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01/03/24

LAPG Member Update

Issue 10 of 2024

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Civil Legal Aid News

Further tender opportunity for the 2024 Standard Civil Contract – opens 18 March

We start with a repeat of the content from Member Update 8 in view of the importance of this item.

The LAA has decided to run a further tender round for the 2024 Standard Civil Contract. The tender opens on 18 March and closes at 5pm on 22 April 2024. This gives those who were unsuccessful in securing a contract through the September 2023 tender process another bite at the cherry. The tender process is also open to new providers.

Who can bid for what? Bids can be submitted in all procurement areas across all civil legal aid categories, including the following HLPAS schemes: Barnstaple, Blackpool, Crewe, Lancaster, Newton Abbott, Preston, St Helens, Taunton, Torquay, Wigan and Yeovil. Note also that events on delivery of the Housing Loss Prevention Advice Service (HLPAS) in St Helens County Court and Family Court and Lancaster Magistrates' Court are taking place in March. See [here](#) for details.

Start date? While the intention is that successful bidders will commence work on 1 September 2024 (the start date for the 2024 Standard Civil Contract) the LAA has noted that it cannot guarantee that start date through this process because of the need to complete verification.



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[Read the LAA news story here](#)

Design phase commences for Private Family Law Early Legal Advice Pilot

As reported in Member Update 4 the government committed to pilot early legal advice for private family law cases involving childcare arrangements as part of its [response to the Mandatory Mediation consultation](#). The MoJ has now created a stakeholder advisory group (SAG) to support the design and implementation of the pilot project and invited LAPG, The Law Society, Resolution and a number of other practitioner bodies to participate. The first SAG meeting took place this week and we will update you as this progresses. Needless to say we have made the point, and the MoJ is very aware, that they must not repeat the iceberg sized mistakes that sunk the disastrous Housing Early Legal Advice Pilot.

Review of Civil Legal Aid (RoCLA) – LAPG Call for Evidence response

We have now had an opportunity to read a few of the responses from providers and membership bodies. Please rest assured that there is absolute agreement on what is needed – an immediate and considerable fee increase and a mechanism for periodically updating fees so they are not stuck for another three decades. The MoJ will now be considering the responses to inform the RoCLA report which is due to be published at the end of March. The MoJ will then take time to formulate proposals before a formal consultation in, we are told, the summer of this year. However if there is a General Election in the next few months that could change the timeline or indeed scupper the entire process.

[You can download our response here](#)

Immigration File Reviews

You can imagine how a practitioner felt when she received this email from their LAA Contract Manager:

“Although your annual review isn’t due until around Aug, CMs have been advised that immigration providers which did not have an immigration file review in Q4 of 23/24 (i.e. Jan-Mar 24), need to have an immigration file review in Q1 of 24/25. It’s also looking likely that all immigration firms are going to need to have 2 immigration file reviews in each

financial year. The reason for this is due to an increase in errors identified in respect of immigration providers through the core testing process.”

Representative bodies were not informed about this. There is a meeting of the Civil Contracts Consultative Group on 13 March and we will be asking for more information on this initiative.

Frontier Economics interim report on the sustainability of civil legal aid – more providers needed

Housing and family providers sought.

Deadline 1 March but can be extended!

As we flagged up in Update 8, The Law Society commissioned Frontier Economics to conduct an in-depth study about the financial realities facing civil legal aid providers. The initial stage has focused on housing providers and **Frontier has published an interim report based on data and interviews with around 30 providers.**

The Law Society is now seeking more housing providers, especially from private practice, and family lawyers. The aim is to provide detailed information to the MoJ about the financial reality of carrying out legal aid work. The deadline for signing up is given as 1 March but The law Society has said that that is flexible.

Updated Immigration providers south west support directory

This was updated once again on 28 February with the LAA publishing the latest version of this directory **here**. This is one week since the last update and may well reflect a number of the problems that beset this scheme.

Uh-oh... problems with the Civil Apply service

We have been informed by the LAA that the Civil Apply service was found to have some faults - some inconsistencies between client address information held in CCMS and the Apply for civil legal aid service (Civil Apply). We have been notified that Civil Apply will only be reinstated when the LAA is satisfied that the system is running correctly. The LAA has stated that there will be no problems for practitioners – if you have any feedback **please email us**.

Inactive Cases Review

Any provider with apparently 'inactive' civil legal aid certificates had until 27 February to respond to the LAA's request for an update on those cases. If you have any difficulties with this review please [let us know if we can assist at all](#).

Details of the [review are here](#).

Reducing Billing Issues

At the last Civil Contracts Consultative Group meeting the LAA raised two areas where they are concerned about an increase in bill rejections:

FAS cases – counsel fees: It was reported that there had been a steady increase in the number of rejected bills specifically where counsel was paid but the figures paid didn't reconcile. Providers can find help with this by checking the published guidance [CCMS Billing With Counsel \(justice.gov.uk\)](#) on the LAA Learning website.

Escape cases – various: The second area where rejects are becoming an issue is escape cases in Immigration and Asylum, Mental Health and other civil areas where claims don't reconcile with CWA. Practitioners must ensure that the amount on the EF claim reconciles with the figure entered on CWA.

LAA Training Seminars

Civil billing - how to avoid reject reasons

This webinar focusses on how to avoid the top 10 reject reasons in civil billing. This will take place at **4.00-5.30pm on Tuesday 12 March**. The webinar will offer a rundown on the reasons for civil billing rejects as well as practical hints and tips to help providers get claims paid first time.

[Register here >>](#)

High-cost Family

The HCF Clinic on **Wednesday 20 March** offers the opportunity to book a virtual face-to-face, 20-minute appointment with experienced caseworkers. Providers can discuss ongoing case specific issues. Registrations are limited and the deadline is Wednesday 13 March.

[Register here >>](#)

Criminal Legal Aid News

Crime Lower Consultation - Proposed Pay Increase for Police Station and Youth Court work - responses by 29 Mar 2024

This is a reminder that this consultation seeks views on proposals to increase Crime Lower fees for Police Station and Youth Court work but once again the government has declined to propose a fee increase for prison law work.

[The announcement on 29 January is here](#)

[The consultation is here](#)

Voluntary Attendance Process Change

Following a recent meeting of the Crime Contract Consultative Group, representative bodies were asked to bring this to members' attention:

"Thank you for the feedback that you helpfully provided on the Voluntary Attendance process change. Following my emails of 1st and 15th February, I am pleased to confirm that the Voluntary Attendance process change will go live from 11PM on 4th March 2024.

As a reminder, this change ensures that Voluntary Attendances will not be deployed between 11PM and 7AM wherever possible, reducing contact with crime providers during unsociable hours.

This week, notes will be distributed to crime providers and Police, informing them of the change. Contract Managers will also be briefed so they can support providers. LAA will be closely monitoring the process change, to ensure it delivers the expected benefits to the profession.

Please continue to send any feedback to me at Philip.hanson@justice.gov.uk"

The Law Society judicial review on crime fees

The latest word on this important case is The Law Society [press release](#) from 31 January 2024. The [judgment](#) placed a great deal of emphasis on testimony from criminal defence practitioners.



Legal Aid
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This is one of the reasons why we thought it was important to include so many comments from members into our Civil Legal Aid Call for Evidence response.

Although we know that the government is not going to appeal the decision, we also suspect that the Lord Chancellor and his officials will be in no hurry to take any action in response to the ruling. And of course we do not know whether the government will do anything in response (apart from, perhaps, coming up with a more rational basis for its initial proposals). Nevertheless as we think more and more about the election, this case adds to the considerable amount of powerful lobbying information for your potential MP...

APPG News & Events

APPG on Access to Justice – Violence Against Women event – 27 February 2024

This week saw an important event in parliament hosted by the APPG on Access to Justice on the crucial topic of access to justice for women experiencing violence. Chaired by Baroness Helena Kennedy KC, the event heard from Laura Farris MP, Minister for Victims and Safeguarding and her shadow counterpart Alex Davies-Jones MP. Nicole Jacobs, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales also spoke, along with Jenny Beck KC (Hon), Co-Chair of LAPG and Chair of the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory and Dr Nicola Sharp-Jeffs, Founder and CEO of Surviving Economic Abuse. Probably the most powerful contribution came from an *Expert by Experience*, who gave her first-hand account of experiencing domestic abuse and seeking legal advice and protection.

This event was the first of a series of APPG meetings this year focusing on the critical role that legal services play in supporting clients and communities.

To stay up to date with the work of the APPG, please join the mailing list by contacting LAPG's Director of Parliamentary Affairs, [Rohini Jana](#).



Sector News & Events

Consultation on Fees in Employment Tribunals

Another reminder that this consultation closes 25 March 2024:

[Introducing Fees in the Employment Tribunals and the Employment Appeal Tribunal](#)



Garden Court Chambers Seminars

Details of the following series of [useful seminars](#) [are here](#):

- Access to Justice for Deaf Communities 29 February 6-7.30
- In conversation with the Secretary-General of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom 5 March 6-7.30
- Women Climate Defenders 6 March 6-7.30
- The Criminalisation of People Arriving on 'Small Boats' report launch 7 March 6-7.30
- Criminal Law and Human Rights 12 March 6-7.30

Doughty Street Chambers IWD Event

Doughty Street Chambers has planned a and International Women's Day Celebration is on Saturday.

[Full details and sign up here](#)

Garden Court Chambers North Events

GCN has planned a session on human rights and legal aid careers on 5 March at 6pm and a police law update on 7 March 12.00-13.00. There is an all day session "20 years since Middleton" and the INQUEST Northern Quiz at 6pm - both on 21 March.

[Full details are here](#)

Article in the Guardian

This is an [interesting Guardian article](#) by Dr Kojo Koram who teaches at the School of Law at Birkbeck, University of London: three pledges he

would like Labour to put in its manifesto: fully legalise cannabis, expunge convictions based on racial bias and reform legal aid (with a nod to The Westminster Commission Report prepared by our very own APPG).

LAPG News & Events

2024 LALY awards nomination are all systems go!

As we reported on Monday, the nomination process for the 2024 Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year awards commenced this week. The nomination window will be open for 8 weeks so please start speaking to colleagues about who you want to nominate as your legal aid hero and start gathering the supporting information to demonstrate just how amazing they are. Full details of this year's categories will be published on Monday so look out for further news on our website and on our social media platforms. In particular, follow @LALYawards for all the latest news.



Full details of this year's categories, guidance for nominations and how to submit your nomination can be found on [our sparkly new LALY webpages](#) (with a special thanks to our wonderful Ops lead Anna Neira Quesada).

Renew your LAPG membership to continue to benefit from our support

LAPG membership runs from 1 January to 31 December each year. Thank you to the many member organisations and individuals who have already renewed their membership for 2024.

If you are yet to renew your membership, please get in touch with us as the Early Bird rate expired on 29 February. However our membership fees are still incredibly competitive and of course we may still offer you the discount if you can convince us that your Wi-Fi dropped just as you were about to hit send on the membership form yesterday....

For those who have not renewed, over the next few weeks we will start to restrict access to:

- Member Updates
- The Member section of our website

- The discount scheme for LAPG training courses and events
- Support with legal aid and practice management issues through our Member Query service

Renewing really couldn't be simpler – you can complete the renewal form online, submit your list of contacts for Member Updates and make payment either through our website or by BACS.

[Visit the Membership page of our website for more details](#)

Not sure whether your organisation has renewed or have any questions about membership, please [get in contact with our Operations Officer, Anna.](#)

LAPG training courses

Supervision Courses

Book your place on any of 2024 Supervision Courses below:

[7TH MARCH 2024](#)

[23RD APRIL 2024](#)

[2ND MAY 2024](#)

[8TH AUGUST 2024](#)

[12 NOVEMBER 2024](#)

Designed for new LAA Supervisors or those wishing to refresh their supervisory skills, our course helps you meet a key component in securing and then effectively operating your legal aid contract and meeting the LAA's supervisor standards. We again welcome Matt Howgate and Vicky Ling as our tutors for this course. You will receive practical help filling out supervisor forms, learn how to conduct file reviews and how to keep up to date with LAA changes.

LAPG members receive a £40 discount on the course fee, bringing it down from £250 to £210 for the day. Book multiple delegates from your organisation and receive an additional 10% discount.

We have reformatted the course so that we are covering all of the same content across one day rather than two days. The content in this course is relevant for both crime and civil practitioners.

If you would like to know more about this course,

or to reserve your place, contact [Andrea Shumaker](#).

Online Introduction to Civil Legal Aid Course

The Civil Legal Aid scheme is incredibly complex and the consequences of getting something wrong can be damaging to a client's case or financially damaging to the organisation doing the work – sometimes both. We have therefore developed the first module in a series which provides a general introduction to the civil legal aid scheme aimed at trainees, paralegals, junior lawyers and those that wish to refresh their knowledge having worked in the sector for some time.

We have moved this online module onto a new training platform, Thinkific! This new platform allows for growth and development of the course and a better overall experience for the user. The same information is covered and it is still entirely self-paced, you will still receive access to the course for 12 months.

We now offer this course in written and video versions! Once you are enrolled on the course you will have the option to read through the material yourself or watch a video! You can mix and match how you learn to complete the course in a way that best suits your learning style and time constraints. All the video and written content are available on the Thinkific platform and you will have full access to both versions.

If you would like to subscribe for just £99 please click [here](#). If you have any issues or require an invoice please email [Andrea Shumaker](#). We offer three discount codes, JFF, for Justice First Fellows, JFFO, for Just First Fellowship Host Organisation employees, and multiple-tickets, to be used when subscribing more than one participant on the course.

So there we have it legal aiders. A busy week of meetings and discussions about everything from HMCTS digital portals to MoJ pilots to means testing to the future of housing contracts. We're incredibly excited to have launched the 2024 LALYs and can't wait to read the nominations about exceptional legal aid lawyers, support staff and organisations as they role in over the coming weeks. Thank you to everyone who has contributed to our crowdfunding to support the Legal Aid Newcomer award, by the way. It is always humbling to see firsthand just how supportive and collaborative this sector can be.

Take care one and all,

Chris Minnoch, CEO [@ChrisLAPG](#)

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01/03/24



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Would you like to contribute to our Member Updates and share news and information with other members? If so, just email us and we can discuss how you can best contribute.

Thank you for being brave enough to be part of the LAPG community!



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