



Legal Aid Practitioners Group **Annual Review 2016**





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Welcome from LAPG Co-Chairs

Welcome to Legal Aid Practitioners Group's first ever Annual Review!

LAPG is a membership organisation for firms and Not-for-Profit organisations that carry out legal aid work. We have recently welcomed a number of barristers and members of the legal aid section of the Association of Costs Lawyers.

Legal aid has always been a resource that is rationed. However when the coalition government brought in the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act in 2013 there was an enormous reduction in the availability of legal aid because a large number of cases fell outside scope.

On top of this a new means test was introduced resulting in some of the poorest in society being denied legal aid. These changes have had a devastating impact on access to justice in England and Wales for a huge number of people, many of whom were already living on the fringes of society and unable to access an ever shrinking pool of help and support as other Government cuts have been made under the banner of austerity.

The result has been a significant in advice, help and support with a 50% reduction in successful applications for legal aid to represent people in court, a rise in domestic abuse, an increase in homelessness and the further

fragmentation of family life and erosion of the rights of the individual.

The legal aid which remains was supposed to be targeted at those most in need and administered fairly. It is neither targeted nor fairly administered. The safety net the public was promised (the Exceptional Case Funding Scheme) has proved to be inadequate, public information about the scheme has been absent or misleading and coincidental regulatory changes have meant extra hurdles for people in need of justice to overcome even where they are entitled to legal aid.

The practical mechanism for making an application has been fraught with its own complications as the LAA has rolled out a digital application portal (CCMS), at best in need of significant development and at worst unfit for purpose, costing the taxpayer and those working in delivering legal aid vast sums.

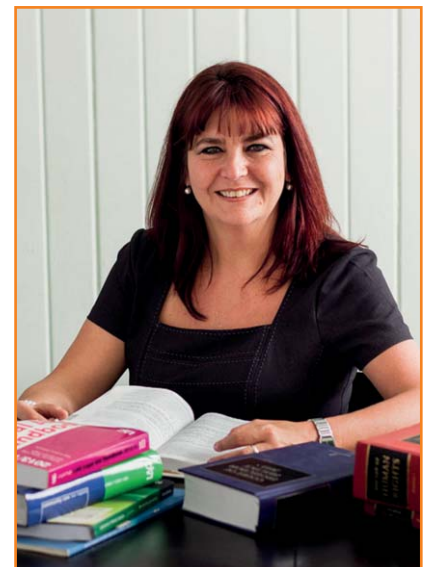
We have seen more and more skilled lawyers unable to continue to deliver legal aid services because of these hurdles. Advice centres and Law Centres have closed and yet the demand for a properly resourced and administered legal aid and justice system has never been so great.



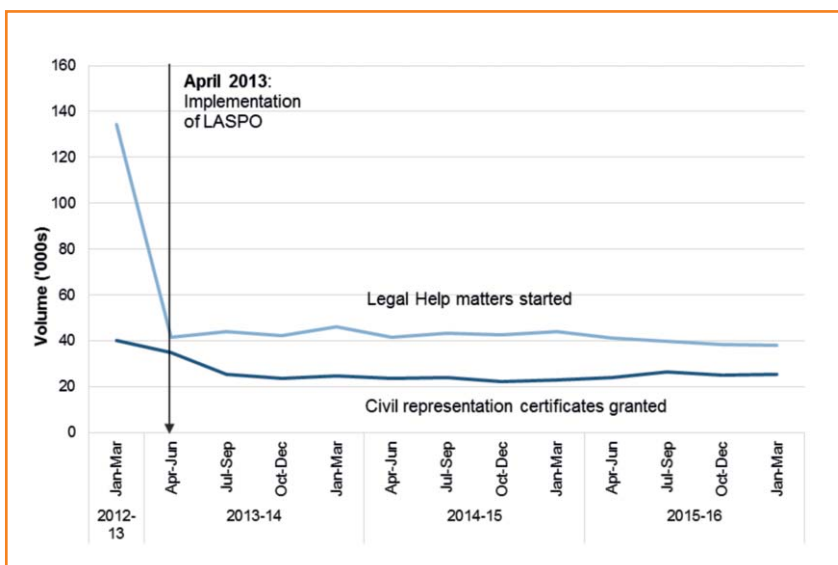
Jenny Beck of Beck Fitzgerald

On a political and a practical level we at the coal face are facing challenges from all angles and yet our clients' problems haven't gone away. Our clients are more in need of justice and protection from harm than ever before.

At LAPG we work for change. We **influence** the policy makers by lobbying for improvements to the rules and regulations, by fighting for change to remedy some of the most devastating impacts of the cuts and by tirelessly informing and advising decision makers on the likely consequences of proposed actions.



Nicola Mackintosh of Mackintosh Law, QC (Hon)



Reduction in Legal Help cases and Legal Aid Certificates following LASPO.

Reference: MOJ Legal Aid Statistics Quarterly: January to March 2016 – see MOJ website

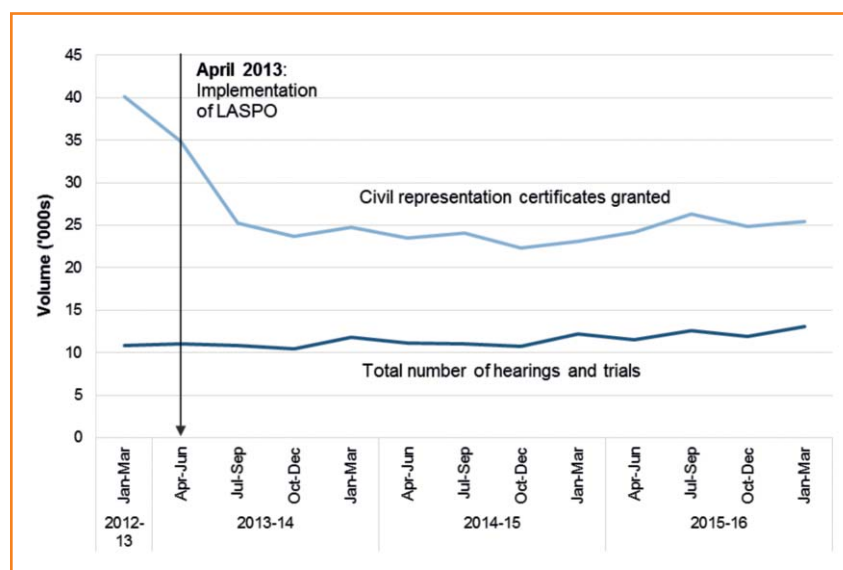
We provide **operation support** to all those on the front line by campaigning for improvements to the administration of the scheme and by helping providers to resolve their contracting and management issues. We foster a **community** of legal aid lawyers by celebrating, training and supporting current practitioners and those who aspire to work in access to justice. LAPG works hard to effect change for our clients in need, so that we have a fairer justice system for all.

Our report contains examples of the work we have done this year and our objectives for next year.

Finally, we can't do any of this without your help and support. We are proud of our membership and the work of all legal aid lawyers. We have established a Friends of LAPG network and we receive countless hours of help and support from members, partners, stakeholders and representative bodies – all of whom are seeking to ensure our clients have access to justice.

	Applications	Granted
2013-14	1,516	70
2014-15	1,172	226
2015-16	1,344	641

Exceptional Case Funding Scheme



Reduction in legal aid providers following the introduction of LASPO.

Reference: MOJ Legal Aid Statistics Quarterly: January to March 2016 – see MOJ website



Influencing



We aim to represent the interests of legal aid practitioners and clients to Government, the LAA and the wider community; we also aim to champion access to justice through Legal Aid and, in particular, to:

- ensure that no further legal aid cuts are made;
- fight to return legal aid scope and eligibility to its pre LASPO levels;
- engage with good IT solutions that genuinely assist with access to justice rather than simply cover up a cut in the provision;
- make practical suggestions for improving the legal aid scheme within the current budget.

Politics - engaging with politicians to promote access to justice

A key role for LAPG is to engage with politicians to promote access to justice on behalf of our members. LAPG, together with Young Legal Aid Lawyers, provides secretarial support to the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Legal Aid. The APPG aims to promote parliamentary and public understanding of the importance of the role of publicly funded legal services. APPG meetings are held in Parliament and are attended by parliamentarians and by interested parties, often people with a professional interest in legal aid and justice. Meetings have covered both civil and criminal legal aid topics. We are grateful to the Legal Education Foundation for supporting this work.

- For more information on the APPG see www.apg-legalaid.org

LAPG provides briefings for Parliamentary debates and encourages members to provide examples to politicians. We also encourage members to engage directly with their local MP to explain the importance of legal aid to their constituents.

Several members of the Committee (Julie Bishop, Laura Janes, Nicola Mackintosh, QC (Hon)) and our Director Carol Storer are all commissioners on the Bach Review.

Press Coverage

Committee members and our Director write for Legal Action magazine, Legal Voice and other legal magazines. We press release a number of our events e.g. the LALYs and the manifesto launch.

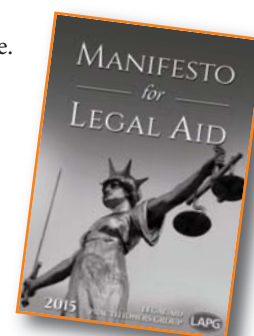


Sir Keir Starmer QC MP, Chair of APPG on Legal Aid

LAPG Manifesto

The Manifesto for Legal Aid was launched in the House of Commons on 18 March 2015 to an audience of MPs, peers, legal aid practitioners and other stakeholders. The Manifesto highlights those areas where changes to legal aid – particularly those brought in under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPOA) – have had a seriously adverse impact on those who most need legal advice and representation, such as children, disabled people and victims of domestic violence.

The Manifesto proposes a series of changes to legal aid provision and delivery which would alleviate the worst effects on the most vulnerable groups - changes which could be implemented swiftly by the Government and at little significant cost to the public purse.



Operational Support



We aim to enable legal aid practitioners to provide quality services to their clients by providing support and services to members

Updates

LAPG members receive regular updates on what is happening within the legal aid system. In surveys of our members, the information in these updates is seen as essential reading to maintain a working understanding of the legal aid scheme. We send updates out as and when they are needed – this usually works out at once a week.

Meetings

Our Director, our Operations Director and Committee members attend meetings regularly to discuss operational issues – from CCMS to high profile cases, from domestic violence evidence requirements to the number of LAA audits practices are subjected to.

Member queries

We're regularly contacted by members asking for help with a problem affecting their practice. These range from how to challenge an audit outcome or bill reduction, to HR and management issues. We have staff and Committee members with vast knowledge and experience of the legal aid scheme and practice management, so we can often provide members with the answer they need or, at the very least, a point in the right direction.

Member queries help us to understand the practical issues impacting on our members. We raise these issues, anonymously where requested, with the LAA or MOJ and provide feedback to members. If the response is of wider public interest we publicise it in an update.



Training courses

Through ongoing training, practical support and up-to-the-minute information, we continually support the delivery of high quality legal services by legal aid lawyers. Our training programme includes unique courses tailored to the needs of legal aid practitioners. We provide training on the specifics of the legal aid scheme, but also on the management and practical issues that help legal aid providers to be sustainable and successful.

Pop up briefings: a two hour seminar about the post-LASPO world, which we have delivered in 2016 in London, Manchester and Liverpool.

The LAPG Certificate in Practice Management: In 2014 LAPG entered a competition for funding run by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills – we were successful and were awarded funding to design and pilot a 60 hour course for managers and future managers. The course is a mixture of face-to-face and online working. We ran that pilot with 24 great delegates.

We learnt a lot and thankfully the delegates told us that they did too. The course has been run again this year and with great involvement. Our third course starts in November 2016.

- More information is on our website www.lapg.co.uk/courses

Training and support for NfPs: LAPG was commissioned by the Legal Education Foundation, on behalf of the Future Advice Fund group of funders, to collate and share the resources developed by Future Advice funded projects. We are running workshops for NfP advice providers, developing an online portal for accessing resources and facilitating intensive consultancy support to help organisations embed new ideas and improve their systems.

CCMS

For four years our Director has been attending meetings about CCMS, together with the Law Society and Resolution. The LAA brought in CCMS so that all civil legal aid applications and billing could be submitted online. It has proved enormously problematic for practitioners, clients and LAA staff. It is now a mandatory system despite representative bodies asking for it to remain optional. LAPG continues to put a lot of resource into working with everyone to try to improve CCMS.

Client and Cost Management System

Civil legal aid applications, amendments and billing.

[New Application](#)

You currently have:

[No Outstanding Actions \(none overdue\)](#)

[View Notifications \(2 outstanding\)](#)

Support

Case enquiries: 0300 200 2020 (Monday to Friday, 9:00 - 17:00)
Alternatively you can 'Submit Case Query' within a case.

Technical Support: 0203 334 6664 (Monday to Friday, 9:00 - 17:00)
Email: online-support@legalaid.qsl.gov.uk

Community



We aim to build a community of legal aid advice providers and to support that community through training, conferences and events.

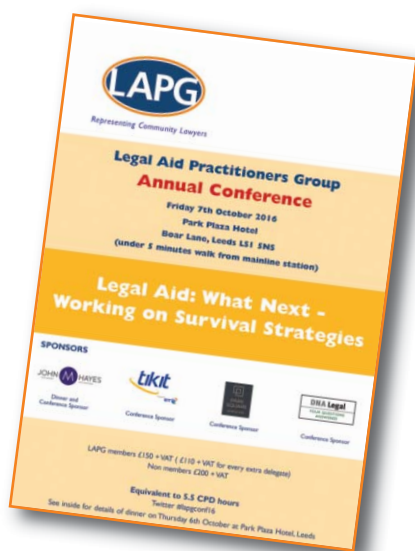
Updates to members

Along with operational and policy issues, our updates include relevant news and events for our members.

Annual Conferences and Dinners

The Annual Conference, held in conjunction with the AGM and Annual Dinner, is always a great opportunity to catch up on what is going on, to survey the sector and focus on ways forward. Practitioners get the chance to question politicians and senior officials from the MOJ and LAA. It is also an opportunity to talk with other practitioners and reflect on what others are doing with a mixture of plenaries and workshops. The Conference confers 5 hours CPD (or its equivalent).

Our conferences are packed with plenary and workshop sessions designed to assist legal aid practitioners at all levels, from newly qualified to partners/senior managers, in their planning for the future and management of their contracts.



Practitioners share hints and tips and generally network. Lawyers can get their fix of black letter law as well. People who can't make it are able to follow on Twitter – we've even started trending!

The LAPG Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year (LALYS) now in its 14th year

The LALYS celebrate the work of grassroots lawyers and have grown from a marquee and fifty people to venues holding over 400 people. They are held annually, with this year's awards held in London with Sky News' Anna Jones as the compere and recipients received by Baroness Doreen Lawrence. In previous years the presenters were Cherie Booth QC, Michael Mansfield QC and Lord Justice Andrew McFarlane QC.

The 2016 winners were:

1. *Legal Aid Newcomer* - Darragh Mackin, KRW Law
2. *Social & Welfare Lawyer* - Lou Crisfield, Miles & Partners
3. *Family Legal Aid Lawyer* - Baljit Bains, Wilsons Solicitors
4. *Family Mediator* - Tracy Winstanley, Heaney Watson
5. *Legal Aid Barrister* - Elizabeth Callaghan, Dere Street Barristers
6. *Mental Health Lawyer* - Philippa Curran, Odonnells Solicitors
7. *Children's Rights* - Clare Jennings, Matthew Gold & Company
8. *Public Law Lawyer* - Simon Creighton, Bhatt Murphy



LALYS Awards 2016

9. *Criminal Defence Lawyer* - Simon Natas, Irvine Thanvi Natas Solicitors
10. *Legal Aid Firm/Not-for-profit Agency* - Anti Trafficking & Labour Exploitation Unit
11. *Access to Justice through IT* - Crowdjustice
12. *Outstanding Achievement* - Hillsborough Lawyers

Working with the next generation of legal aid lawyers

We work closely with Young Legal Aid Lawyers (YLAL) on operational issues but also because we share their concerns about access to the profession and social mobility. Each year YLAL speak at our conference to encourage students into the legal aid sector. We work with universities and colleges to provide subsidised conference places for their students. We also attend law fairs and university open days to help students get a better understanding of the legal aid world.



Annual conference 2015

Finances and Membership

A statement of financial activities

	2015	£	2014	£
FIXED ASSETS	386		577	
Tangible assets				
CURRENT ASSETS				
Debtors	35,441		32,762	
Cash at bank and in hand	61,699		36,127	
	<u>97,140</u>		<u>68,889</u>	
CREDITORS: amounts falling due within 1 year	<u>20,577</u>		<u>30,143</u>	
NET CURRENT ASSETS	76,563		38,746	
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES	76,949		39,323	
CAPITAL AND RESERVES				
Profit and loss account		<u>76,949</u>		<u>39,323</u>

Income	£	Expenses	£
Membership income	56,810	Salaries and related costs	69,856
Conference tickets and sponsorship	31,739	Governance	3,990
LALY sponsorship	57,729	Conference overheads	13,364
Grant income	114,101	LALY overheads	37,982
Miscellaneous income	1,272	CPM pilot costs	85,780
		Training expenses	4,296
		Office and general running costs	8,776
Total	261,651	Total	224,044

Many thanks to the **UK Commission for Employment and Skills** for supporting the Certificate in Practice Management.



Many thanks also to the **Legal Education Foundation** for supporting the All Party Parliamentary Group on Legal Aid and for their ongoing support of our training activities.

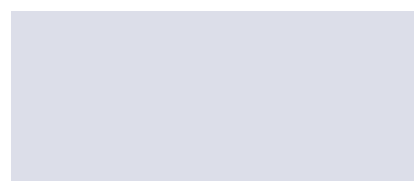


Thank you to LAPG members

LAPG's members are the backbone of the organisation. Our membership covers all areas of legal aid and is spread across England and Wales.

Members represent large firms, small to medium firms, niche practices and not for profits such as law centres and other independent advice agencies.

Members provide support and evidence for campaigning initiatives, help to lobby politicians and policy makers and provide us with the information we need to campaign on their behalf.



LAPG welcomes the new Operations Director

This year the LAPG Committee decided to create a new post to build on our training initiatives and provide the Director with support on operational issues. In March 2016 the Operations Director, Chris Minnoch, joined LAPG. Chris has experience of managing a not for profit legal aid provider, fundraising, developing networks of advice organisations and working with local government to deliver targeted advice services.



Chris Minnoch

Director's Report

LAPG was established 35 years ago by a group of legal aid lawyers who recognised the need for a body to represent the interests of those working within the system and the clients they serve. Formally constituted in 1983, LAPG is now a membership body representing firms and not-for-profit organisations across England and Wales as well as individual barrister members and members of the Association of Costs Lawyers who do legal aid work.

LAPG insists on the United Kingdom providing a legal aid system that protects all the vulnerable in society. We will positively fight any unjust Government decisions or policies wherever that protection is threatened.

As an organisation, LAPG is well known for contributing to and influencing both operational and policy matters. We are committed to access to justice and to ensuring that the legal aid scheme is accessible to as many people as possible. We also believe that the scheme itself needs to be clear and fit for purpose.

We have set out the headlines of what we do throughout this report. Here are some of the organisation's achievements:

- We sent out almost one update a week to members, which may stress an important deadline or cover a range of issues from CCMS to a consultation deadline, from news about LAPG events to reports on engaging with government about domestic abuse evidence changes.
- We responded to member queries – about CCMS, high profile cases, payment problems, contract enquiries and many more.
- We have carried out significant work on CCMS with our members and fed back to the LAA.
- We delivered training on the post-LASPO world, our annual

conference and dinner and re-launched the Friends of LAPG.

- We met regularly with the MOJ and LAA, seeking to improve the scheme for clients and practitioners
- We ran the APPG on Legal Aid along with YLAL – raising awareness in parliament with meetings focussing on civil and criminal legal aid issues
- We celebrated the work of legal aid lawyers at the LALYs, July 2016 in London
- We worked closely with Resolution, the Law Society, HLPAs and others to influence LAA/MOJ policy and practice. I am a member of the Law Society's Access to Justice Committee and am on the board of Legal Action Group. I have spoken at a number of events about legal aid issues and I am a Commissioner for the Bach Commission reviewing the legal aid system.

What next for LAPG? We will continue to develop our three primary areas of work: influencing, operational support and building a community of legal aid lawyers.

Looking ahead, LAPG will:

- Work with practitioners, representative bodies and the LAA to improve CCMS
- Domestic abuse evidence requirements continue to be a focus
- Scrutinise and help members navigate the 2018 civil tender round
- Continue to work with other representative bodies on civil and criminal legal aid issues
- Continue to try to improve the system – particularly the risk carried by practitioners and the bureaucratic burdens



Carol Storer

- Continue to deliver high quality training and support to members, and develop resources for NfP advice agencies
- Expand the APPG – reach out to caseworkers and those at the coal face in MP's surgeries and local authority teams to increase their understanding of the legal aid scheme

It has become increasingly difficult for many people to obtain advice and representation. We shall continue to take that as our focus and to support the many dedicated practitioners who strive to deliver a quality service that is frequently poorly paid and is made more difficult by the amount of unpaid work involved.

We thank all our members and our funders, our Committee in particular and invite those who are not members to join us to support what we do.

Supporting LAPG

Become a Member of LAPG

Membership is crucial to LAPG. While we represent the interests of all legal aid lawyers and fight to improve the system, it is our membership that gives us a voice and allows us to work with colleagues and policy-makers to effect change.

Annual membership for firms starts at as little as £195.00. Membership can also be negotiated via associations and umbrella bodies. Individuals such as barristers pay £100 and pupils and students receive reduced rates.

All members receive regular email updates and access to LAPG's experienced staff and Committee members to assist with operational issues. Members receive discounted access to events and training courses.

Become a Friend of LAPG

Friends of LAPG was set up to enable us to engage with the wider legal community. We wish to widen our influence from our membership to those who support our aims and access to justice. We aim to keep our Friends up to date on what is going on in the legal aid world, with our campaigns and our parliamentary activity.

If you have an interest in access to justice, and you're not currently working in legal aid, speak to us about becoming a *Friend of LAPG*. This requires no financial contribution, just support for our work.



Become a member of LAPG's Committee

LAPG is supported by a Committee of experienced and knowledgeable practitioners and practice managers who volunteer their time. The Committee represents all areas of law covered by legal aid and members come from small, medium and large firms and not-for-profits from across the country. Committee members have a breadth of expertise and are true coal face practitioners.

The Committee provides governance and supports LAPG's staff members. Committee members assist with enquiries from member organisations and are actively involved in campaigning and provide practical support for our events.

Attend our events

We run 'pop-up' seminars around the country to keep practitioners up to date on the latest legal aid news. We hold an annual conference and dinner and the Legal Aid Lawyers of the Year awards. Join us for these events to help us build a community of practitioners all united by the common belief in the fundamental importance of an accessible justice system. Meeting and working with practitioners at the coal face also helps us to understand the day-to-day issues affecting those trying to deliver legal aid services.



LLST Sponsored walk 2014



Become a Volunteer

We're always open to suggestions on how those with an interest in our work can assist on a voluntary basis. Are you interested in research? Can you provide technical expertise? Can you help us reach out to our members? If you want to help please get in touch with us.

- If you're interested in becoming involved with us or supporting our work please get in touch: **office@lapg.co.uk**



Lord Bach

Thank you

LAPG Committee members:

Jenny Beck, *Co-Chair*, Nicola Mackintosh, QC (Hons), *Co-Chair*, Phil Walsh, *Vice Chair*, Jo Hickman, *Treasurer*, Julie Bishop, Matthew Howgate, Laura Janes, Helen Johnson, Jawaid Luqmani, William Montague, Lisa Phillips, Kirsten Powrie, Lucy Verity, Beverley Watkins *and Young Legal Aid Lawyer reps* Heather Thomas, Rachel Francis *and* Oliver Carter

Recently stood down from the Committee

- Melissa Butler, formerly Steel and Shamash
- David Emmerson OBE of Anthony Gold Solicitors, former Chair
- Wendy Hewstone of Access Law, former Secretary
- Lawrence Lupin, Lawrence Lupin Solicitors

Funders

- Baring Foundation,
- Legal Education Foundation
- Future Advice Fund

Special thanks to: Matthew Smerdon, Alan Humphreys, Jill Gale, Rachel Billet

Former staff

Project workers for the APPG on Legal Aid: Ann Lewis and Eleanor Sanders. *And some great temporary admin staff including:* Sean Moran, Megan Thomas and Joe Fitzsimmonds



John M Hayes and Elspeth Thompson

For proof reading the Manifesto

Patricia Verity

Trainers

Vicky Ling, Matt Howgate, Andrew Otterburn, Jo Edwards, Jacqui Scott, David Gilmore, Anthony Edwards *and* Dr Paul Davies from the LAA, *and the team at* CrowdJustice

LALY founder/co-organiser and incisive freelance journalist

Fiona Bawdon

All the wonderful sponsors of the LALYs and the conference

Accesspoint, The Bar Council, Bidwell Henderson, CILEx, DG Legal, DNA Legal, Irwin Mitchell, John M Hayes, The Law Society, Legal Action Group, the Legal Education Foundation, Matrix Chambers, Park Square Resolution Barristers, tikit, TV Edwards *and* friends of LALY16

LALY Judges

They looked through almost 900 pages of nominations

Noel Arnold, Fiona Bawdon, Jenny Beck, Rob Brown, Richard Charlton, S Chelvan, Sir Keir Starmer QC MP, Marcia Willis-Stewart *and for the IT award:* Matthew Ryder QC *and* Jimmy Vestbirk



LAPG Conference 2015 – Plenary session

Great organisations...

... Who give us so much support in so many ways... Garden Court Chambers, Legal Action Group, London Legal Support Trust

Hosts of seminars and meetings

Bindmans, Clifford Chance, Garden Court, Herbert Smith Freehills, Jackson Canter *and* Shelter

Volunteers for the LALYS

Cal Bawdon, Saul Bawdon, Sophie Spector, Luke Annis, James Adshead, John Briant, Ellen Wright, Mahima Gupta, Josie Hicklin, Nishmita Bhamra, Tim Potter *and* Lucy Logan-Green

Providers of office space

(emergency and planned)

LASA, Advice UK, Steel and Shamash *and* Deighton Pierce Glynn

For encyclopaedic knowledge

Paul Seddon *at the Association of Costs Lawyers for his encyclopaedic knowledge of costs*, Richard Miller *of The Law Society for his encyclopaedic knowledge of all things legal aid*, Matt Howgate *and* Vicky Ling

And a thank you to the helpful staff ...

... at the LAA for attending events, providing data and answering queries, especially the fastest responder to emails John Sirodcar.

Technical Support

- Accesspoint
- Danny Lang
- James Capper
- Inzar Haq
- DG Legal

Photography throughout this publication: LALY photographer, Robert Aberman



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