interviewing individual respondents periodically over a number of years instead of on a single occasion.

Switching to a 'panel' design is the most significant overhaul for the survey since it was introduced in 2001. The new approach will start in 2010.

The survey has been hugely influential in shaping the debate around access to justice in this country in recent years.

## Stakeholders

As well as underpinning the development of the Community Legal Service, the survey's findings have been employed extensively by a broad range of stakeholders in the civil justice system.

Examples include:

- Age Concern
- Citizens Advice
- Commission for Rural Communities
- Ministry of Justice
- Money Advice Trust
- PLENET
- Shelter
- Youth Access

The survey's findings have also become increasingly influential in the area of health. For example, the Royal College of Psychiatrists mentioned the survey in a review of debt and mental health, which appeared in October 2009.

In particular, the survey has:

1. Established and quantified the extent of legal problem 'clustering' and 'referral fatigue'
2. Demonstrated and described the strong links between civil legal problems and social exclusion
3. Exposed the extent of unmet 'legal need' across different communities.

## Vulnerability

Most recently, the survey has been used to highlight the impact of the recession on people's

vulnerability to legal problems and use of legal services. This has helped to make the case for civil legal aid in the face of general pressure on public spending.

The survey has also been influential in other jurisdictions with findings cited extensively in, for example, the recent Australian Attorney-General's Access to Justice Taskforce report (September 2009).

Indeed, the form of the survey has now been replicated in a range of jurisdictions, effectively acknowledging the strategic value of such surveys.

## Benefits

The move to a panel design is an important one. Interviewing individual survey respondents periodically over a number of years, rather than on just a single occasion, provides many benefits.

For example, the panel Civil and Social Justice Survey will ultimately allow full information to be collected for the 45% of legal problems that are not concluded at the time of initial interview.

The new approach will allow us to:

- understand more fully how problem resolution strategies develop
- address more fully the downstream costs of problems
- build up a more detailed and accurate picture of the temporal relationship between problems and more general life events.

## Issues

Using a panel survey also means that issues emerging during interviews can be revisited and explored more fully through later interviews.

The changes being made to the Civil and Social Justice Survey will make sure that our understanding of the public's experience of civil legal problems will develop faster than would otherwise have been the case.

In turn, this will help services to evolve more effectively to meet public need.

## Leaps forward

The current form of the survey has allowed us to make great leaps forward in this regard. But the 'cross-sectional' design only gathers information at a single point in time. This hampers efforts to understand how key social processes unfold over a period of time.

Examples of such social processes include 'advice seeking behaviour' and the 'downstream impact of problems'.

The Legal Services Research Centre is now working with Ipsos MORI to realise the panel survey's potential. The survey research organisation has taken over responsibility for the Civil and Social Justice Survey fieldwork from BMRB Social.



*Pascoe Pleasence, Academic and Scientific Adviser at the Legal Services Research Centre, Legal Services Commission, and Professor of Empirical Legal Studies, University College London.*

## Contact & Information

» [www.lsrc.org.uk](http://www.lsrc.org.uk) > projects



**Legal Aid 60 event at the Welsh Assembly**  
The event was sponsored by Dr Ian Gibbons, Minister for Social Justice & Local Government (below).



## Legal Aid 60 roadshow ends on a high

*Exhibition to celebrate 60th anniversary of legal aid finishes tour in Cardiff...*

Our special 60th anniversary exhibition provided the focal point for a special event at the National Assembly for Wales in Cardiff.

The touring roadshow has been on the road since opening at the House of Commons back in April 2009.

Since then it has been on show in places as far apart as Truro Cathedral, Newcastle City Library and the Forum in Norwich.

The 60th anniversary event in Cardiff brought together assembly members, the Welsh justice community and local authorities.

### One million visitors

Our estimates suggest that nearly a million people have seen the exhibition, which set out to show how legal aid has developed to reflect society's changing legal needs.

The exhibition also illustrates how legally aided test cases, like the Thalidomide compensation case and the Clapham Rail disaster inquest, have positively changed the law. And it provides a glimpse of the shape of legal

aid in the future.

LSC Wales director Paul Davies said: 'Our legal aid service is the best funded in the world and I'm confident that legal aid will continue to play a valuable role in society for the next 60 years and beyond.'

The exhibition has been supported at different venues by our special teams of 'Diamonds' who have been on hand to talk about modern day legal aid services.

### Helping hand

When the roadshow visited Bristol one member of the public said: 'This is a blessing – my son is going through a very difficult time. I'm really worried. I didn't know how to help him, but I'll definitely get him to ring the Community Legal Advice helpline. You've helped my family – thank you.'

A major reason for the exhibition is to raise awareness of legal aid following a MORI poll we commissioned earlier this year. This showed that only 17 per cent of the public in England and

Wales know a great deal about legal aid.

Visitors have been able to take away a special 60th anniversary leaflet, which accompanies the exhibition. This explains the role and achievements of legal aid over the past 60 years and looks forward to what the next 60 years will hold.

And we've also been able to direct people towards our highly successful campaign website – see below.

### Encore

There will be a final encore for the exhibition when it is displayed one last time in the reception area of our London Abbey Orchard Street office from Monday 14 December to Tuesday 22 December.

### Contact & Information

» [www.legalaid60.org.uk/sixty/celebrating.jsp](http://www.legalaid60.org.uk/sixty/celebrating.jsp)

# eForms pilot begins for Delivery Transformation

*We're piloting electronic forms as part of moves to new ways of working with providers...*

Electronic forms to help deliver legal aid in a simpler and more efficient way are being piloted from December 2009.

Ten provider firms from across England and Wales make up the initial pilot. This will increase to 25 in February 2010.

All the firms involved have expressed a keen interest in Delivery Transformation (DT) and offered to be early adopters of the new system.

One of the pilot firms is Dawn Advice – a Newcastle-based charity that does legal aid work across the north east.

Dawn Advice contracts and relationship manager Matt Goldsmith said: 'The time that we save will allow us to dedicate more time to our customers and to focus on advice work.'

## Significant benefits

'It is easy to see there are significant benefits for ourselves and our client through the delivery of this programme.'

Another pilot firm is Cartwright King where partnership secretary John Scruton said: 'I see electronic working as being part of the way forward, making transactions with the LSC more timely and efficient.'

'We are very pleased to be chosen to be part of the pilot and we look forward to the improvements working in this new way will bring.'

By 2011 the way the LSC works with

providers will be very different, with a move to online services – as outlined in issue 62 of Focus.

## Pilot group

The initial pilot group is made up of the following firms:

1. Watson Woodhouse
2. Morgans Solicitors
3. Criminal Defence Associates
4. Cartwright King
5. T V Edwards
6. Dawn Advice Ltd
7. Venters Solicitors
8. The Gwyn George Partnership
9. Bhatia Best
10. VHS Fletchers

Feedback from the pilot group will allow us to develop and improve the system before it is rolled out to all providers later in 2010.

## Your chance to be involved

There is also an opportunity for more providers to become involved in shaping our Delivery Transformation programme (see contact box).

From the 15 December 2009 six forms will be made available electronically to the pilot group, with an additional six added during February.

In some instances a selection of forms will be merged to create a single eForm. Please refer to the table for more detail:

Forms launched December 2009	Forms launched February 2010
<p><b>eForm Claim 1/1a/2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Claim 1:</b> Claim for assessment of costs or payments of costs following detailed assessment in civil cases</li> <li>• <b>Claim 1A:</b> Costs in Fixed Fee Public Law Scheme</li> <li>• <b>Claim 2:</b> Costs met in part or full by other party</li> </ul>	<p><b>eForm CDS 5:</b> Application for extension of upper limit (This eform will include a selection of additional fields from the below forms)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>CDS1:</b> Clients Details Form</li> <li>• <b>CDS2:</b> Application for advice and assistance</li> <li>• <b>CDS3:</b> Application for advocacy assistance</li> </ul>
<p><b>eForm POA:</b> For payment on account in civil cases</p>	<p><b>eForm CLS APP8:</b> Application for amendment or prior authority in civil cases</p>
<p><b>eForm CDS 4:</b> CDS 4 &amp; 4a Application for prior authority to incur disbursements in criminal cases</p>	<p><b>eForm CDS7:</b> Non-standard fee contract work assessment form</p>

## Benefits for providers

The use of eForms will give providers immediate benefits through a number of new features:

### Auto data validation

This will prevent forms being rejected by ensuring mandatory fields have been completed before the form can be submitted.

### Automatic calculations

Automatic calculations on some forms will save time – for example, by adding up the different costs a provider has entered.

### Intelligent questions

As information is entered, the forms will show only relevant questions, further speeding up the process.

### Online tracking

Providers will be able to access the status of their applications and claims online, without needing to call the LSC.

### Relevant requests

The forms will ask for specific additional information or evidence based on the information already entered – so providers will no longer need to submit whole files unless it is necessary.

### Electronic submission

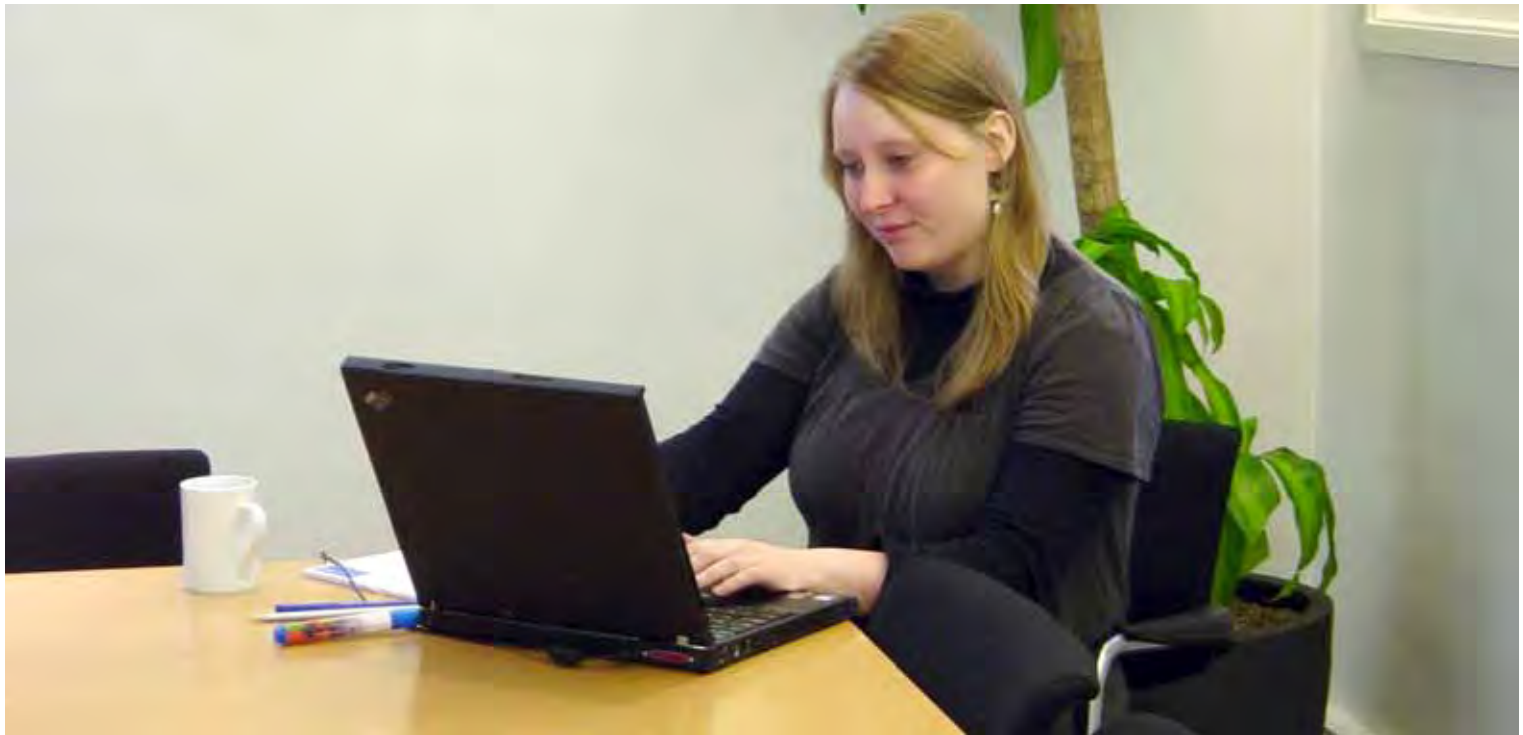
Users of the electronic claim forms will be able to reduce costs and waiting times further by scanning in evidence and information.

Overall, the eForms aim to help providers:

- Save money, by reducing printing, postage and packaging costs
- Save time, by removing the need to fax urgent work, and cutting down decision times on some forms from weeks to minutes
- Simplify processes, through integration with LSC Online, seamless form changes, and a straightforward system, which is easy to use, with training available

### Further information

Providers interested in helping to shape our DT programme should email us at [delivery.transformation@legalservices.gov.uk](mailto:delivery.transformation@legalservices.gov.uk) or speak to their relationship manager.



## ■ New online networking resource

*A new online resource, inspired by the concept of a virtual café, is being piloted early in 2010 offering legal aid providers a free secure community space...*

Legal aid providers are being invited to join a pilot for a free online environment where professionals can chat or catch up on the latest news.

Legal Aid Link (LAL) is designed as an 'online café' where members can use the web to meet peers and exchange information.

The new resource has been developed by London-based Matrix Chambers, supported by funding from the Legal Services Commission.

### Innovations

Matrix barrister and LSC Commissioner David Wolfe said: 'We have a reputation at Matrix for innovations in the delivery of law. LAL is the latest such advance.'

'I think this is an exciting example of how new technology can really enhance our work, helping us share information effectively.'

Around 50 providers have been consulted to develop the features and functions of the new resource and there is still time for more people to become involved (see box right).

### Responsive

Matrix project officer Rachael Marsh said: 'I'd be glad to hear from anyone who would like to contribute. This is a resource that needs to be responsive to the needs of those using it.'

Birmingham Law Centre chief executive Pete Lowen is a member of the reference group. He is hoping to use LAL when it is launched and can 'see the potential of such a resource'.

There is also broad support from Birmingham solicitor Phil Storey from Bailey Wright & Co. He said he was unaware of anything similar to LAL on this scale for legal aid providers, and said: 'It is a much-needed resource.'

Once it is launched, the resource will belong to its members and will be self-governing. Members will be able to shape the site as it suits them and provide content and collective oversight.

### Contact & Information

» rmarsh@matrixlaw.co.uk

» 0207 404 3447 ext 458 - Rachael Marsh

## Key features of Legal Aid Link (LAL) website

Since the Legal Aid Link (LAL) project started a group of around 50 providers have been trying out various functions on a mock-up site.

Key features for members include:

- uploading documents
- accessing information shared by others
- multi-media sharing e.g. video recordings of seminars
- discussion rooms about specific issues or areas of law
- secure rooms with restricted access for sharing confidential information

The functionality is still being developed. LAL will continue to evolve in response to members' needs after the new site has been launched.



## ■ Tendering for 2010 contracts: update on processes

*Latest dates and information on tendering for the new 2010 civil and criminal legal aid contracts...*

New civil legal aid contracts are due to come into effect from 1 October 2010.

The recent announcement from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) on the Best Value Tendering (BVT) pilots means that we are reviewing the implications for the July 2010 crime contract tender.

This is the position for:

1. immigration services
2. all other civil categories
3. crime

### Immigration services

The tender process for contracts to deliver mainstream face-to-face services in immigration and asylum began on 30 November 2010.

To allow additional time over the Christmas and New Year period, the tender window will be open for just over eight weeks. All tenders must be submitted by 12 noon on 28 January 2010.

Full details can be found on the tender pages of our website – see below. This includes:

- information for applicants

- instructions on how to access and use our eTendering system

The tender process began on 16 December 2009 to deliver services under new contracts at Immigration Removal Centres. This affects services available either through on-site surgeries or the Fast Track scheme.

### All other civil categories

The tender exercise for all other civil categories will open in February 2010.

For more information on these categories please see the civil tenders pages of the website – see contact box opposite.

### Crime

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) has announced that the Best Value Tendering (BVT) pilots announced in July 2009 will not now go ahead on 4 January 2010.

Instead, ministers have asked the LSC to work with colleagues at MoJ and the legal professions to develop outline proposals for a more

ambitious programme.

The work the LSC has put in to develop the pilots will be used as a foundation for building these proposals, which will cover England and Wales.

The professions will be updated on next steps and the implications for the July 2010 crime contract tender as soon as practicable.

### Contact & Information

» [lsc > cls > tenders > civil contracts for 2010 > immigration and asylum](#)

» [lsc > cls > tenders > civil contracts for 2010](#)

» [lsc > cds > news](#)

### Subscribe to LSC Update for the latest information on tender opportunities:

» [lsc > about us > our publications > subscribe to publications](#)

# Asylum internet pilot beats all targets

*Internet booking pilot successfully speeds up legal advice for asylum clients...*

Trials for a new internet booking service for asylum applicants have been so successful that the system is to be rolled out permanently in the pilot area.

The pilot in Wales and the South West has performed well beyond expectations – suggesting a clear advantage for electronic appointments compared with the paper-based rota system.

Asylum pilot project lead John Facey said: 'The thinking behind this trial was to ensure increased access to legal advice for some of the most vulnerable members of society.

'This should improve the credibility of the asylum system and provider greater opportunity for early advice to be given.'

## Reduced waiting times

Under the pilot 100% of applicants were able to receive an appointment within a week. Average waiting times came down from eight calendar days to three.

This offers a significant increase in the time available for both clients and providers to prepare their case before their substantive

interview with the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA).

With the paper-based system, only 50-60% of asylum applicants were able to receive an appointment with a legal adviser within a week of requesting one.

The remaining applicants were likely to encounter difficulty in accessing advice before their substantive interview – a key part of the asylum application process.

## Working together

Making the pilot a success involved collaborative working between the LSC, the Welsh Refugee Council (WRC) and our immigration providers in Wales and South West.

The WRC acted as operators of the system – able to offer appointments to those applicants housed by the UKBA in accommodation in Cardiff.

Providers would upload appointments on to the system, which clients could then choose based on the date/time that they were available, and their distance to the provider.

The next step will be to develop the system

further to make it more reflective of the needs of the providers and operators.

## Further testing

We are carrying out further testing of the Voluntary Appointment System in two other UKBA regions.

In the North West we have been working with UKBA staff who have operated the system and offered appointments to applicants in the region.

The Refugee Council is currently performing the same role for applicants accommodated in Yorkshire and Humberside.

If these pilots are also a success, the plan is to roll out the system in place of the paper rota before the start of the new civil contracts in 2010.

If you would like to know more about the pilot please contact the Immigration Policy Team – see below.

## Contact & Information

» [immigration-services@legalservices.gov.uk](mailto:immigration-services@legalservices.gov.uk)

## Funding for appeals in asylum cases

*Clarifying the process for requesting a review when legal aid funding is refused for appeals...*

New guidance is being made available to help providers with clients who have been refused legal aid funding for appeals to the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal (AIT).

Clients refused legal aid funding in this way have a right for the decision to be reviewed.

But the application process for reviews moves very quickly and there is a limited time available to appeal any negative decision to the AIT.

### Process for requesting review

Questions and answers about how the process works are being made available to make sure that providers and clients are crystal clear about how the review process works.

These Q&As explain the devolved powers that providers hold to grant, refuse or withdraw funding i.e. Controlled Legal Representation

(CLR). They also explain where to send review applications and important next steps in the process.

Public funding for AIT appeals is only granted where a case satisfies a 'merits test'.

If an applicant is assessed as having a 'poor' chance of success and funding is not granted then the client has the right to apply to the LSC for a review of this decision. They will need providers to assist them in this process.

This review goes to an Independent Funding Adjudicator.

### Funding code guidance

Key requirements governing reviews are set out in the funding code guidance for immigration.

Clients can submit an application for review within a reasonable timescale of their legal

adviser doing one of the following:

- refusing to grant CLR following a negative decision from the Home Office
- withdrawing CLR funding while an appeal to the AIT is ongoing
- refusing/withdrawing funding in relation to a bail hearing.

## Contact & Information

» [lsc > cls > civil areas of work > immigration and asylum > processing immigration applications](#)

» National Immigration and Asylum Team (NIAT) referral line – 020 7718 8091

» [IFAResults@legalservices.gov.uk](mailto:IFAResults@legalservices.gov.uk)



## New sentencing options for children and young people

*A new youth community sentencing structure came into force on 30 November 2009...*

Solicitors working in the youth justice system are being urged to make sure they are up to speed with a new community sentencing system.

The Youth Rehabilitation Order (YRO) combines a number of existing sentences into one generic sentence.

The changes to juvenile legislation are being made in tandem with a new model for determining intervention levels called the Scaled Approach.

Like the YRO, this new way of working came into force on 30 November, 2009.

### Talk to YOT contacts

Newcastle youth offending team (YOT) manager Rod Stapley said: 'This is going to need solicitors to talk to their local YOT contacts and really get to grips with the new system.'

The YRO is now the standard community sentence for the majority of children and youngsters who offend. It has been brought into

force by the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act, 2008.

It replaces nine existing community sentences such as the Curfew Order and the Exclusion Order.

YOTS like the one in Newcastle can provide more information about the thinking behind the new sentence. But key aims are to:

1. simplify sentencing
2. improve flexibility of interventions

The idea is to give courts the ability to construct sentences that properly address individual risk and needs and reduce the likelihood of re-offending.

### New model of working

The Scaled Approach is a new model of working for youth justice practitioners. It matches the intensity of a YOT's work with young people to their assessed likelihood of reoffending and risk

of serious harm to others.

The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) has developed the model in partnership with YOTs and with input from external stakeholders like the Magistrates' Association.

It applies to young offenders between the ages of 10 and 17.

### Impact on clients

One reason it is important for solicitors to understand the implications of all these changes is that their clients are likely to notice differences in the way they experience their orders.

Levels of contact with YOT workers will vary according to the individual assessment of a young person's likelihood of reoffending. So co-defendants or repeat offenders may notice varying levels of intervention with youth justice practitioners.



## National standards

YOTs must adhere to national standards when looking at individual cases and co-ordinating input from different professionals e.g. social services and education departments, the police, probation service and health authorities.

Rod said: 'It's really important that legal practitioners remember that the national standards have only ever been a minimum

Rod Stapley said: 'We know that young people are served best when the professionals involved understand the system.

'It's a waste of everyone's time – and billable hours – if fruitless challenges are made to the contact young people have with YOTs and other practitioners.'

## "These changes mean that good local relationships will be vital"

standard – that means for the least risky and those that reoffend less.

'Where patterns of offending are more ingrained, YOTs now have the opportunity to work with these young people in a more targeted and in-depth way. This is because the national standards reflect the new Scaled Approach of managing our contact with young people.

'It's also important for lawyers to understand the transitional arrangements where the YRO will be used and where the Scaled Approach will apply, for example as young people work through their old community orders.

## Opportunity

'This is a tremendous opportunity for us but something that may be a matter of "frustration" to some young people as they have more rigorous interventions planned for them.'

The Scaled Approach model will be used to inform:

- planning interventions
- YOT reports to courts and youth offender panels

## Dialogue essential

Rod says it is essential for solicitors to have a healthy dialogue with local YOT youth court teams or court leads and Youth court user groups.

Rod said: 'These changes mean that good local relationships will be vital. Here in Newcastle we have intermittent contact with our solicitors. We know that they work under tremendous pressure of "time is money".

'Our court team has been passing on information as we've got it but we'd like to get the links to work better.'

## Contact & Information

» [www.yjb.gov.uk](http://www.yjb.gov.uk) > practitioners > courts and orders > criminal justice and immigration act > yro

» [www.yjb.gov.uk](http://www.yjb.gov.uk) > practitioners > youth justice – the scaled approach

## Jobcentre Plus to promote CLA services

More than 600 Jobcentre Plus offices across England and Wales are providing information to the public about the services Community Legal Advice (CLA) can offer.

Research has shown that people who are in receipt of benefits or unemployed are more likely to experience civil law problems.

These problems often occur in clusters causing vulnerable groups to encounter many problems at the same time as seeking employment.

## Resolve problems

CLA works to resolve problems that those looking for work often experience. The idea is to allow them to focus on finding employment and improving their everyday lives.

Many Jobcentre Plus clients will be eligible for legal aid.

## Helpline

CLA booklets and posters will be available in all Jobcentre Plus offices until April next year. The booklet and posters highlight the type of advice that is available via the helpline as well as the website address for self-help advice.

The materials also give additional information on opening hours and examples of the types of problems the CLA service can help with.

CLA development manager David Woodhams has led on negotiations with Jobcentre Plus. He said: 'I feel confident that this partnership will ensure the unemployed have access to our advice services.'



## ■ Training is key to improving payment controls

*Report on Public Accounts Committee hearing to help map way ahead*

Provider training is to be looked at again once we receive a report from the Public Accounts Committee looking at the procurement of legal aid.

This report is being put together following a recent hearing of the House of Commons committee.

This was held in response to the National Audit Office's (NAO) recent reports on criminal legal aid procurement and the LSC's annual accounts.

At the hearing MPs questioned chief executive Carolyn Regan, executive director for commissioning Hugh Barrett, and MOJ Access to Justice director Peter Handcock.

### Tighter control

Training is one of a number of actions being taken to make sure there is tighter control of payments to providers.

Actions already under way include:

- further clarification and training for providers to ensure improved compliance with contracts
- adding new checks to our online billing system in order to strengthen payment controls
- strengthening the LSC's audit team and systems, including the introduction of a

team dedicated to checking eligibility for legal aid

- reclaiming up to £2m of overpayments to providers by the end of 2009

### No evidence

There's no evidence that the majority of overpayments result from deliberate action by solicitors. However, the LSC has been looking at the categories of law where the most mistakes have been made – particularly family and immigration law cases.

Since 2005/06, the LSC has funded an additional 277,000 civil and 40,000 criminal cases, while controlling costs at £2.1 billion over the past year (2008/09).

### Changes

Without changes already introduced to the legal aid system, it is estimated that this cost would have risen to £2.7 billion.

There is a big transformation programme within the LSC. As part of this programme staff numbers are being reduced from 1,700 to 1,100 by the end of 2011 (30% cut).

Future savings of £3m a year are being generated through a 20% reduction in executive and senior management posts. Middle management posts are being cut by 28%.

## ■ Revised guidance on claiming in family cases

*Feedback from providers has resulted in changes to guidance on how to make claims in family cases...*

Changes have been made to the guidance on our website for providers completing the Family Controlled Matter Report (CMRF) form.

The amended guidance follows feedback from practitioners. The intention is to:

- make the existing guidance clearer
- provide some additional practical examples of how to claim in family cases.

It is important for both providers and the LSC that cases are reported accurately to ensure that:

- providers are paid the correct fees – in some cases a lower fee is being claimed than should be
- providers' reconciliation positions are accurate
- monitoring of key performance indicators (KPIs) is correct
- the LSC has accurate data to assess the impact of the fee scheme on providers
- providers' claims are not rejected, as there is now additional validation in LSC On-Line that does not allow certain incorrect code combinations to be used.

### Contact & Information

» [lsc](#) > [cds](#) > [cds news](#)

» [lsc](#) > [cds](#) > [consultations](#) > [VHCC 2010](#)

» [VHCCproject@legalservices.gov.uk](mailto:VHCCproject@legalservices.gov.uk)



## Looking at the future of Very High Cost Cases

*Consultation opens on replacement for VHCC Panel scheme...*

A consultation has opened on a new scheme for Very High Cost Cases.

The idea is to:

- replace the VHCC Panel Scheme established in January 2008
- deliver savings of the same magnitude as the 2007/08 Panel tendering exercise

### Options for advocates

Proposals to be looked at include

1. Benchmarking option – adapting current hourly rate scheme but managed under individual case contracts. No advocate panel.
2. Maintaining the current scheme – all advocates meeting experience and quality entry criteria to have opportunity to join advocate panel
3. Extending the Advocates' Graduated Fee Scheme to include cases expected to last up to 60 days. All cases lasting 60 days or more to be paid at 2008 Panel rates.
4. Options for litigators

### Proposals to be looked at include

1. Maintaining the current scheme – all litigators meeting experience and quality

entry criteria to have opportunity to join litigator panel

2. Extending the Litigators' Graduated Fee Scheme to include cases expected to last up to 60 days. All cases lasting 60 days or more to be paid at 2008 Panel rates.

Copies of the full consultation document and the initial impact assessment are available from the CDS consultation pages.

The consultation is due to close on 26 January 2010. It is possible that this may be extended. So keep an eye on the consultation pages.

### Consultation events

The LSC will be hosting three regional VHCC events about the consultation.

Please contact us at [VHCCproject@legalservices.gov.uk](mailto:VHCCproject@legalservices.gov.uk) for further details.

#### Contact & Information

- » [lsc > cds > cds news](#)
- » [lsc > cds > consultations > VHCC 2010](#)
- » [VHCCproject@legalservices.gov.uk](mailto:VHCCproject@legalservices.gov.uk)

## VAT goes back to 17.5%

*The VAT rate is reverting to 17.5% on 1 January 2010.*

Full guidance on how this change will affect your work can be found on our website in the CLS and CDS sections under Pay Rates and Schemes.

The guidance covers how:

- the rate of VAT we will pay is dependent on how you report your work
- we have changed our systems and processes to accommodate the change.

The LSC is not able to provide VAT advice, as providers are responsible for their own VAT accounting. If anyone has any issues they can contact their local VAT office.

Anyone with any further queries about the application of VAT to the type of work they perform can contact their Relationship Manager.

#### Contact & Information

- » [lsc > cls > pay rates and schemes](#)
- » [lsc > cds > pay rates and schemes](#)



## Interactive business training starts

Free training modules are now available on our website to help equip legal aid providers with the skills and knowledge they need to work effectively.

The interactive training will help firms to:

- maximise areas of profit and efficiency
- save costs
- understand and identify cost drivers

The training modules are based on face-to-face training successfully delivered across Bristol, Bridgwater and Manchester. The modules went live on 7 December 2009 and are provided by our Provider Readiness Team. They deal with:

1. financial skills
2. effective use of IT
3. alternative business structures
4. expanding your business

Feedback from the face-to-face training was:

- 'really excellent course material – would recommend this training to any provider'
- 'a useful "taster" as a foundation for further study'
- 'course was excellent!'
- 'interesting and very informative'

The modules have been developed with PricewaterhouseCoopers as an introduction to a number of key financial and business management principles.

The idea is to give a broad foundation on each subject and provoke thought, highlight areas for business and personal development and provide practical guidance.

The training content has been developed specifically for the legal aid market, with examples

and exercises taken from case studies.

The sessions are aimed at those with little or no formal business management training.

However, the feedback suggests that the training is equally useful to experienced managers, providing both a refresher and confirming good practice.

The system is open to everyone and free to use, so whether you have no knowledge, a small amount, or even significant experience, there will be something for you in the training.

### Contact & Information

» [lsc](#) > [about us](#) > [transforming legal aid](#) > [provider readiness support](#)

» [lsc](#) > [about us](#) > [transforming legal aid](#) > [the way ahead for legal aid reform](#)

## Payment dates December 2009 to February 2010

*In the table to the right are proposed payment dates up to February 2010.*

*The payment day is the day it goes into bank accounts (day 3 of BACs).*

*For regularly updated information about payment dates please see the LSC website.*

Contract Payments & 1 <sup>st</sup> settlement of the month	2 <sup>nd</sup> settlement of the month	3 <sup>rd</sup> settlement of the month	4 <sup>th</sup> settlement of the month	5 <sup>th</sup> settlement of the month
4 Dec 09	10 Dec 09	17 Dec 09	24 Dec 09	31 Dec
7 Jan 10	14 Jan 10	21 Jan 10	28 Jan 10	
4 Feb 10	11 Feb 10	18 Feb 10	25 Feb 10	

■ [LSC > Criminal Defence Service \(CDS\) Pay rates and schemes > Payment dates](#)

■ [LSC > Community Legal Service \(CLS\) Pay rates and schemes > Payment dates](#)