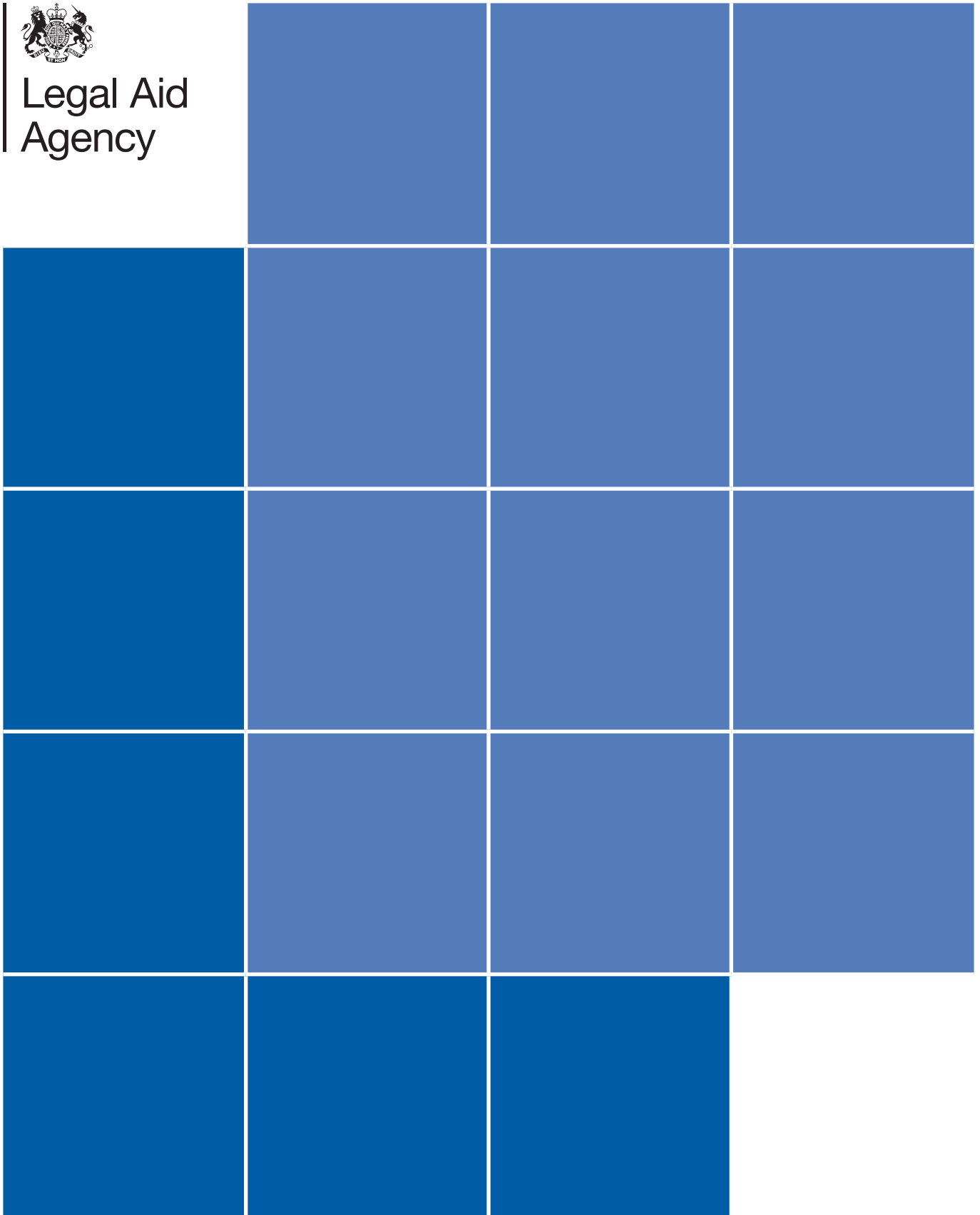




Legal Aid
Agency



Welsh Language Scheme Report 2014/15

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Introduction

1. This is the Legal Aid Agency's report on the operation of its Welsh Language Scheme based on activities undertaken for the period April 2014 to March 2015.
2. This report is produced in line with the framework for monitoring and reporting agreed with the Welsh Language Board in September 2010.

Compliance with the WLS

Transfer of Grant

3. We have now successfully transitioned the processing of criminal legal aid applications from HMCTS to the Legal Aid Agency. As part of the transfer, we have introduced an online Welsh language application form to ensure that our clients can continue to apply for Criminal Legal Aid in Welsh and receive all related correspondence in Welsh if they choose to.

Tenders

4. Our contracts with providers specifically contain clauses regarding the provision of Welsh language services to legal aid clients in Wales as a matter of course. We have run several tender processes for the letting of new contracts during this review period and continue to maintain this requirement in civil and criminal legal aid contracts for the delivery of advice to the public.

Publications

5. All published materials intended for the public in Wales are produced bilingually. These include the Legal Aid Agency's Annual Report 2014-15 and the Director of Legal Aid Casework Report 2014-15.

Performance Indicators

PI 1 Frontline Services

Bilingual Staff

6. We currently have one bilingual member of staff and one advanced learner dedicated to our Welsh language services following the departure of our other Welsh language caseworker during this period. This amounts to 7% of the customer services team in Wales. They cover our frontline services (telephone, correspondence, applications) and assist with proof reading and ad hoc translations. We are also recruiting two additional Welsh caseworkers to replace the member of staff who has left and are therefore increasing our Welsh language capacity imminently to 13%. In addition, we have a further two bilingual staff in different departments within the Wales office who can also cover the Welsh language services if required.
7. We continue to receive positive feedback from our providers regarding our Welsh language frontline services.

Telephone calls

8. We maintain monthly logs of the telephone calls that we receive on the Welsh language telephone line. From April 2014 to the end of March 2015, we received 594 calls, a decrease of 243 calls on the previous 12 months. This is due to the reduction in legally aided work since the introduction of LASPO and may be partly attributable to the introduction of digital processes and the new Client and Cost Management System (CCMS).

PI 2 Providing Services through Third Parties

Contract management

9. Our existing legal aid contracts with our face-to-face providers and new contracts let during 2013/14 include specific requirements that they have the ability to provide a Welsh language service in Wales. Firms either comply by employing Welsh language speakers or have procedures in place to provide a Welsh language service through referral to Welsh speaking solicitors should a client so request. We have reviewed arrangements with all of our providers during this period to establish what Welsh speaking staff they have and the demand that they have received for Welsh language services. We have also used this opportunity to promote our Welsh language services, such as our telephone line and bilingual forms. Of the 174 organisations that we currently contract with in Wales, 106 employ one or more Welsh speakers,

which equates to over 60% of providers. Those providers who do not currently employ a Welsh speaker are all, bar one, based in the South East of Wales where demand for Welsh services is lower. There are 44 providers in this area who do employ a Welsh speaker and we therefore consider that there is sufficient alternative provision available. Where a provider does not provide a Welsh speaker, any clients wishing to conduct their affairs in Welsh are passed to an alternative firm within the same procurement area where such provision is available.

10. Additionally, we continue to fund telephone advice through Civil Legal Advice contracts. Clients accessing this service are able to speak to Welsh speaking operators.

Clients

11. The LAA's new 'Check if you can get legal aid' digital on-line service on Gov.UK is available in Welsh and supports clients to diagnose whether their problem falls within scope of legal aid and if they are likely to be financially eligible to receive public funding.
12. For those clients accessing Civil Legal Advice (CLA,) which is a national telephone advice line service providing specialist legal advice in Debt, Education, Housing, Family and Discrimination, MoJ Translation Framework (Language Line) is available to facilitate the delivery of Welsh language services where requested.

13. Where clients are detained in police custody and require legal advice, they can request a Welsh-speaking solicitor when the custody officer contacts the LAA's Duty Solicitor Call Centre (DSCC). This service facilitates the deployment of an appropriate solicitor to the police station.
14. The CLA service have implemented the Welsh Language translation of their internet pages and are due to have a live assessment with Government digital services within the next three months.

PI 3 Language Training and Awareness

15. All staff are allocated time for training and development. Three members of staff are currently pursuing Welsh language training provided by Her Majesty's Court Service (HMCTS) to improve Welsh language skills. We are very grateful that HMCTS have shared this resource with us. We will also continue to consider requests from staff wishing to undertake paid training where they can demonstrate that this satisfies a business need.

PI 4 Information Technology

16. Our new IT system for civil legal aid matters has been rolled out to 1600 legal aid providers. Correspondence and any declarations requiring the client's signature are available in Welsh.

PI 5 Administering the Scheme

17. We have received no complaints about our Welsh Language services during 2014/15.

Conclusion

18. We are pleased to report that we have successfully implemented our new Welsh Language scheme this year and have continued to provide a high standard of Welsh language services.



Matthew Coats
Chief Executive, Legal Aid Agency