



The Civil Legal Advice (CLA) service provides specialist legal advice to people across England and Wales who qualify for legal aid. It helps people with **debt, education, discrimination, housing and family issues**.

CLA's fully trained advisers deal with around 1,500 new cases each month.

How does CLA work?

When people contact CLA, they will be asked questions about their problem and their financial circumstances. This will include details of their, and if necessary, their partner's benefits, income, savings, spending and National Insurance number.

If it looks like they qualify, they will be transferred to a CLA specialist adviser. The adviser will need to ask them further questions to confirm whether they can help.

This will include consideration of whether online or telephone advice is appropriate. Where face-to-face advice is considered necessary, or if representation in a court or upper tribunal is needed, CLA will arrange this for the client.

Rachel, 27: "The lady on the phone was really nice. She explained the whole process of what they do, and took a history of our issue, and next thing we know we heard from the solicitors."

The specialist will ask the client to provide evidence of their circumstances.

If CLA can't help, they will always suggest other places where people can go for information or advice. This may include local or national advice services.

How to access CLA

CLA is available online, by telephone or by post.

People should initially visit the gov.uk website: www.gov.uk/civil-legal-advice. They can then fill in their personal details and book a call-back from CLA at a time that suits them.

Alternatively they can call CLA on **0345 345 4 345***.

CLA can offer additional support to use the service. People should discuss their specific needs when they contact CLA.

CLA can offer:

- interpretation in over 170 languages
- British Sign Language via webcam
- Text Relay/minicom via **0845 609 6677**
- a call-back where the cost of calling is a concern
- freepost
- correspondence in an accessible format

A friend or third party can speak to CLA on behalf of the person.

*Calls will cost approximately 9p per minute from a landline. Calls from mobiles may cost more. If they are worried about the cost, they can request a call-back within 24 hours by either calling CLA or texting 'legal aid' and their name to 80010.

The service operates Monday to Friday: 9am–8pm and Saturday: 9am–12.30pm. Outside these times, the person should leave a message and CLA will call back within one working day.

Can CLA help with your client's issue?

CLA offers advice in the following categories:

Debt advice for people who are at risk of losing their home. For example, they may be behind with their mortgage payments, facing bankruptcy because they owe money, or a court may have ordered them to sell their home to pay a debt.

Special educational needs advice for people challenging how a school, college or council is providing support for their child's, or their own, special educational needs. This may be because of their: physical or sensory impairments; learning disabilities; or communication, emotional or behavioural difficulties.

Discrimination advice for people who have been discriminated against, including harassment or victimisation, in contravention of the Equality Act 2010. For example, they may have been discriminated against because of their sex, race, age, disability, religion or sexual orientation.

Housing advice for people who are homeless or at risk of eviction or repossession. It includes: landlord harassment or refusal to fix a problem in the home which is causing a serious health and safety risk; or defending an action against anti-social behaviour.

Phil, 43: "She [the Operator] was very helpful; she knew what she was talking about. It was like she knew exactly what I was feeling. I was panicking at the time 'cause obviously I didn't want to lose my home."

Family advice for people seeking court protection from abuse, harassment or forced marriage. Advice is also available for: child and financial arrangements for people who have been in an abusive relationship; situations where a child may be taken into care, or where the family is unhappy with how they're being looked after in care; and for family mediation.

In most **debt**, **discrimination** and **special educational needs** cases people must use CLA to get advice unless they:

- are under 18
- are in prison or a secure hospital
- have been assessed by CLA as needing face-to-face advice in the past 12 months for a similar issue

For **housing** and **family** problems, people can use CLA or choose to go directly to a local face-to-face adviser.

Does your client qualify for legal aid?

If you're not sure whether your client qualifies for legal aid, you should refer them to the legal aid online checker at: www.gov.uk/check-legal-aid or you can check on their behalf.

The checker will ask questions about the problem and the client's financial circumstances. Whatever the outcome, the client will be directed to the most appropriate source of help or advice.

To qualify for legal aid they will usually need to show they cannot afford to pay for their own legal advice.

This will include:

- receipt of certain benefits such as: Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance (income-based), Employment and Support Allowance (income-based), Pension Credit - Guarantee Credit or Universal Credit.
- their (combined) household income. This must be less than £2,657 a month before tax. For households with five or more children, the monthly eligible income is more (add £222 to £2,657 for the fifth and each additional child).
- having less than £8,000 in savings, shares or property.

They will need to provide information on their income and savings (and their partner's if they have one).