



Legal Aid
Agency

Business Plan 2014/15

Delivering legal aid efficiently and effectively as part of the justice system

Contents

Introduction by the Legal Aid Minister, Shailesh Vara MP	1
Foreword by the LAA Chief Executive, Matthew Coats	2
The Ministry of Justice’s Strategy for Reform	4
Section 1: The Legal Aid Agency (LAA): Who We Are	
This section covers the organisation that we have built and includes reflections from our staff on our first year as an Executive Agency.	
1.1 Our purpose, our values & our culture	7
1.2 Our organisation, our people & our providers	10
1.3 Our first year as an Executive Agency	15
1.4 Our strategic objectives	21
Section 2: The Legal Aid Agency: Business Priorities	
This section focuses on our priorities for the year ahead, our future and our focus on continuing to make the LAA a better place to work.	
2.1 Our goals for the year ahead	23
2.2 Making the LAA a better place to work	29
2.3 Our plans for the future	33
2.4 Living within our means & managing our risks	36
Appendix:	
A Our Transparency Arrangements	39
B Our Governance	40
C Our Arrangements in Wales	42

Introduction by the Legal Aid Minister, Shailesh Vara MP



I am pleased to introduce the 2014/15 Business Plan for the Legal Aid Agency (LAA). The creation of the LAA last year was a major milestone toward the Government’s ambition of reforming and improving a fundamental part of our legal system. This plan sets out how the Agency will continue to build on this progress over the next twelve months.

Legal aid is an integral part of our justice system, providing support to the most vulnerable people in society. It has, therefore, never been more important to ensure that legal aid remains sustainable and concentrated on cases where it is needed most.

In doing this we must be mindful that the cost of our legal aid system has more than doubled in real terms in the last thirty years. Additionally, the fiscal position of the UK Government has meant that each Department has a part to play in identifying savings to live within our means. It is because of these reasons that we have implemented reforms, through both the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders

(LASPO) Act 2012 and the Transforming Legal Aid programme, the latter of which is expected to save an additional £215m by 2018/19. In making these reductions I am looking to ensure the long-term sustainability of the legal profession in the difficult environment that it faces.

Despite a difficult financial climate, I am delighted to see the Agency driving forward improvements in its operations to generate greater efficiencies and recognising in these times of difficult public finances that it too has a role to play in finding savings. The LAA has also developed an engaged and motivated workforce and enabled digital working to modernise the way we work with our partners.

The Agency has also implemented changes to its operations in line with the reforms in the LASPO Act and, working with the Ministry, has engaged constructively and consistently with the legal profession. I will work with the Agency and the Secretary of State for Justice to ensure that we continue improving the administration of legal aid in England and Wales to provide a better service for everyone involved in the legal aid system.

I remain committed to ensuring that the Government and the legal profession work together to ensure we have a legal aid system that protects those who need it most whilst commanding the confidence of the taxpayers who fund it.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shailesh Vara". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a horizontal line.

Foreword by the LAA Chief Executive, Matthew Coats



As the LAA begins its second year I am delighted to introduce our plans for the next twelve months. Looking back, I am confident that we have started as we mean to go on. Our first year as an Agency has been one of transformation, while achieving sustained strong performance. Our staff have worked hard with providers and our partners in the justice system to reduce our processing times, make efficiencies, and continue the highest standards of stewardship of public funds. None of this has been easy but together we have delivered on our commitments.

In the past twelve months we have embedded a new governance structure, integrated our staff into the Civil Service, entered the final phases of implementing a digital solution to our civil casework, embedded changes resulting from the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act 2012, and worked with colleagues in the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) to consider operational arrangements for the Legal Aid Transformation proposals. At the

same time we have worked hard to ensure our core business – administering legal aid – has been done efficiently and effectively. Looking back, we can see that we have laid the foundations of a successful organisation. Our core services are performing well and are consistently delivering above target levels for the processing of applications and bills, and for the first time since 2007/08 our accounts for 2012/13 were laid before Parliament on time with an unqualified audit opinion from the National Audit Office (NAO). Considerable effort was undertaken across the organisation to reach this goal and it is a key milestone in the transformation of our financial management capability.

It is also a great credit to our staff that we have delivered a consistently high quality service to providers during this period of change and transition. This was exemplified by their response to the surge in applications we received in the last days before the LASPO Act 2012 changes came in to force in April 2013. Across the Agency staff pulled together to enable us to continue to meet our service standards. For me this episode demonstrated two things; that our staff are the driving force for the achievements of LAA, and that local initiatives are as important as large scale change in helping us deliver the further savings that are now required.

It is because of this that we have focused in this plan on making the LAA an even better place to work. This will include a wide range of initiatives, from supporting

our staff to make the best use of their five days training to improving the physical environment they work in.

In the coming year the LAA will continue to work towards the MoJ objective of “a more effective, less costly, and more responsive justice system for the public”. We will continue to implement our three key business priorities and will be moving the majority of our services online through the delivery of our change programmes. We will build on the success of 2013/14 and continue to improve the service we provide.

We will only be able to do this in partnership with legal aid providers. We may not always be able to agree on everything but I do believe that it is only through working together that we will be able to develop the high quality and cost efficient legal aid service that the taxpayer deserves. As part of this we will be seeking provider input on the range of operational changes which will take many of their interactions with us online and we will work with them to make the transition as smooth as possible.

I am proud of everything we have achieved so far. 2014/15 will be a demanding year but I am confident that if our staff, our providers, and our MoJ partners work together we will be able to repeat and build on the success of the last year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matt', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The Ministry of Justice’s Strategy for Reform

As an Agency of the MoJ the LAA’s strategic direction is defined by the Ministry’s Strategic vision for reform, which is to create a more effective, less costly and more responsive justice system for the public.

To deliver this, the MoJ is making changes to the things that it does and the way that it does them. The current phase of its reform programme is focused around five priorities:

Transforming rehabilitation	Driving down re-offending rates and improving value for the taxpayer by opening up rehabilitation services for offenders to a more diverse market of providers; extending our rehabilitative approach to offenders sentenced for up to 12 months; and introducing payment by results.
More effective and cost efficient custodial system	Reforming the prison system to drive down cost across the estate and make every penny of public money count. Ensuring that the sentencing framework operates as efficiently and effectively as possible, to deliver appropriate punishment of offenders, without compromising on public safety.
Transforming youth custody	Reforming youth custody to create a more efficient system which ensures that young people are appropriately punished, while receiving the support and education required to turn them away from a life of crime.
Transforming courts, tribunals and the criminal justice system	Continuing to improve the way our courts are run, while ensuring that cases are managed as well as they can be, and that victims are put first in the system.
Transforming legal aid	Reforming the legal aid system to reduce the cost to the taxpayer and ensure that the system commands the confidence of the public.

Transforming legal aid and the LAA's contribution to this vision

The ongoing Legal Aid Transformation (LAT) programme continues to play a major part in the MoJ reform agenda. LAT will deliver a reformed legal aid system which costs the taxpayer less and commands the confidence of the public. Working with MoJ policy colleagues we have already begun to deliver reforms to criminal and civil legal aid services which are expected to deliver around an additional £215m of savings by 2018/19. We have implemented the first two tranches of these reforms including changes to civil and family legal aid fees, introducing a Crown Court eligibility threshold to remove legal aid for the wealthiest defendants, and restricting legal aid for prison law.

On 27 February 2014, the Government announced its decisions on the future procurement of criminal legal aid services and on the 27th March announced an agreement to provide extra support for criminal legal aid lawyers as they prepare for legal aid savings and market restructuring. We are therefore now moving forward with the implementation of this third tranche of the transformation programme. In doing so, we will ensure providers are supported at each stage of implementation with the appropriate communications and training.

Even after delivering these major reforms, there is more still to do in achieving efficiencies in our administration and working collaboratively with the MoJ to deliver its strategic vision. This will help to ensure that legal aid, and the justice system more widely, is more effective, less costly, and more responsive to the public. Our priorities are set out on pages 23 and 24 of this Business Plan.

Section 1: The Legal Aid Agency (LAA): Who We Are

This section covers the organisation that we have built and includes reflections from our staff on our first year as an Executive Agency.

1.1 Our purpose, our values & our culture

Our purpose: Delivering legal aid efficiently and effectively as part of the justice system.

The LAA works in partnership with legal providers and the wider MoJ to deliver this purpose. Our work is essential to the fair, efficient and effective operation of the civil, family and criminal justice systems. This purpose guides our planning and decision making and we therefore ensure that the organisation continues to develop in a way which enhances our ability to deliver this primary function. The engagement and commitment of our staff is crucial to the LAA's ability to achieve our purpose. This is reflected in our plans to make the LAA a better place to work in 2014/15, as set out on pages 29 and 30. Our purpose is underpinned by three strategic objectives linked to our business priorities. These objectives are:

- **Strategic Objective 1:** Improve casework to reduce cost, enhance control and give better customer service
- **Strategic Objective 2:** Improve organisational capability to meet the challenges ahead, including developing and engaging our people
- **Strategic Objective 3:** Build and maintain strong partnerships to secure quality provision and contribute fully to wider justice and Government aims.

Further detail on our strategic objectives can be found on page 21.

Our values: As civil servants we demonstrate the values of the Civil Service Code. These are:

Integrity:

putting the obligations of public service above your own personal interests

Honesty:

being truthful and open

Objectivity:

basing your advice and decisions on rigorous analysis of the evidence

Impartiality:

acting solely according to the merits of the case and serving governments of different political persuasions equally well

Our culture: Our culture defines the way we think and act as an organisation; the way we behave towards each other and our partners; and the way we work. We want a culture in which we:

Take pride in good decision making and continue to achieve excellent results

Adopt a positive and outward looking approach

Value common purpose, team work and collaboration

Embrace diversity and ensure fairness in our workplace

Our independence: Director for Legal Aid Casework

The Director of Legal Aid Casework is a role created by the LASPO Act 2012 focused on decision making on individual legal aid applications. The Director has sole responsibility for individual cases which ensures that decision making in this area is independent from Government.

The Director is supported by the LAA Board in ensuring that robust practices are in place to maintain the independence of the decision making process of granting legal aid. The LAA’s Chief Executive, Matthew Coats, has undertaken this role since implementation on 1 April. He reports to Parliament annually on how he has executed this duty (see appendix A – Our Transparency Arrangements).

Our role in delivering Civil Service Reform

Alongside the MoJ’s vision the LAA also has a role to play in Civil Service Reform and its four key themes. Our plans for the coming year will make a significant contribution in all of these areas:

<p>More skilled</p>	<p>More digital</p>	<p>More unified, open, and accountable</p>	<p>Better Policy Making</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing our people is one of our three strategic objectives and a cornerstone of our commitment to making the LAA a better place to work • We will build capability through continued learning and development, increasing our commercial awareness and continuous improvement in our activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving toward online interaction with providers and provision of services is a priority for LAA. • This includes the roll-out of the Client & Cost Management System (CCMS) which will allow civil bills and applications to be processed online and implementation of the Crime Change programme which has begun with a successful pilot of eforms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have begun to work closely with Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on counter fraud. • We will share data with Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) to validate vehicle ownership to support enforcement activity on our Crown Court Means Testing scheme. • We are committed to transparent reporting of our performance throughout the year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MoJ is responsible for legal aid policy. However, LAA will provide insight based on learning from operational delivery and service development which will be crucial for the implementation of LAT reforms.
<p>More detail on pages 29 and 30</p>	<p>More detail on page 35</p>	<p>More detail on pages 35 and 39</p>	<p>More detail on page 23</p>

1.2 Our organisation, our people & our providers

Our organisation

The LAA operates throughout England and Wales with a headquarters co-located with the MoJ in London.

We maintain a regional contract management presence in order to be physically close to our provider base and other justice system partners. This is delivered by just over 100 contract managers. Our case management function, delivered by around 850 staff, is led from three

main locations where we can deliver a cost effective, electronically enabled service to our providers: South Tyneside for civil and family, Nottingham for crime, and London for exceptional and high cost cases. Case management and other functions are also undertaken in Birmingham, Brighton, Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, Chester, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Reading. The Public Defender Service (PDS) provides services directly to the public with a capacity to deliver anywhere in England and Wales. Our organisational structure and associated core activities are:



Our Shared Services

As a part of the wider MoJ group we make use of the Ministry's central HR, legal, shared services, digital communications, press office, procurement and estates service functions. Together these provide the full range of services which support the Agency and its staff. We have worked collaboratively over the last year to develop the services that we are receiving in all of these areas so that they match the demands of the business. By partnering with the MoJ to provide these central functions we have cut costs and have ensured that the LAA receives high quality support across the board.

Our People

Since the Agency was first established in April 2013 we have built on extensive efforts to ensure that our staff are well informed, well trained, and engaged with their work. We will continue this focus in 2014/15, as set out in our plans to continue to make the LAA a better place to work on pages 29 and 30. In the last twelve months our work in this area has been focused on three themes: acting on the results of our national staff engagement survey; developing our talent; and ensuring that the Agency has an inclusive culture and a representative workforce:

Engagement: In 2013/14 we developed an extensive national action plan, created in partnership with our staff, in response to feedback from the national staff survey. Actions already delivered include

presenting and publicising a common purpose for the organisation, promoting good practice in staff performance management, the introduction of Team Information Boards (TIB) with regular staff briefings, and publicising the range of development opportunities open to civil servants.

The national plan is supported by local action plans which tackle local issues and by the sustained visibility and accessibility of our leadership team to all staff through: biannual Senior Leadership Team visits to all regional offices; regular weekly communications to all staff from the Chief Executive inviting feedback on essential matters; biannual manager meetings; and intranet webchats on various work programmes.

In 2013 we also acknowledged and celebrated the successes of teams and individuals in the LAA through our National Employee Awards ceremony. Awards were given in eight categories, and winners included the team that had worked to deal with the surge in applications prior to the implementation of the LASPO Act 2012 and the team that worked to reduce the error rate which contributed to our accounts being unqualified for 12/13. Individuals were awarded for their work on diversity, being an inspirational leader and for work undertaken not only within the LAA but also within the community.

In 2013 we saw a three percentage point increase in our staff engagement score to 60% which was two percentage points above the civil service average (58%) and moved us to being ranked 33rd out of 98 civil service organisations (up from 50th in 2012). There remains more improvements to make but we have laid a solid foundation for making the LAA an even better place to work in 2014/15.

Talent: Our experience over the last 12 months has continued to demonstrate the fundamental role our staff play in achieving our purpose, and the MoJ's Capability Plan ensures that we have the organisational capability to meet the challenges ahead. We will continue to ensure that our people are equipped with the right knowledge, support and development to deliver the LAA's purpose and objectives.

Our talent management activities enable the LAA to identify and develop staff who have the potential to progress to more senior levels while ensuring that all staff are given opportunities to use their talents to contribute to the LAA's objectives. In 2013/14 we ran a talent review of staff at bands A and B which helped us assess the organisation's capability and our leadership development needs.

This year also saw us fully embed the use of Civil Service Learning as an online learning and development tool for all LAA staff, and the range of online development opportunities it offers were publicised widely. Staff are encouraged to make use of the five learning days they receive each year and we will continue to promote the diverse ways in which these can be used {case study #1}.

Case Study #1: Learning and Development Co-ordinators

Two members of the Central Commissioning Team act as Learning and Development (L&D) co-ordinators to focus on the team's L&D. During 13/14, the co-ordinators conducted a learning needs analysis which identified individual development needs including development of skills linked to the Civil Service Capabilities Plan. The results of the analysis were used to create individual learning action plans and these in turn were used to inform conversations with line managers as part of the Performance Management Appraisal process. The results of the analysis also fed into a wider team L&D plan to keep a focus on L&D all year round.

Equality & Diversity: The LAA values an inclusive culture. We aim to attract and retain a representative workforce that understand the needs of the diverse population we serve and are able to use that knowledge to improve how we deliver legal aid. We have appointed a diversity champion within our Executive Team who supports and champions the diversity priorities of the LAA.

In 2013/14 we identified a set of diversity priorities for the LAA. These remain relevant to our work in 2014/15. We will a) ensure that leadership promotes equality, diversity and inclusion; b) improve support for staff with a disability; c) build an inclusive culture towards different working patterns; d) support the diverse representation of staff at senior grades; and e) improve the capability of staff to take account of the equality duty to enable us to efficiently commission and administer legal aid.

Our key activities include:

- Establishing local dis-Ability Champions to provide a local point of contact for disability matters and support staff to share their knowledge of disability with colleagues; for example in Nottingham the dis-Ability champions have revised the induction process to ensure this includes discussions on ability and reasonable adjustments.
- Supporting the MoJ pledge to promote the ‘Time to Change’ campaign, which challenges mental health stigma in the workplace {case study #2}.
- Promoting the MoJ Reasonable Adjustment Support Service.
- Promoting best practice in flexible working and tackling barriers to flexible working across LAA & MoJ.
- Ensuring all staff have undertaken the requirement to complete Equality and Diversity training and provide opportunities for them to continue to develop their knowledge of applying the public sector equality duty.
- Target learning and development opportunities to underrepresented groups.

We report on specific actions under the MoJ Equality Objective framework, details of which are available on the Justice website at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ministry-of-justice-equality-objectives-2012-2016>

Case Study #2: Raising awareness on Mental Health

Engagement and dis-Ability champions across the LAA ran events for colleagues to promote 'Time to Change', the national campaign to de-stigmatise mental health issues which MoJ became signatories to in April 2013. Staff received training and talks from MIND, took part in myth vs. fact quizzes, shared personal experiences and were given information on available guidance, resources and support networks. The event helped to de-stigmatise mental health issues within the LAA.

2 million acts of legal assistance a year including through our Community Legal Advice telephone service.

We are continuing to improve our service to providers, for example by:

1. Reducing further the turnaround times for decisions on applications and payment of bills.
2. Continuing to improve contract management support to providers. In 2013/14 this helped to reduce reject rates on bills which in turn helped providers cashflow as more bills were processed following their first submission.
3. Moving to online submission of applications and bills, accompanied by training, to further improve efficiency.

The LAA also works closely with other key stakeholders in the wider justice system. Examples include MoJ colleagues, the Law Society and the Bar Council, both the Family and Criminal Justice Boards, the Solicitors Regulation Authority, Insolvency Service, and HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS).

Our Partners and Providers

We work with a wide range of providers of legal services. These include solicitors, barristers, mediators, and legal advice services. Many of our legal aid providers are small and medium enterprises and include self-employed individuals, large firms of solicitors, not for profit organisations, and alternative business structures.

Our providers offer a variety of legal services including telephone advice, representation and mediation.

During 2013/14, we have worked in partnership with our providers to implement the legal aid reforms while they have continued to deliver legal aid to the public. Together, we deliver around

1.3 Our first year as an Executive Agency

The LAA's first year has been marked by strong performance in operations and financial management, all of which has been delivered alongside a number of major change programmes and in partnership with our providers and our partners in the wider justice system.

Delivering our Change Programmes

The transition to an Executive Agency: Since its inception on 1 April 2013 the Agency has completed its transition from a Non-Departmental Public Body to an Executive Agency of the MoJ. This transition was delivered on time, within budget, and without disruption to our core activities. This included:

Estates Consolidation

A major programme of building moves, including the closure of our large London Exchange Tower offices. This completed a consolidation process which delivered £1.5m savings in our estates portfolio.

Integration into the Civil Service

The integration of all our staff into the MoJ and the wider Civil Service. This opened up a wide range of new development opportunities, including Civil Service Learning. This also brought LAA staff within the Civil Service's talent management programme.

Sharing Services

The transition to MoJ corporate services, including HR, legal, and shared services. This brought further efficiency savings and ensured that the LAA has access to quality services.

The implementation of the Legal Aid Reform (LAR) programme:

In 2013/14 we began delivering legal aid under the new LASPO Act 2012 which was introduced on 1 April 2013. This represented a wide-ranging programme of reform to the scope of legal aid and clients' eligibility. This included implementation of Crown Court Means Testing (CCMT) regulation changes which made further refinements to contributions towards legal costs and enhanced our enforcement powers to improve the collection of outstanding liabilities.

The implementation of Legal Aid Transformation (LAT) Reforms:

In April 2013 the Secretary of State for Justice launched the Transforming Legal Aid consultation on further legal aid reform designed to increase public confidence in legal aid and reduce the bill to taxpayers for funding the legal aid system. As the delivery agency for legal aid the LAA is charged with the task of implementing the LAT proposals, working in collaboration with the legal profession to do this as effectively as possible. The first two tranches of reforms were delivered successfully in partnership with MoJ policy and legal colleagues in December 2013 and January 2014. These included changes to civil and family legal aid fees; introducing a Crown Court eligibility threshold to remove legal aid for the wealthiest defendants; and restricting legal aid for prison law.

Piloting the Integrated Delivery Programme (IDP):

The Integrated Delivery Programme (IDP) is responsible for developing and rolling out the Client and Cost Management System (CCMS) which will enable the LAA to grant legal aid, pay bills and recover debt electronically for civil certificated work. In the past year, during the system's pilot phase, we have made important strides towards the full roll out of CCMS with 70 providers currently using the system. Our Contract Managers have been working closely with other civil providers to help them plan for the introduction of the system.

Working together to deliver against our Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Throughout the year our performance against our KPIs has remained strong and we are on track to deliver against our targets. Of particular significance has been Case Management's sustained performance at above target levels in all areas of service delivery. Our performance against our KPIs for the year will be published in the LAA Annual Report and Accounts in the summer of 2014.

As well as sustaining performance on our processing targets, we have made further progress in reducing the level of rejected applications and bills - increasing the efficiency of our processing while also improving the experience for providers. This was achieved in partnership with our

providers who worked with LAA Contract Managers to tackle the main causes of errors {case study #3}.

Case Study #3: Reducing the level of bill rejects in the year

Case Management, Contract Management and the Planning and Performance team recognised improvements were needed to the civil and crime bill reject processes both internally and externally. Contract Managers contacted providers with the highest reject rates and worked, together with the Case Management teams, to discuss reasons for rejects in more detail and give training to providers. This was delivered through workshops, online presentation sessions and on site visits and providers were also invited to learn more about our processes and procedures. This work resulted in: changes made to the reject reasons recorded on our systems; our quality control process being improved; use of checklists for both providers and caseworkers; and an email group set up which allowed providers to challenge rejects. This has successfully led to a significant reduction in both civil and crime bill reject rates.

Financial Stewardship

Our emphasis on financial stewardship has been successful, and 2012/13 was the first year that our accounts were laid before Parliament with an unqualified regularity audit opinion since 2007/08. This was only possible through the hard work of our staff and through collaboration with our legal aid providers to reduce the errors which had contributed to our qualification in prior years {case study #4}.

In 2013/14 we have remained within both our reduced administration and Legal Aid Fund budget, through increasing the frequency of the fund forecast, improved governance around our financial planning, and by having better discussions with operational teams about how money is being spent and managed.

Case Study #4: Reducing the levels of errors

Contract Management (CM) and Operational Assurance (OA) have worked closely together to reduce our net error rate. Through undertaking core testing – a methodology used to identify errors in bills from a statistical sample of cases - OA provided detailed feedback to CM on any errors. CM used this to develop and deliver training and guidance to providers to avoid future errors, and raised individual errors with providers

to establish whether any further evidence could be made available to substantiate the claim and hence remove the error. Where no further evidence was available further reviews and audits were undertaken by OA to recoup any inappropriate claims and recover overpayments. As a result of joint working, the level of error has continued to reduce and this improvement, combined with the recoveries made, reduced the net error rate sufficiently to avoid accounts qualification and to protect the fund.

Collaborative Working

Working in partnership, both internally and externally, has been one of the biggest contributing factors to achieving our strategic objectives. Embedding a sense of common purpose, we have launched and implemented a refreshed counter fraud strategy, strengthened relationships with partners across the justice system and made improvements to consistency in our processing of applications and bills {case study #5}. Collaborative working will remain a key theme throughout the next year, in particular as we look to contribute to wider justice system aims through working with other Government departments.

Case Study #5: Working in partnership

Following the Scott Baker review of the UK extradition arrangements and judicial concerns regarding the impact of delays in legal aid means testing on the timeliness of execution of warrants in extradition cases, the National Courts Team (NCT) worked with the HMCTS Legal Aid team, the Duty Solicitor, Contract Management and Service Development teams to gather and analyse data on the drivers for delays. One of the outcomes from this analysis was the consultation and subsequent implementation of a new voluntary rota for duty solicitors with experience of extradition law. This, alongside improvements in processing consistency and a reduction in rejects and rework, resulted in an improvement in the speed of decisions which has remained consistently high since August 2013.

Continuous Improvement

In July 2012 the MoJ produced a Continuous Improvement (CI) strategy; a high level plan covering the work required to embed CI principles by the end of 2015. Working with the central MoJ CI team we have recently completed CI academies which trained a number of staff, in six of our regional offices and the Public Defender Service, as CI practitioners. A further CI academy began in February

2014 and this will ensure there are CI Practitioners in each of our operational processing sites. This will provide teams with the skills and tools to make and lead on improvements, which, in turn, will improve our level of service to our clients, suppliers and other areas of the Agency {case study #6}.

Case Study #6: Impact of CI on our processes

Staff in the civil telephone teams have been working hard to improve performance. By January 2014 (traditionally the busiest time of the year for calls following the Christmas break) the average call waiting time had reduced significantly to one minute and 49 seconds. This was achieved by reprioritising resource and introducing process improvements identified through CI activity including creation of a new database and management information tool to help reduce waste and double handling; regular feedback to wider LAA colleagues and senior management on the reasons for calls so issues could be resolved downstream to reduce future call volumes; and development of a call back system where providers can request a call back at a time convenient for them.

What makes our people proud

During our February and March 2014 Senior Leadership Group visits we asked our staff for their reflections on our first year as an Executive Agency and what made them proud during 2013/14. A selection of their comments can be found below:

My team – the way we work together and with others in the LAA & externally.

Keeping accounts out of qualification after striving so hard to achieve it.

Being nominated for the Innovation award.

Achieving and excelling on targets.

Collaborative working with IDP & contract management.

Helping providers to interpret the new LASPO Act guidance and regulations.

Engaging directly with 400 staff about flexible working and disability awareness.

Transition from Legal Services Commission to LAA/Moj.

Contributing to promoting mental health & well being awareness in my section.

Positive feedback from providers for quality of communications.

2013 staff Survey – increased staff engagement.

1.4 Our strategic objectives

We will continue to implement the business priorities we established last year through 2014/15. This is so that we can build on the success of 2013/14 and ensure consistency for staff in the second year of the Agency.

We continue to improve the organisation that we have developed so far and the service that we offer providers. Our approach is centred on three strategic objectives that underpin our purpose. These cover our business-critical areas of (i) efficient casework; (ii) strong financial control; (iii) effective commissioning and contract management; and (iv) responsible management of public money. At the same time they focus on strong working partnerships with the wider justice system and developing the organisational capability required to deliver against the challenges ahead. Pages 25 to 28 set out the core activities and commitments that underpin these strategic objectives for 2014/15.



Section 2: The Legal Aid Agency: Business Priorities

This section focuses on our priorities for the year ahead, our future and how we are focusing on continuing to make the LAA a better place to work.

2.1 Our goals for the year ahead

The LASPO Act 2012 and the Transforming Legal Aid reforms complement the wider programme of reform which is designed to move towards a simpler justice system. The strategic vision is for a justice system which is more effective, less costly and more responsive.

2014/15 will bring a number of new challenges for the LAA. The overall legal aid fund budget has reduced significantly for the year and our ongoing cost improvement work will have to ensure that we can deliver the necessary savings in the administration budget. We will also continue to assess the operational impact of the reforms on our ability to meet our performance targets and ensure our workforce remains engaged and motivated.

In 2014/15 we will deliver a number of important change programmes that will result in savings and will provide a better service to our providers. In the first few months of the year much of our focus will be on the implementation of the Transforming Legal Aid reforms. We will also be rolling out CCMS, which will place the majority of our civil legal aid processing online, and implementing the Crime Change Programme which will transfer the processing of criminal legal aid applications, currently administered by HMCTS, to the LAA. Our commitment to making the LAA a better place to work will ensure that our staff are supported during this period of transformation.

Our change programmes

Implementation of Legal Aid Transformation (LAT) reforms:

Following decisions on the remaining policy reforms set out in the Government Response, published on 27 February and 27 March 2014, we are proceeding with the implementation of tranche three of the reform package including the implementation of the Residence Test for civil legal aid and the procurement of criminal legal aid. Many of the reforms require significant changes to our IT systems and business processes. The LAT programme will ensure that these changes allow our operational teams to continue to administer legal aid in the most efficient and effective way possible.

Delivering CCMS:

Once fully rolled out, CCMS will allow civil legal aid providers and advocates to submit all of their applications and bills online, improving efficiency and control in our civil casework function. It will also reduce error rates in submitted applications and bills.

Following on from the pilot in 2013/14, we will increase the number of providers and advocates using CCMS, working closely with external users to support them in using the system. In parallel we will be completing the training of our own staff on the new system and bringing all civil sites onto CCMS. We will monitor performance closely and continue to engage with providers, advocates and their representative bodies to consider feedback and opportunities for continuous improvement.

Crime Change Programme:

The objective of the LAA Crime Change Programme is to process all criminal legal aid applications and bills in a paperless and electronic way. As part of this process we will be transferring and centralising the existing criminal legal aid application process from HMCTS to the LAA. We will also modernise the application process by expanding the use of electronic applications (eForms) - so that all providers are able to submit applications for criminal legal aid online - and introduce changes to the billing system to turn it into an online process. As a result, we will offer the vast majority of our services online, greatly improving our providers' experience and making a significant contribution to the Cabinet Office's Digital by Default agenda.

Under this modernised and automated process we expect to be able to continue to improve our level of customer service to providers as well as to make efficiency savings. This change will help to improve the quality of applications and support a greater level of financial stewardship to the LAA.

Continuous improvement

Alongside our change programmes we will also be embedding a culture of continuous improvement throughout the organisation during the year. Over the next three years we want to empower our staff to take ownership of their work, to lead on local reforms, and to redesign our processes to increase efficiency. This will entail a cultural change and a move to

considering our delivery as an end to end process, rather than as a set of discrete and consecutive processes.

We will achieve this through training, the use of communication channels, and through role modelling by our leaders. As already demonstrated in 2013/14, continuous improvement will allow us to harness the full potential of our staff to ensure that the progress we have made in delivering an efficient and effective service can continue.

Working with Partners

We will continue to work closely with our partners to support MoJ, Criminal Justice System (CJS) and Government wide initiatives to improve the justice system. Through our strong working relationship with MoJ policy we will support Local Family Justice Boards to reduce the duration of childcare cases and improve control and reduce the cost of experts, and support Local Criminal Justice Boards in examining ways of improving the efficiency of criminal justice activities in each of the local areas. We will also participate in CJS efficiency and Common Platform Programmes by trialling new ways of providing criminal defence services, including by the use of technology supporting the Government wide Digital by Default agenda.

Our Commitments & Key Performance Indicators:

Our strategic objectives are underpinned by our commitments for the year and are monitored through four key performance indicators (KPIs) which measure the impact of the most important elements of our day to day work. Progress against both

delivery of our commitments and KPIs will be tracked through our performance framework and will be discussed at both a local level and by the LAA Executive Team and our Board each month.

The commitments and KPIs which underpin delivery of our Strategic Objectives are set out below:

During the year we will:

Strategic Objective 1

Improve casework to reduce cost, enhance control and give better customer service

- Increase the speed with which we make both payments and assessments of eligibility whilst maintaining the quality
- Continue to digitise our services and our processing
- Review the casework operating model following implementation of the provisions of LAPSO Act 2012, Transforming Legal Aid, and new IT system for civil cases (CCMS)
- Work closely with providers to reduce further the net error rate on payments to providers and on eligibility assessments
- Develop criminal online applications and billing (including roll-out of crime eforms)
- Continue to increase gross collections through the CCMT scheme, improve collection rates, cash and secured debt ratios and consequently the savings realised
- Maintain delivery of a high quality and efficient criminal defence service to clients through the PDS

Linked to the following Key Performance Indicators:

KPI: Financial Management

- Agency admin costs – Monitors the delivery of efficiencies and cost savings required to enable the Agency to manage its operations within the reduced allocated admin budget
- Legal Aid Fund – Monitors the legal aid expenditure, within the allocated budget, including the delivery of savings related to the implementation of reforms
- Assurance – Monitors the accuracy and compliance of legal aid applications and payments

KPI: Operational Delivery

- Case Management – Measures performance of our core processing functions – making assessments of eligibility, dealing with amendments and the payment of bills for civil and crime work.
- Contract Management – Monitors the management of contract performance by providers, including maintaining the low error rate and continuing the reduction of incorrect bills submitted
- Public Defender Service – Measures the performance of the Public Defender Service, focusing on value for money, quality and the proportion of duty calls accepted locally
- IT Service – Measures the customer service delivered to staff in the LAA and improved service availability in relation to system outages

During the year we will:

Strategic Objective 2

Improve organisational capability to meet the challenges ahead, including developing and engaging our people

- Improve engagement with our people through promoting local teamwork and improving the immediate working environment; getting communications right; and investing in skills
- Embed talent management by identifying and developing staff with potential to progress
- Grow advocacy capability in the PDS
- Continue to engage with the MoJ wide capability plan to develop the right level of capability within the Agency
- Embed learning and development activities and support each member of staff in completing their 5 days of learning and development activity in the year
- Implement the Digital by Default legal aid services, including enhancing provider access to LAA online services

Linked to the following Key Performance Indicators:

KPI: People

- People, Capability and Staff Engagement – Monitors how successful we are in improving staff engagement and reducing the number of working days lost through staff absence

During the year we will:

Strategic Objective 3

Build and maintain strong partnerships to secure quality provision and contribute fully to wider justice and Government aims

- Implement MoJ policy to deliver a competitive mechanism for crime contracts and develop and implement a new provider management/commissioning strategy
- Support CJS efficiency and service development initiatives
- Draw on the PDS's knowledge and experience of the criminal defence market to inform policy development and decision making
- Work with our partners to deliver our change programmes - LAT, CCMS and Crime Change
- Continue to work closely and engage with our providers including through the launch of a new channel strategy for our provider customer service

Linked to the following Key Performance Indicators:

KPI: Reputation

- Correspondence – Monitors our customer service response to queries, correspondence and complaints, including Freedom of Information and Data Protection Act requests

2.2 Making the LAA a better place to work

Our experience over the last year has once again demonstrated the importance of our staff during a challenging period. It is because of this that in the coming year the LAA will focus on making the LAA a better place to work. This will play a part in everything that we do.

The results of the staff engagement survey for 2013 were positive with an overall engagement score of 60% which represented an improvement of three percentage points on 2012 and was two percentage points higher than the civil service average (58%), moving us to 33rd in the Civil Service organisation rankings (from 50th in 2012). The engagement score is driven by the answers to questions relating to nine key themes:

- **Leadership & Managing Change**
- **My Work**
- **My Manager**
- **Learning and Development**
- **Resources and Workload**
- **Pay and Benefits**
- **Organisational Objectives and Purpose**
- **My Team**
- **Inclusion and Fair Treatment**

In 2013 we saw increases in the score (% of positive answers) in 8 out of the 9 themes. Whilst, overall, this was positive, we are working to make improvements and with an 89% response rate we are confident that these results provide a solid base for our focus on making the LAA a better place to work.

Using these results we have developed our Staff Engagement National Action Plan. This plan, summarised below, incorporates feedback from all levels of the LAA and is supported by local plans.

Staff Engagement National Action Plan

1. Promoting local teamwork and line management best practice, and improving the immediate working environment

- Support managers to manage performance effectively to realise the full potential of all of our staff.
- Improve the physical working environment including through delivering the right technology to enhance the capability of our staff.
- Build an environment that makes it easier to work collaboratively and securely with our colleagues.
- Foster an inclusive and mutually respectful culture in the LAA which values equality and diversity.

2. Getting communications right and keeping our people informed

- Publish regular and extensive communications so all staff are fully informed of changes which will affect them.
- Encourage continuous improvement and reward and recognition throughout the organisation.
- Ensure managers carry out one-to-ones consistently so staff are adequately supported and their views are taken on board.
- Keep all staff informed about progress on our change programmes through regular updates.

3. Invest in skills

- Support and encourage our staff to make the most of their five development days.
- Publicise the range of different learning and development activities open to staff, such as shadowing, mentoring, e-learning, and locally run training sessions.
- Appoint more local Learning and Development champions to provide guidance on the development opportunities available and to help staff map their development journeys.

During our February and March 2014 Senior Leadership Group visits we asked staff what they will do in 2014/15 to help make the LAA a better place to work. A selection of their commitments can be found below:

Engage & motivate myself and my team to improve the quality of outputs.

Share knowledge gained through volunteering with team and other contract managers.

Send fewer emails – get up and speak to people.

Continue being a coach.

Contribute to improving office environment.

Help my team to enjoy their work and support each other through the challenges ahead.

Support providers and counsel during CCMS roll out.

Utilise #my5days to improve my own skills.

Promote collaboration and sharing information tools.

Encourage my team to challenge existing processes.

Further promotion of equality and diversity in the workplace.

Leadership

We require strong leadership at every level of the organisation to deliver this plan and to provide support and inspiration to our staff. We will be launching a number of initiatives during the year to help our leaders develop their full potential. The Civil Service's leadership narrative will provide the basis for this work and it will be accompanied by an LAA specific narrative on leadership and a set of case studies of successful leaders across the business. While the publication of this narrative will, in itself, trigger local conversations and activities we will be developing targeted activities to continue to build the capability of managers and leaders at all levels of the organisation including facilitating action learning sets, and publicising and celebrating examples of good leadership {case study #7}.

Case Study #7: Mentoring in the LAA

The LAA Senior Leadership Group (SLG) set up a mentoring programme this year which has been well received and will continue in 2014/15. All members of the SLG made a commitment to support at least two mentees with a specific focus on career development. This initiative helped develop a sharp focus on staff development and on supporting each other. This was further supplemented by local mentoring schemes. For example, the LAA's Contract Management team set up a scheme to make their contract managers available as mentors for other members of staff throughout the organisation. A number of colleagues are taking part in the scheme, with some being mentored by a contract manager and others opting to shadow a contract manager for a day. The scheme offers mentees the opportunity to receive advice and guidance to support their personal development goals, to experience firsthand the relationship the LAA has with our providers, and to explore and understand how we can work better with each other. Mentors have also benefitted from the opportunity by developing their skills in problem solving, and by working with people from across the agency which has developed their networks outside of contract management.

2.3 Our plans for the future

In our first Business Plan we set out a three year vision of the LAA. By the end of 2014/15 we will have continued to make good progress towards achieving a large number of our milestones, but our plans for developing and improving our Agency continue through to 2015/16 and beyond.

While our core purpose will remain unchanged, at the end of 2015/16 we will have moved to primarily interacting with legal aid providers online. The completion of the rollout of CCMS will be a major step in this direction, as will the transfer of the processing of all criminal legal aid applications from HMCTS to the LAA, and the introduction of electronic applications (eForms). At the same time the Agency will exploit the opportunities presented by greater use of online working and collaboration with legal aid providers to reduce the level of incomplete and incorrect applications and bills submitted.

Over the next two years these changes will allow us to improve further our customer service, approve funding for all but the most complex cases within two weeks of receiving accurate applications, and pay complete and accurate providers' bills within four weeks of receipt.

Our ongoing aims for the three year period, 2013/14-2015/16, remain:

- Move to wholly digitised services and online working with providers including work currently undertaken on our behalf by HMCTS.
- Reduce turnaround and payment times to assessment for eligibility in civil within two weeks and payment within four weeks for 90% of cases and reduce turnaround and payment times for crime bills to four weeks for 90% of cases.
- Identify further potential efficiencies or added value from working with other parts of MoJ and seek more opportunities to work collaboratively with other parts of Government.
- Develop skills and leadership training for our staff to continue to drive the capability levels of the organisation.

Improving the way we interact with our providers

We will continue to develop how we interact with our providers and improve on our customer service standards. One such approach will be through our new Channel Strategy.

During 2014/15, and beyond, this strategy will transform the LAA from a largely paper based organisation to one which carries out most of its customer service transactions via digital media. This process

will begin in civil legal aid before being rolled out to crime and will have two primary aims:

1. Enhance the existing channels to improve customer satisfaction.
2. Move the majority of contacts to those channels which offer best value for money and the best experience for providers, such as email and webchat.

Once our new Channel Strategy has been introduced we will be able to offer providers a range of improved ways to contact our customer services.

Transforming the way we work

‘Transforming the Way we Work’ or TW3 is a Cabinet Office initiative that sets out the vision for a transformed workplace in the Civil Service. TW3 is about identifying what we need to work effectively, and then delivering solutions to meet these needs.

TW3 in the LAA is driven by a commitment to making the Agency a better place to work. It will involve challenging the stereotypes of work as being something that is undertaken at a desk in a Government building and moving to a place where work ‘activity’ is undertaken in many places, offices, home and/or other Government and public places. Over the next two years the initiative will:

- Make the necessary changes to the existing ‘office’ estate to ensure that it is more responsive to more modern ways of working, including greater utilisation of space and improved ability to work and collaborate away from a traditional environment.
- Deploy better IT to support different patterns and locations of working. We will be asking whether existing technology is fit for purpose, how we can make better use of modern technology in the way we work, meet and collaborate, and how we can build the digital capabilities and mindset to get the most out of new tools and devices.
- Introduce HR policies that promote smart working. We will create a more flexible package for people in case working teams.

We will run a number of small scale pilots across the LAA to test TW3 principles and how we can use them to deliver increased efficiency, productivity and job satisfaction.

Our approach to digitising our services

The aim of our Information Technology is to help us to deliver a more efficient and smoother service for legal aid providers whilst reducing our administration budget.

We will focus on making transactions available online which will improve our efficiency and financial controls. This will include online applications and billing, incorporating the online submission of evidence, and the online issue of receipts, payments, and provider statements. We are also working on wider IT modernisation which could result in integration with the software systems used by providers and other third parties. This will include opportunities for integration with DWP, HMRC, HMCTS and other departments' systems to further reduce the processing times for providers.

2.4 Living within our means & managing our risks

To contribute to the overall required reduction in spend at departmental level, we have worked collaboratively, on a cross-discipline basis, to review savings and efficiencies across the LAA.

These reviews have focused on: administration of the legal aid fund; the scope of legal aid; and the remuneration paid for legal aid.

The LAA’s financial resources are managed by our admin budget which resources all administrative expenditure incurred by the LAA. The Legal Aid Fund budget finances all legal aid programme expenditure. The central funds budget finances orders obtained, in limited circumstances, from the Crown Court for costs incurred by defendants who privately fund their legal representation and are acquitted. Our budgets for 13/14 and 14/15 are below:

	13/14 Budget (£m)	14/15 Budget (£m)
Legal Aid Fund	1,818.9	1,630.0
LAA admin	98.3	94.2
Central funds	53.0	55.7

Our savings plans are set out below:

Legal Aid Administration

In real terms we plan to reduce the administration budget by 28% over the spending review period. To do this we will:

- Increase the volume of transactions undertaken online.
- Continue to maximise efficiencies and economies of scale through sharing services as an Executive Agency of the MoJ.
- Continuously review our ways of working to be as lean and effective as possible.

The future focus of our efficiency agenda will be in driving continuous improvement and efficiency in the way we administer the legal aid fund. We will also continue to build upon a drive to improve commercial decision making across the LAA with targeted awareness events planned throughout the year {case study #8}.

Case Study #8: Raising our levels of commercial awareness

We have encouraged our staff to identify savings to meet the constraints on our administration budget through activities such as the '£200 challenge' - an initiative that challenges every member of staff to identify innovative and simpler ways of working to contribute, at least, £200 per person in savings. This has been further supplemented through raising the level of commercial awareness across the Agency. Our finance team ran a "Commercial Awareness week" including workshops (attended by 200 staff) to investigate how all staff could contribute to tackling the commercial challenges faced by the LAA. Through these activities we are making positive steps towards improving the way we work and delivering the savings required.

Legal Aid Fund

Stewardship of taxpayers' money is at the heart of what we do, and we will continue to drive improvements in the way in which we efficiently and effectively control expenditure on publicly funded cases and make payments to legal aid providers.

On top of existing reforms, LAT will deliver around £215m of additional savings by 2018/19.

Additionally, we updated our debt collection strategy in 2013 and continue to deliver against three core objectives: (i) preventing debt arising in the first place; (ii) creating further efficiency in how we administer and collect debt; and (iii) increasing our cash recoveries from net debt. We will work closely with colleagues in Cabinet Office and collaborate with other Government Departments to deliver this strategy.

A comprehensive summary of our financial performance will be published in the Annual Report and Accounts in Summer 2014.

Managing our risks

The LAA values the importance of robust risk management and has a comprehensive process in place to identify, monitor and mitigate those risks which could prevent the LAA from achieving its strategic objectives.

Risk is managed across all levels of the LAA. At an operational level, Deputy Directors own business unit level risk registers which are reviewed, updated and discussed at least quarterly. High priority or recurrent risks at this level are used to inform the Corporate Risk Register which is owned by the Executive Team who are responsible for reviewing and discussing it every quarter.

The Corporate Risk Register is also reviewed by the LAA Board and is incorporated into the MoJ's Strategic Risk Register, owned by the MoJ Executive Committee.

The Agency's approach to risk management is supported by its Assurance Framework which follows HM Treasury best practice. The framework identifies three lines of defence to ensure that the Agency's control environment is robust and comprehensive. The first includes front-line arrangements to manage risk and ensure organisational objectives are met. The second relates to monitoring activities which evidence management oversight of control. The third line of defence identifies those activities which measure assurance independently, from a source outside the organisation such as Internal Audit and the National Audit Office.

The most significant risks for the LAA during 2014/15 are:

- Risk of delay to our delivery of online working for civil applications and bills through the implementation of CCMS. We will mitigate against this through continuing to listen to feedback from providers using CCMS, closely monitoring our phased roll out, developing system enhancements if required, and keeping our provider representative bodies and our pilot providers updated on our progress.
- Risk that optimal levels of operational and financial efficiency are not achieved by the LAA's planned technological solutions. We have an ambitious IT programme to wholly digitise our service and move to online working with providers. We have already implemented a suite of

controls to allow us to monitor, in real-time, our progress in developing our technological solutions; these will be maintained.

- Risk that stakeholder support for our continuing legal aid reforms is not obtained. We accept that the implementation of reform will create challenges for the LAA, particularly in securing stakeholder support across all areas. To manage this risk, we have developed a Stakeholder Management Strategy which explains how the LAA will continuously engage with stakeholders.

Further detail on our risks can be found in the Annual Governance Statement which will be published as part of the LAA Annual Report and Accounts in Summer 2014.

Appendix A: Our Transparency Arrangements

The Government is committed to providing greater transparency to enable the public to hold services to account while providing an assessment of value for money.

Key Publications:

- **Annual Report & Accounts:** Provides a comprehensive summary of LAA's activities and financial performance for the preceding year as well as reporting against our performance targets and strategic objectives.
- **Statistical Information Pack:** Provides summaries of volumes and values of work carried out by providers across all areas of legal aid.
- **Input Indicators – Legal Aid:** Provides the average costs per case of legal aid and is one of the Input Indicators in the MoJ Business Plan.
- **Director of Legal Aid Casework Report:** Provides a summary of the work carried out by the Director of Legal Aid Casework, the decisions made and the processes followed to maintain the independence of the decision making process of granting legal aid.

As well as a commitment to publishing data, the LAA will continue to commit to open and constructive dialogue to engage with legal professionals through our communication channels. Some of the key channels used by the LAA include:

- Provision of the LAA Bulletin and Advocates' Bulletin which are regular newsletters with links to content on the LAA section of the Justice website. These are emailed to legal aid providers and advocates to provide news and updates in key areas e.g. tender invitations, consultation launches and responses, changes to forms, and billing and payment dates.
- Meeting regularly with various representative groups and sharing information on our performance.
- Organising face to face events for providers, barristers, mediators, and experts to encourage constructive dialogue between stakeholders and the LAA on key issues, such as legal aid reform and training on our new systems. The events are held across England and Wales and allow our senior managers to explain what we are doing and to discuss wider concerns. Thousands of practitioners have attended these events in recent years.
- Membership of, and attendance at, Criminal and Family Justice Boards.

Copies of LAA strategic publications can be found at: <https://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/corporate-reports/legal-aid-agency>

All publications are available in Welsh.

Appendix B: Our Governance

The key elements of the LAA's Governance arrangements are summarised below.

The LAA Board provides overarching governance for the Agency. It is chaired by the Chief Executive of the LAA and provides support, advice and guidance to the Chief Executive on the strategic direction of the Agency. Whilst the day to day management is the responsibility of the Executive Team, the Board receives reports and takes decisions on key business priorities as appropriate.

Alongside the day-to-day management, the Executive Team also meet quarterly as the LAA's Change Board which provides oversight across all our change programmes and supplements the work of individual Programme Boards.

The LAA has three Non Executive Board Members (NEBM) who were recruited through an external campaign. Non Executive Board Members cover the specialist areas of finance/audit, legal, and commercial as well as providing strategic Board oversight. They are accountable to the Chief Executive for their conduct as Board members. The role of the Non Executive Board Members is to provide effective and objective challenge to the rest of the Board and officials as appropriate. The LAA Board is supported by the LAA Audit Committee which consists of our three Non Executive Board Members, one of whom acts as chair.

The Membership of the LAA Board comprises:

- Chief Executive, LAA (Chair)
- Director of Finance and Performance, LAA (who will Chair in the CEO's absence)
- Director of Commissioning and Strategy, LAA
- Director of Case Management, LAA
- Principal Legal Advisor, LAA
- Director General of Finance and Corporate Services, MoJ
- Non Executive Board Member, Legal
- Non Executive Board Member, Chair of Audit Committee
- Non Executive Board Member, Commercial

The following people also have standing invitations to attend the Board:

- HR Director for the LAA
- Director for Legal Aid Policy, MoJ
- Head of Corporate Centre, LAA

If, in the future, the office of the Director of Legal Aid Casework is not held by the Chief Executive of the LAA, this Director shall also be a member of the Board.

The Chief Executive is appointed by the Permanent Secretary of the MoJ via the standard Senior Civil Service approval mechanisms. The Chief Executive, as Legal Aid Accounting Officer is accountable, through the Permanent Secretary, to Parliament for ensuring that the resources are used for the purposes authorised by Parliament. The Chief Executive is also responsible for answering for the propriety and regularity of LAA expenditure. As is currently the case, the Chief Executive may also be appointed as the LAA Director of Legal Casework, to carry out the role of making decisions (independent of the MoJ) on individual legal aid applications. The Director of Legal Casework is designated by the Lord Chancellor under the LASPO Act 2012. The Director receives the necessary advice and support to carry out their duty to make independent decisions on the granting of legal aid for individual legal aid applications. This is set out in more detail in the LAA Framework Agreement document.

LAA approvals and delegations are made in line with standard MoJ approval and delegation authorities.

Framework Document

The LAA operates under a Framework Document, agreed between the Agency and MoJ. The Framework Document can be found at <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/publications/corporate-reports/legal-aid-agency/laa-framework.pdf>

Appendix C: Our Arrangements in Wales

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice is accountable to Parliament for our activities and performance across England and Wales.

In addition, within Wales, the Legal Aid Agency maintains close links with the Welsh Government, in recognition of the devolved administration. This includes working directly with stakeholder groups such as the Criminal and Family Justice Boards in Wales, as well as specific Welsh stakeholders such as CAB Cymru, CAFCASS Cymru and Shelter Cymru.

A major part of the Public Defender Service's (PDS) operations are currently based in Swansea and Pontypridd. Under the terms of Legal Aid Transformation, this is set to increase further as the PDS will have one of the nine contracts for the whole of South Wales, which will mean a formal and increased presence in Cardiff from June 2015.

As part of the Agency's wider strategy for PDS, the plan is also to develop the Service's advocacy capability in the South Wales area. This has started with the appointment of a Head of PDS Advocacy, based in Cardiff.

