



Legal Aid
Agency

The Legal Aid Agency Strategy

July 2021

Working with others to achieve excellence in the delivery of legal aid



LAA Strategy



The world in which we operate is changing. I want the LAA to help recover, rebuild and restore the justice system, by providing a quality service for users and providers of our services that is accessible, clear, accountable, and responsive. A service that rebuilds public confidence in the justice system and is one that we can all be proud of.

The Legal Aid Agency (LAA) is in a strong position to meet an uncertain future in terms of our commitment to delivery and the quality of our people. We have successfully implemented major policy changes and we have maintained our services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. We have done so, thanks to the efforts of our high-performing team of people and a network of dedicated legal aid providers across England and Wales.

Operationally our work contributes directly to delivery of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) strategic outcome to:

Deliver swift access to justice

Underpinned by the strategic enablers:

- **Great people** – Improving the employee experience in the MoJ
- **New ideas** – Enable digital transformation to support priorities and access to services

- **Sustainability** – Putting environmental sustainability at the heart of decision making
- **Better outcomes** – Encouraging excellence and collaboration through an inclusive culture.

This strategy sets out a clear direction that holds true to our vision, as well as the wider MoJ strategic outcome to deliver swift access to justice, which forms a key part of the department's Outcome Delivery Plan, through legal aid services; providing value for money; and being a truly diverse and inclusive place to work. To support our operational delivery we work in partnership with MoJ policy and in shared areas such as communications, finance and estates.

The LAA Strategy is a living document, reflecting our longer term aims, showcasing that we can, and will, continue to adapt to changing needs and priorities. Our annual LAA Business Plan sets out in greater detail how we will accomplish our aims and monitor our performance for the year ahead.

Jane Harbottle
Chief Executive



Vision

To support swift access to justice, through working with others to achieve excellence in the delivery of legal aid



Mission

Work with providers of our services to ensure fair, prompt and effective access to civil and criminal legal aid and advice in England and Wales. We work across the whole of the justice system to make sure our services meet the needs of everyone who uses them, including the most vulnerable in our society.



Guiding Principles

We will build confidence and trust in our services by setting our ambition and approach to delivery in line with our guiding principles:



User centred



Right first time



Open and transparent



A responsive, diverse, learning organisation

Our approach will evolve as we learn new things from users and providers of our services, our people (employees) and the challenges and opportunities from the changing world around us.

Our three Strategic Objectives are our framework for delivering and shaping our plans. To support them, we have high-level milestones and responsive Key Performance Indicators detailed in the LAA Business Plan that help measure our success in delivery.

Our core work



Case Management

Process applications for civil and criminal legal aid and pay bills for those services promptly and accurately.



Contract Management and Assurance

Work closely with our provider base to ensure the smooth running of our contracts, and deliver assurance of legal aid provision.



Public Defender Service

Provide independent defence representation in crime cases through the Public Defender Service.



Service Development and Central Commissioning

Design, develop and tender new contracts to ensure the provision of legal aid services.

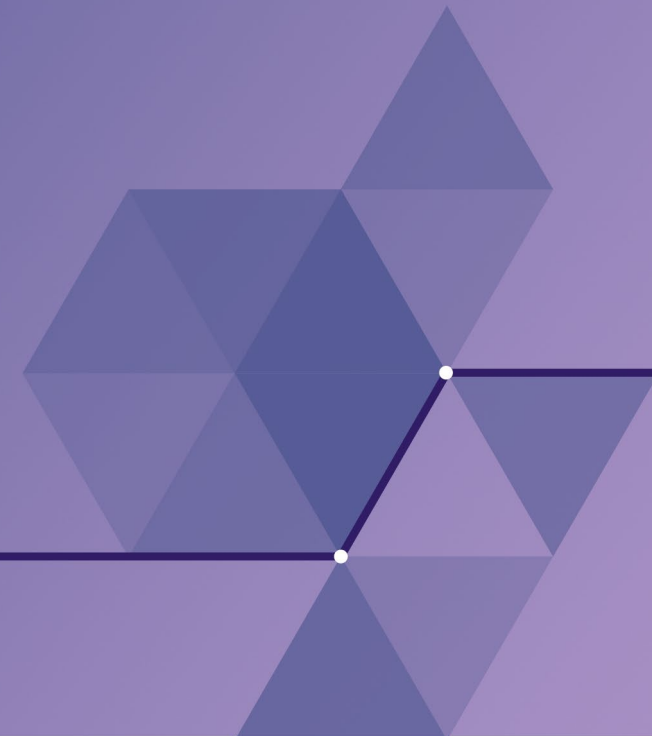
Supported by:

A Transformation team working in collaboration with LAA teams and LAA digital to improve services for staff users.

A corporate centre who ensure effective communications, business planning, corporate reporting, support leadership teams and build a diverse, inclusive and engaged workforce.

MoJ digital and finance professionals. Shared functions including human resources, project delivery and legal services who provide support across LAA, MoJ and other Government departments.

We are part of the Ministry of Justice



Our shared MoJ values

Values that sit at the heart of how we work

The MoJ values define **who we are and what we stand for**. They send a clear message, both internally and externally, about what is important to us as an organisation; what our expectations are, what we are willing to support, **what we will tolerate and what we will not tolerate**.

They shape our expectations of one another and those we deal with.

Values **influence our culture** and how we think and act. Our values are what make us unique and they are the foundation of our collective success.

We want to harness the power of our values to drive performance, unity and strength, enhanced employee experience and reputation.

PURPOSE

Justice matters. We are proud to make a difference for the public we serve.

HUMANITY

We treat others as we would like to be treated. We value everyone, supporting and encouraging them to be the best they can be.

OPENNESS

We innovate, share, and learn. We are courageous and curious, relentlessly pursuing ideas to improve the services we deliver.

TOGETHER

We listen, collaborate and contribute, acting together for our common purpose.

We are an integral part of the MoJ and wider justice system



MoJ, Ministers and wider government

Oversee and set direction and priorities.

The LAA is part of the Ministry of Justice. We support Ministers and wider government in delivery of their priorities and work together to implement legal aid policy.



The Legal Aid Agency

Contribute to the 'deliver swift access to justice' strategic outcome, administering legal aid services as part of MoJ.

Our people *deliver* our services working with providers and users. Our people also *use* employee services provided by the LAA.



Providers

Contracted to provide services on our behalf and users of our case management and contracting services, including:

Providers contracted to deliver legal advice and representation via legal aid funding.

Advocacy services authorised to provide expert legal opinion in legal aid funded cases.

Contracted providers for other services we require.

Representative bodies who we consult and work with.



Clients

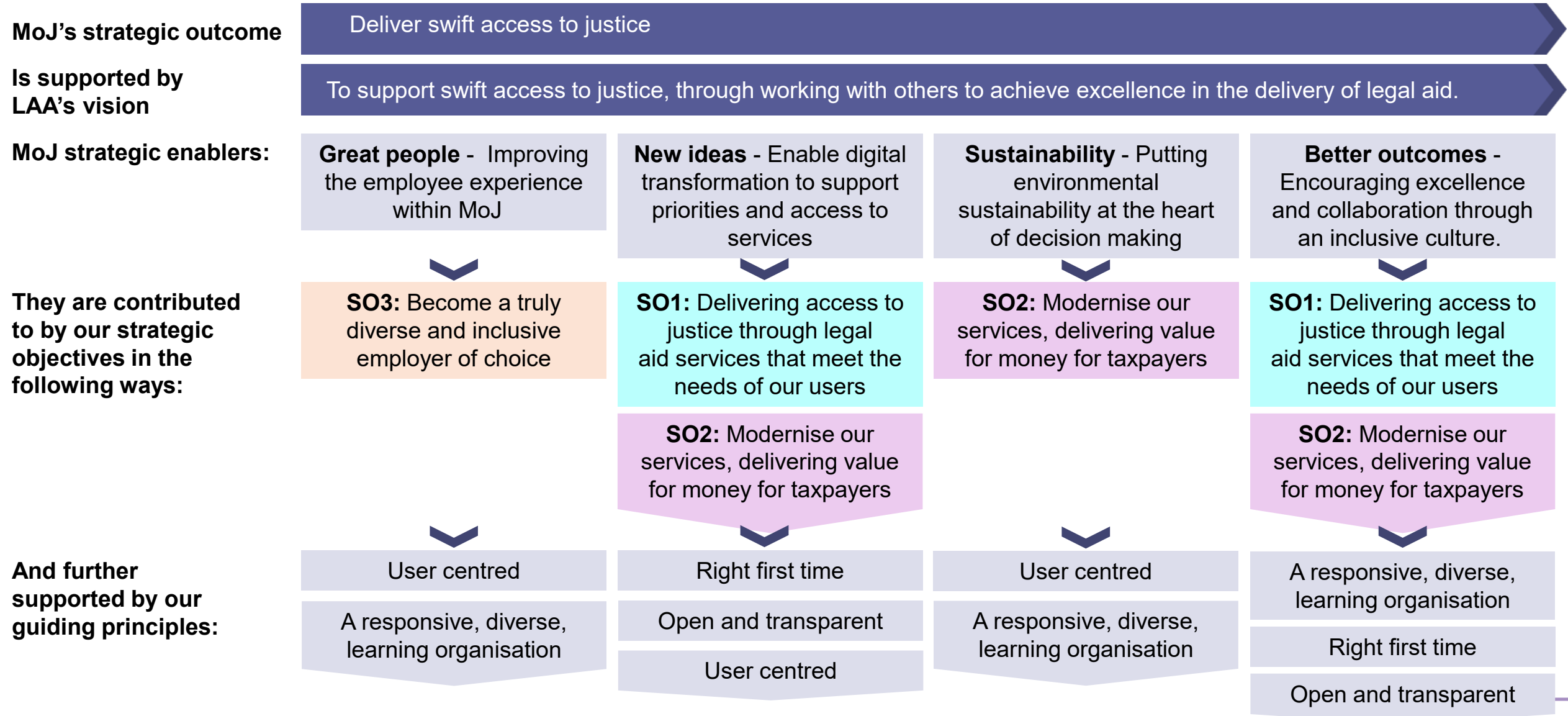
Use our case management and public defender services to obtain legal aid funding - providing them with access to justice, including:

Clients in receipt of legal aid represented by providers or the Public Defender Service.

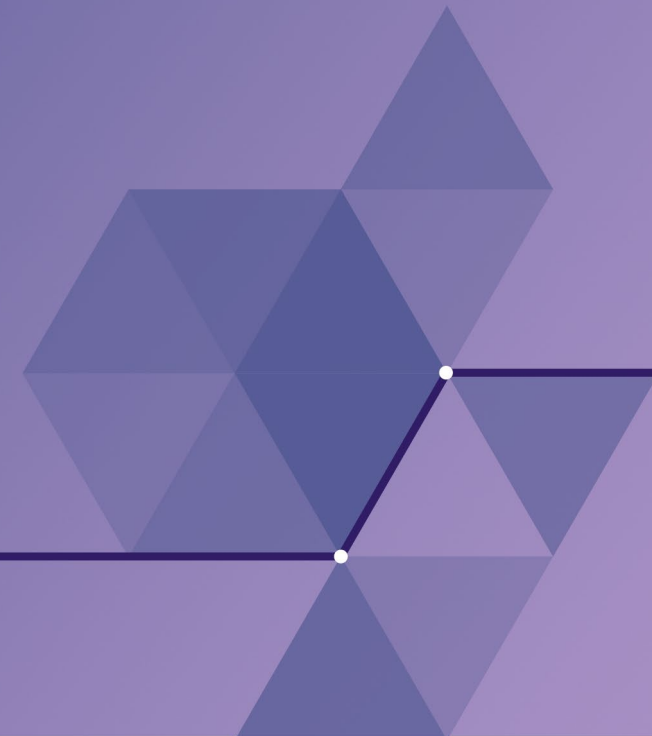
Members of the public who contact us about legal aid for example, to make representation.

Members of the public who apply directly for funding (Exceptional Case Funding).

How we link to MoJ's strategic outcome



Strategic objectives



Our strategic objectives



Strategic Objective 1
Delivering access to justice through legal aid services that meet the needs of our users



Strategic Objective 2
Modernise our services, delivering value for money for taxpayers



Strategic Objective 3
Become a truly diverse and inclusive employer of choice

Focus

User focus - Putting users of our services, their experience and confidence in the quality of our services first

Delivering value - An effective Public Defender Service, focused on adding value to benefit the wider justice system and the public we serve

Sustainable change - Taking into account the relevant governing legislation and policy direction - shaping change in partnership with MoJ, based on our experience of user needs and service delivery

Develop - As LAA transformation continues, further development of our services to respond to the needs of our users whilst providing value for money

Grow - Exploring how our skills and the position of the agency could further enhance access to justice outcomes through appropriate opportunities

Adapt - A location strategy that is responsive to changes in the way we deliver our services, sustainable for the future and cost effective whilst supportive of our people and the way they work

Evolve - Develop our cultural and emotional intelligence as an organisation focused on our goal for the LAA to be a great place to work for everyone

Respond - Work in partnership with staff networks and champions empowering change, prioritising belonging, wellbeing and supporting our responsibilities in the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) across all our work

Learn - Improve our understanding of the impact of learning and development and evolve our learning offer for our people and organisation

Current Key Performance Indicators

Service delivery - speed of applications, payments, correspondence, telephone services

Finance and efficiency – error rate, fund and admin spend

People – sickness, learning and development, bullying and harassment, diversity declaration reporting

Future Development

Quality of user experience and outcomes

Transformation benefits, cost per transaction, contracting, debt recovery, sustainability

Outcomes for our people, belonging, talent management, attrition and recruitment

Guiding principles



User centred



We are a delivery organisation focused on user needs, improving the quality of our services and our users' experience of them. All users of our services, whether providers delivering legal aid on our behalf or clients engaging with us directly or through providers, are our customers.

Client users of our services come to us when they are facing difficult and challenging times in their lives. To provide the right service for them and the providers representing them, we need to make decisions quickly and in line with the relevant legislation to ensure fairness.

We actively engage with representative bodies and our providers at early stages of any changes. Their feedback and insight as providers of our services is vital in ensuring changes are effective and user centred.

We will seek to ensure the way we deliver our services, design and implement changes are directly informed by better understanding of who uses legal aid services, their journey through the justice system and our service interactions.

We work to recognise the different needs of user groups and want them all to have confidence in the services we provide and for our services to respond to their needs.

We have some of this knowledge already. We work with the MoJ Legal Aid Policy team to understand the impact of policy and legislative change on our users, as well as through our work on digital transformation such as introducing the Apply service, based on understanding user journeys and developed through continual user feedback.

Being user centred requires us to make decisions based on what we know will work for our customers, not just for us.

Right first time



Our consistently good delivery against our performance targets supports our right first time approach. We continually seek opportunities to drive up our performance and to earn a consistently good reputation for doing so.

We have focused on the speed of access to justice, with performance targets for processing times and the transition from paper-based systems to digital ones.

Our aim is to make it quicker to approve applications and payments first time and to make sure where we have to reject applications and payments, we have focused our resources and expertise to do so with confidence and clarity.

Our users should be able to trust in the services we provide and have confidence that where the right information is provided our decision will be prompt and correct.

We have made good progress in how we have introduced digital services and

processes into our work, and this will continue to be a focus for us in the future, especially as we implement any new policies and legislative changes.

Providing high quality training for our people and providers is essential to support our right first time principle.

Our work in 2020 to introduce a secure file exchange and migrate from a paper-based process to digital is an excellent example of this strategic focus.

Looking ahead, our Apply digital service is gradually expanding its functionality and user base, with a view to all providers being able to make civil legal aid applications on Apply in 2023.

Open and transparent

We use data and evidence to support decision making. We are focused on providing a credible service our users can have confidence in. We are committed to providing value for money for taxpayers.



In recent years, government has sought to improve the level of transparency it provides to the public about data, services and processes. Citizens are now used to digital services providing them with greater levels of information and control.

The more an organisation can help its service users to know what it is doing and understand why decisions have been made, the more a partnership develops, confidence grows and the easier it becomes for both parties.

Action here can help to break down barriers, reduce the need for service users to chase information, and increase the quality of information that comes into and out of our agency.

We are already moving in this direction, hosting on-line training events to support our providers' understanding of how to successfully use our systems for applications, billing and appeals.

Our challenge is to build on this and consider what information and data we could share and what would add most value to service users, to organisations across the MoJ and to our own business processes.

This links with the principle of being user-centred. We will understand what data and information enables our service users to be informed and empowered, helping us to work together more effectively. This will be an important part of our ongoing transformation programme.

A responsive, diverse, learning organisation

Our people are at the heart of our achievements, we support them to learn, develop and share their skills. We expand this approach by encouraging partnership working across the MoJ, wider government and Civil Service.



We recognise that we can and should do more to be truly diverse and inclusive. We are committed to understanding issues that limit opportunity and equality of outcomes for our people by listening to our people and gathering robust data. We are committed to taking action at all levels and to set out our goals and achievements, enabling our people to know they belong and to be at their best.

We want to offer a working environment that celebrates our people as individuals and includes choice about how we collaborate to best meet our business objectives.

We recognise and value the links between the wellbeing of our people, improved morale and productivity.

We have developed a location strategy focused on creating flexible, sustainable, modern and inclusive workspaces,

capable of responding to individual needs. We will adopt sustainable working practices, in line with Government Property Agency design standards, working with our people and delivering value for money.

The evidence from the Civil Service People Survey shows that the LAA is a great place to work. However, we can go further and we can become an employer that people actively seek to work with and stay with, due to our offer, our values and our reputation.

In particular we intend to strengthen our learning and development offer, building on our tailored programmes and setting out a strategic approach to talent management, supported by a coaching culture.



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<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/legal-aid-agency>

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