

Procurement process for Criminal Legal Aid Services from October 2025 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Stage 1

Information regarding the procurement process for the 2025 Standard Crime Contract is provided within the Application Guide (AG) which is located on the tender pages our website. All Applicants are encouraged to read the AG thoroughly as this provides detail that will answer most potential questions.

[Application Guide for publication V.3.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Where not defined in this FAQ document, capitalised terms are either defined in the AG or in the Crime Contract [Standard crime contract 2025 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

As set out under Paragraph 2.5 of the AG, the deadline for Stage 1 Applicants to ask questions about the contents of the AG or the tender process was **23:59 on 1 October 2024** (note this is referred to as the “End date for supplier clarification messages” on the eTendering system). We are therefore unable to answer questions received after that deadline.

Questions that we consider to be of wider interest have been collated and answered centrally in writing to ensure that all potential Applicants have equal access to information. These questions and answers have been published in this FAQ document.

Later versions of this FAQ document, which will be published after the Stage 1 Tender Submission Deadline, will include any questions received after this deadline which are also considered to be of wider interest. Applicants under the Stage 2 Application Process will have further opportunities to ask additional questions once the Stage 2 Application Process opens on 23 October 2024.

Technical Questions on how to use the eTendering system

There is a helpdesk to provide technical support to Applicants using the eTendering system. However, the helpdesk is unable to assist with problems with Applicants own computer hardware or systems. For these types of issues Applicants should contact their usual IT support.

Questions for the helpdesk should be emailed to: help@bravosolution.co.uk.

Alternatively, the telephone number for the helpdesk is 0800 069 8630 and lines are open from 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday.

The helpdesk will be accessible until the tender closes. However, we recommend that Applicants start to complete their Tender early so that they identify any areas in which they need technical support as soon as possible, as the helpdesk is likely to be very busy in the days leading up to the tender Deadline and the LAA cannot guarantee that queries received close to the tender Deadline will be dealt with in time.

The Stage 1 Tender Submission Deadline is 23:59 on Tuesday 22 October 2024

How to apply for a 2025 Crime Contract

Q.1 The current portal access relates to the old identity of this firm. The main contact noted on the current portal left after the last tender and the other contact noted is in the process of leaving. I have been added as a user and am awaiting an email following an online chat with an assistant about changing the users. Given the changes of name and personnel, however, I am unsure as to whether to tender under the current login / account or alternatively, commence a new portal access.

Section 3.3-3.7 of the Application Guide provides information regarding how to register and how to manage registrations on the eTendering system. It is possible to update registrations to accommodate changes of personnel and name. It is possible to obtain technical support and guidance where an Applicant requires help in managing their registration, which can be accessed using the contact information provided in the Application Guide. The contact details are on the first page of this document.

Completing the SQ/ITT

Q.2(a) Please can you clarify what definition you are using to define SME?

Q.2(b) Ref Question 1.11.1 A.9 What constitutes, for your purposes, an SME?

The definition for an SME can be found [here](#).

Q.3 Ref Question 1.40.1 C.13 What constitutes, for your purposes, a relevant commercial organisation as defined by S54 of the relevant quoted Act?

A “relevant commercial organisation” means a commercial organisation as defined by s.54 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, read in conjunction with the Modern Slavery Act 2015 (Transparency in Supply Chains) Regulations 2015/1833. It is a matter for the Applicant to determine whether they fall within that definition.

Q.4 The SQ asks whether I have been a partner of a previous provider, given that my involvement with my previous firm ceased in 2007, do I actually need to provide that information at all?

The LAA requires Key Personnel to provide information relating to similar positions held at all organisations which held LAA contracts. There is, therefore, no time limit on question A.13.

Q.5 Past crime tenders have required the office delivery procurement area to be entered into the ITT in Bravo. There is no function for that this year. Are we correct that all you require is the address and confirmation of the town/city for outer London areas? There is no option to confirm the desired procurement area.

There are no procurement areas under the 2025 Standard Crime Contract. However, where you wish to join the Duty Rota(s) you should answer 'Yes' to question A.3 of the ITT and provide your office postcode (where known) at A.1.v. You will then be informed which schemes you are eligible for as part of the notification process and asked to confirm/select the scheme(s) you wish to join.

Q.6 In the SQ and ITT I have used my pre-marital name as this is the name I have continued to use in the business as it is well known by crime clients. In Q.1.11.2 A.10 I

have listed my married name and added AKA my pre-marital name as I wish to continue using this. This is the clearest way to show the named person for sole PSC on Companies House (with my married name) is actually one and the same person. Please confirm this is permissible. I would intend to repeat the same on the LAA Indemnity form during later verification.

In the answer to question A.10, if an individual is known by more than one name (for example, if they practice under their pre-marital name) please ensure that all their names are included.

If you are known by more than one name (for example, if you practice under your pre-marital name), please complete the SQ using the name you practice under. Please include any other names you may have in your answer to question A.10.

Q.7 Please can you confirm if we are able to submit an additional page through the message portal to list all PSC as the space provided does not have sufficient space to list the required information for each individual.

Where you are unable to provide all of the information requested within the space provided in either the SQ or ITT please submit any additional information via the Bravo message boards. The title of the message should clearly identify that the message contains information to supplement the SQ/ITT response.

Q.8 Is the authorisation number required in 1.7.2/A.5(c) the SRA number for a sole trader?

The Relevant Professional Body Authorisation referenced at A.5 (c) of the SQ is the authorisation reference for the Applicant organisation, not that of any individual(s) within that organisation.

Q.9 Please confirm that 1.11.2/A.10 does not apply to sole traders?

As a sole trader there is no requirement to answer A.10 (information regarding Persons of Significant Control).

Q.10 As with previous tenders, could the LAA kindly confirm that since Companies House only provides the month and year of the date of birth of Persons with Significant Control (PSCs), the LAA will also accept the month and year of birth as sufficient in response to the “Date of Birth” sub-question under “ITT: itt_1032 - 2025 Standard Crime Contract - Stage 1 Selection Questionnaire” Question A.10 (1.11.2)?

A full date of birth (day, month, year) is preferred. If this is not possible, the month and year, is an acceptable minimum.

Q.11 Regarding SQ Question 1.11.5 A13, we have over 120 Partners and would be logistically unworkable to list off all of their previous firms that may have held a LAA contract, and in some instances, this information may not be available. Please confirm that we need only provide this information for the Partners that will be working on the LAA contract.

The LAA requires all Key Personnel to provide information relating to similar positions held at all organisations which held LAA contracts. Therefore, please provide further details regarding the directors/members/partners and the organisation in which they previously held this position.

Q.12 Could you please advise where we upload mandatory attachments and what they are? We are unable to find this in any guidance notes. We have completed the questionnaires but are hesitant to submit due to the warning of making sure all mandatory attachments are attached.

The only additional document that Applicants may need to upload is the Additional Offices Form, which is only applicable to organisations tendering for more than 15 offices. No other documentation is required at this point.

Q.13 Where can I find the firm number for an existing provider?

Details of where to find the Firm Number can be found in the SQ Annex A - 2025 Standard Crime Contract: SQ document, located online at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/crime-contract-2025-tender>

If the applicant currently holds a Legal Aid Contract, the firm number can be found in the Applicants Provider Activity Report.

Q.14 Which address is the Service Address for the PSC - is it their home address or business / office address?

An Applicant may use either its home or business/office address as the service address for PSC as preferred.

Q.15 Is it allowed for the Applicant to be a Company Director of two Providers - one for the Applicant company and one for another Provider who has applied for the 2025 Legal Aid Contract?

Yes. Both organisations must declare the individual's interests in the usual way.

Q.16 Do I upload 1032 to that part of the portal and 1033 to that part?

We do not require Applicants to upload any supporting documentation during the Stage 1 tender process unless specifically requested to do so (e.g. where an additional office form is required). Applicants will be informed as to what additional information we require on notification of the outcome of their tender, and this information should be provided after notification and prior to the Stage 1 Tender Verification Deadline.

Duty Schemes

Q.17 Our office is in X London Borough, but our postcode shows as unrecognised when entered into the government postcode tool advised by the tender Application Guide documentation at <https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council>. Is there another way to check this postcode for tender procurement purposes please?

If your postcode is not recognised by the Find Your Local Council tool or you disagree with the borough it assigns against your postcode, please enter the London Borough that you believe that the office is in and the LAA will confirm as part of the verification process.

Q.18 If the Applicant has been successful in obtaining a Legal Aid Contract to start on October 2025 and after commencement of the Contract wishes to open new offices, will the Applicant be allowed to undertake Duty Solicitor work from these new offices?

Yes, Applicants will be allowed to add new offices and to undertake Duty Solicitor Work from these offices after they have commenced work under the Contract. Where an existing 2025 Crime Contract holder wishes to add a further Office(s) or an additional Class of Work after their 2025 Crime Contract has commenced, they will be able to send the request through the crime.contracts@justice.gov.uk email address, as per Paragraph 6.3 of the Application Guide. Applicants will be able to join Duty Rotas at the next available entry point following successful verification of each new office.

Quality Accreditation

Q.19 What is the current duration of the Specialist Quality Mark (“SQM”) accreditation?

A. The SQM accreditation is valid for three years. We are looking into changing how often reaccreditation is needed and considering extending the reaccreditation period to five years from 1 October 2025. We hope to provide more information on this later this year.

Relevant professional body authorisation

Q.20 We would prefer to wait till we are notified that we have been awarded a contract before we undertake the expense and work of applying to the Solicitors Regulation Authority for Authorisation. Do firms have to have achieved SRA authorisation before the stage 1 tender verification deadline of the 31 January 2025? Or will proof that the application has been submitted to the SRA be sufficient by the tender verification deadline so long as SRA authorisation is obtained before the contract start date of the 1 October 2025?

Any Applicant who wishes to both obtain a Contract commencing on 1 October 2025 and to secure entry to the October 2025 Duty Rotas must submit its fully compliant verification information/documentation by the Stage 1 Verification Deadline of 31 January 2025. This includes confirmation that the Applicant has been granted appropriate authorisation by a Relevant Professional Body.

Offices

Q.21 If we have submitted stage 1 application for existing offices, will this prevent us from submitting stage 2 application for any proposed new office in March 2025. Or will we have to wait until the commencement of the 2025 contact and apply to add a further office by emailing crime.contracts.justicew.gov.uk?

You may only submit one Tender (i.e. a maximum of one response to the SQ and/or ITT). If you wish to change any element of your Tender, e.g. to add a new office, after the relevant Tender Submission Deadline for the Stage you have tendered under has passed, you must contact the LAA using the eTendering message boards and must not attempt to make any amendments to your tender in the eTendering system, as per Paragraph 18.10 of the Application Guide.

Alternatively, you may wait until the Service Commencement Date and e-mail crime.contracts@justice.gov.uk to request an additional office as set out in Paragraph 6.3.

Q.22(a) When an existing entity wants to add a new office and the new address is not yet known/set up etc, is 'TBC' the correct wording for the address section on the ITT for this proposed office?

Q.22(b) If an existing contract holder wants to open a new office for the 2025 contract, do we simply put TBC (To be Confirmed) in the office details as we do not have an address at this time

Q.22(c) Could you confirm how you would want an existing firm to respond when wanting to tender for a new office but do not know the address or postcode at this time. Is it TBC (to be confirmed)?

If an Applicant is seeking to open a new office, but has not yet confirmed the office location, they should enter TBC in the address section of the ITT for the office in question.

Q.23 We are due to move addresses for two of our offices on an, as yet, undetermined date between now and the contract start date. Both new offices will remain within the same Duty Scheme / Police Station Scheme Code. Should I complete the tender with the existing addresses and notify / update once a date for the change of address is known, or complete the tender with both the existing and contemplated addresses and clarify which offices we intend to proceed with prior to the contract start date?

Where you are seeking to open a new office, but have not yet confirmed the office location, you should enter TBC in the address section of the ITT for the office in question. If you intend to move your current office, but have not yet confirmed the new location, you may either enter TBC in the office address or you may provide the address of your existing office and notify the LAA once the new office location has been confirmed.

Q.24 Is it permissible to tender for more than one office within the same Duty Scheme / Police Station Scheme Code?

You may tender for more than one office within the same Duty Scheme area.

Supervision

Q.25 Where there is more than one supervisor do you only require a completed supervisor declaration for one?

You must provide one fully compliant Supervisor Standard and Declaration Form for each Class of Work in which you intend to deliver Contract Work, according to table 4.8 in the Application Guide.

Please note that if you are bidding for a Contract to deliver either Criminal Investigations and Criminal Proceedings or Prison Law Work, you do not need to provide a Supervisor Declaration Form for Appeals and Reviews Work prior to assessment, as these Contracts include an authorisation to deliver Contract Work under the Appeals and Reviews Class of Work (see paragraph 7.4 of the Application Guide).

For any additional Supervisors, LAA Contract Management will confirm within 3 months of the Service Commencement Date that each Supervisor is fully compliant as per Paragraphs 2.3 and 2.19 – 2.20 of the Specification, and you will then need to provide a compliant Declaration Form for each new Supervisor.

Q.26 Please confirm where the supervisor declaration should be uploaded and how?

We do not require Applicants to upload any supporting documentation during the Stage 1 tender process unless specifically requested to do so (e.g. where an additional office form is required). Applicants will be informed as to what additional information we require on

notification of the outcome of their tender, and this information should be provided after notification and prior to the Stage 1 Tender Verification Deadline.

Q.27 Please provide clarification regarding the Appeals and Reviews contract work supervisor requirements. The specification document states the supervisor must hold a current non-conditional practising certificate for the previous three years, however the supervisor declaration makes no mention of this requirement. Does the supervisor need to be 3 years PQE?

Paragraph 2.24 of the 2025 Standard Crime Contract Specification requires that Supervisors must have held a current non-conditional practising certificate for the previous three years.

This requirement is also mentioned at 3(i)(a) of the Standard Crime Supervisor Declaration Form and at 3(i)(a) of the Appeals and Reviews Supervisor Declaration Form.

Q.28(a) Is it the case (as it appears to be) that the supervision ratio contained in previous contracts, of one Supervisor to four Designated Fee Earners, has been removed from the 2025 contract?

Q.28(b) Is there any limit on the number of Designated Fee Earners that one Supervisor can supervise, or it is an unlimited number?

Q.28(c) Is it right that there is no maximum number of fee earners / case workers 1 supervisor can supervise to deliver contract work in the Criminal Investigations and Criminal Proceedings Class of Work?

Providers must ensure that they carry out effective supervision of their Designated Fee Earners and Caseworkers in accordance with the requirements of section 2 of the Specification.

Q.29 If an Agent, not directly employed by us, is supervised by a Supervisor at another firm that they might be linked with, do we also have to formally supervise them or it is enough for us to confirm the identity of their Supervisor at the other firm that they are linked to?

Where a Provider instructs an Agent they have not designated as a Designated Fee Earner, this must subject to compliance with Clause 3 of the Standard Terms. A Provider must designate any Agent who regularly undertakes Contract Work for them as a Designated Fee Earner, in accordance with paragraph 2.30 of the Specification. Contract Work undertaken by you, as a Provider, must be supervised in accordance with the requirements of Paragraph 2 of the Specification.

Q.30 Do self-employed consultants engaged full time and exclusively by us but not directly employed by us, fall within the definition of Agent as defined in clause 1.1 of the Contract? If so, is Section 4.9 of the Contract Specification intended to exclude self-employed Consultants who attract their own work and are remunerated based on fee-sharing agreements, from being entrusted with an entire Matter or Case in the Magistrates or Crown Court?

Any individual (except Counsel) who is not an Employee (as defined at clause 1.1 of the Standard Terms) of a Provider but is engaged by the Provider to undertake Contract Work is an Agent (as defined at clause 1.1 of the Standard Terms). A Provider must designate any Agent who regularly undertakes Contract Work for them as a Designated Fee Earner, in accordance with paragraph 2.30 of the Specification.

Q.31 How do you define “entrusted with an entire Matter or Case” in Section 4.9 of the Contract Specification, and to what extent would other personnel have to be involved in a Matter or Case to avoid being caught by this section?

‘Case’ and ‘Matter’ are defined in clause 1.1 of the Standard Terms.

Q.32 Does the “12 hours per week Contract Work” referred to in Section 2.16 of the Contract Specification include or exclude travel and waiting time?

Travel and waiting time undertaken in respect of Contract Work counts as Contract Work for the purpose of meeting the “12 hours of Contract Work each week” threshold of Paragraph 2.16.

Q.33 Does the “3 hours per month” referred to in Section 2.31 of the Contract Specification include or exclude travel and waiting time?

Travel and waiting time undertaken in respect of Contract Work counts as Contract Work for the purpose of meeting the “less than three hours a month” threshold of Paragraph 2.31.

Q.34 How frequently are we required to update our records of evidence of compliance with the requirements needed to maintain Accredited Representative status under Section 2.28 of the Contract Specification, especially with reference to Agents? Would annual updates be sufficient given the annual CPD and practising certificate requirements of qualified solicitors?

Where a Designated Fee Earner is an Accredited Representative, you must maintain a record of the evidence of compliance with the requirements needed to maintain Accredited Representative status.

Q.35(a) Can 1 Supervisor supervise 1 office of one Provider and 1 office of another Provider to deliver contract work in the Criminal Investigations and Criminal Proceedings Class of Work?

Q.35(b) Can a Supervisor supervise two offices of the same Provider to deliver contract work in the Criminal Investigations and Criminal Proceedings Class of Work?

Q.35(c) If the Supervisor is meant to be employed full time in order to supervise an office for one Provider, how will it then be possible to be able to Supervise one office for another Provider to deliver contract work in the Criminal Investigations and Criminal Proceedings Class of Work?

A Supervisor may also act as a Supervisor for a maximum of one other Provider. Supervisors may act as a Supervisor at a maximum of two Offices.

Please note that any Provider whose Schedule authorises it to undertake Contract Work in the Criminal Investigations and Criminal Proceedings Classes of Work must employ a minimum of one Full Time Equivalent Supervisor who meets the Supervisor Standards at Paragraphs 2.19 to 2.20 for this Class of Work. “Full Time Equivalent” or “FTE” is defined at Paragraph 1.2 of the Specification and “means the equivalent of one individual working 35 hours in a standard 7 day week (excluding breaks). More than one individual may together make up the FTE requirement.” We would not expect the same Supervisor to be able to work full time for two Providers.

Supervisors may act as a Supervisor at a maximum of two Offices. Where a Supervisor acts as a Supervisor at another Provider this means they may only act as a Supervisor at one of your Offices as they will also be acting as a Supervisor at an Office of another Provider.

Q.36 What does "full time equivalent " mean?

"Full Time Equivalent" or "FTE" is defined at Paragraph 1.2 of the Specification and "means the equivalent of one individual working 35 hours in a standard 7-day week (excluding breaks). More than one individual may together make up the FTE requirement."

Cyber Essentials

Q.37 How do new entrants who only get access to their offices close to the service commencement date obtain Cyber essentials?

Cyber Essentials is an assessment of your organisation's IT infrastructure. Applicants must have confirmed that they will have this in place for the Service Commencement Date in order to proceed.

Q.38(a) What is the deadline stipulated in the SQ ITT to obtain the appropriate Cyber Essentials Certificate?

Q.38(b) When will firms be expected to have their Cyber Security Certificate? Will it be required for the 31 January deadline?

As per Paragraph 4.8 of the Application Guide, Applicants must complete the declaration in the SQ warranting that they will hold a current and valid Cyber Essentials certificate, or an equivalent certification as may be agreed with us, by the Service Commencement Date. There is no requirement for this to be in place by 31 January 2025. LAA Contract Management will confirm compliance with this requirement within 3 months of the Service Commencement Date.

Q.39 What are the implications for firms unable to secure Basic Cyber Essentials prior to the start of the contract on 1st October 2025? We envisage delays as the accreditation is not currently held by many legal aid firms and there may be delays with assessment bodies checking self-completed forms. Will there be any leniency and additional 3-6 months provided, or will it be seen as a fundamental breach and lead to contract termination?

All Applicants are required to hold Cyber Essentials certification, or an equivalent certification as may be agreed with us, by the relevant Service Commencement Date and to maintain this throughout the lifetime of the 2025 Crime Contract.

Changes to organisational structure

Q.40(a) We are currently a Limited Liability Partnership (LLP). We are intending to change legal status to a Limited Company but do not currently know what date that change of legal status is likely to take effect, nor whether the Limited Company will be formed by the verification date of 31 January 2025. How should we deal with this?

Q.40(b) We are currently applying to change the partnership into a limited company. We will become a limited company on the 1st January 2025, the management structure will not change. Do we apply for the tender in the new limited company or the existing partnership.

As set out at Paragraph 17.1 of the Application Guide, you should bid as the entity that will be delivering the contract work from the Service Commencement Date. If you intend to change the legal status and/or corporate structure of your organisation following the submission of your Tender, you must notify the LAA via the eTendering message boards as soon as reasonably practicable. At a minimum, you must notify us on, or within 14 days of any material constitutional change that affects or might affect you, to request the LAA's consideration of the same (see Paragraph 17.2 of the Application Guide).

Q.41 We are proposing to merge with another organisation in a different CJS area. Both firms currently hold a 2022 General Criminal Contract. The merger is proposed to take effect on 1st January 2025 and we will be liaising with our respective LAA Contract managers with regards to novating the existing 2022 Crime Contract from Firm A to Firm B. The question is how both organisations tender for the new 2025 contract. Whilst we are confident the merger will go ahead there is the remote possibility it may not. How should we bid to ensure the following:

- **Both firms hold contracts in the event the merger does not go ahead as planned**
- **The merged firm holds a contract with schedules for all of that firm's existing offices and the new additional office**

As set out in Paragraphs 4.2 and 4.5 of the Application Guide, the LAA will only contract with single legal entities and an Applicant may only tender for and be party to a single 2025 Crime Contract. Therefore, if the merger does not go ahead, only firms that have applied in their own right can be treated as having applied.

In the event the merger does go through, section 17 of the Application Guide sets out the process should Applicants seek to make a change to their organisation status during the procurement process.

Applicants that are subject to a material constitutional change after the Tender Submission Deadline should note that such requests may delay notification of contract award, confirmation that the Applicant has successfully Verified its Tender, upload of contract documentation onto the CWA system and/or eligibility to join Duty Schemes. Please also note that the contracting entity must be fully constituted and be able to demonstrate it meets the minimum 2025 Crime Contract requirements to verify its Tender and be issued with a 2025 Crime Contract.

Q.42 We would appreciate confirmation re the details provided at sections 17.1 & 17.2 of the Application Guide. Our circumstances are that we are working towards merging with another provider and have set a date for this merger as 1st November 2024. Are we correct in thinking that both ourselves and the firm we are merging with should submit individual applications and provide responses confirming the position as it is at the Tender Submission Deadline (23:59 on 22 October 2024). Then if the merger goes as planned on 1st Nov 2024, we have 14 days from that date to notify you of the change via this message board?

The requirements for any Applicant who intends to change their organisational status after submission of their tender are set out at Section 17 of the Application Guide.

Where this is a change to legal status or corporate structure, Applicants must notify the LAA via the e-Tendering message boards as soon as reasonably practicable and by no later than 14 days of any material constitutional change, as per Paragraph 17.2.

General

Q.43 Won't providers who tender for the 2025 Crime Contract simply be locking themselves into a 10-year contract without any prospect of a fee increase?

Remuneration levels are a matter for Regulations rather than the contract. Legal Aid contracts can accommodate fee changes made in Regulations.