

**The Legal Services
Complaints Commissioner's
summary of the
Law Society's progress against its
Client Care Programme**

**Summary of progress and
activity as at March 2009**

THE LAW SOCIETY'S CLIENT CARE PROGRAMME

Background

In June 2008 the Legal Services Complaints Commissioner announced that she would be imposing a penalty of £275,000 on the Law Society following her decision to declare the complaints handling plan submitted by the Law Society for the period 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009 as inadequate.

On 4 March 2009, following a number of detailed discussions with both the Law Society and the Ministry of Justice, the Commissioner and the Law Society announced that they had reached a regulatory settlement whereby the monies will now be devoted to a range of Client Care measures costing £275,000, designed to promote diversity and excellence in the profession and to improve standards of client care and complaints handling.

Agreed measures

The measures agreed by the Commissioner and the Law Society include:

- Recruiting a Client Care Project Manager at a cost of £40,000, who will be responsible for overseeing the range of measures agreed, providing project plans and reporting to the Commissioner on a quarterly basis on progress and expenditure under each programme of agreed measures.
- Project 1 - the Law Society committing £100,000 to establish a Consultancy Service, which will involve the recruitment and training of 20 consultants nationally. These consultants will work with around 200 firms identified as needing support and information on best practice in client care and complaints handling, and will evaluate and monitor firms' progress as they implement the necessary changes.
- Project 2 - the Law Society will also launch a dedicated client care and complaints handling helpline, which will involve taking over the Legal Complaints Service (LCS) telephone helpline for solicitors (Lawyerline) and relocating it to its own Helplines team, staffed by solicitors. The Law Society has committed £30,000 to recruit additional resource, train the existing team and launch the new complaints helpline.
- Project 3 - the Law Society will provide additional funding to the Solicitors' Diversity Access Scheme. With the support of the Law Society Charity, the Solicitors' Diversity Access Scheme is able to award scholarships to a number of students to enable them to undertake courses leading to qualification as a solicitor. The Law Society will make an additional £105,000 to fund two additional places per year for five years on its Diversity Access Scheme.

The Commissioner's summary of progress and activity as at March 2009

The Law Society has provided the following update to the Commissioner giving details of the activity it has undertaken against each project during Quarter 1 – March 2009.

Recruiting a Client Care Project Manager

The Law Society has reported to the Commissioner that a temporary client care manager has been appointed on 31 March 2009 to manage the activities within the programme pending the appointment of a full time secondment to the post.

Project 1 – Client Care Consultancy Service

The Law Society has reported to the Commissioner that:

- Complaints data has been gathered and analysed on the referrals to LCS over the last 12 months. This data has been analysed to establish numbers of complaints by region, complaint type, complaint outcome, field of law, size of firm and complaint/fee earner ratio.
- Service will support 210 firms initially. It has been decided that firms who have had involvement with miners' compensation claims will be excluded from the remit of the service due to the specific nature of the issues with those firms.
- Links have been established with the Practise Standards Unit of SRA to ensure that the consultancy service offers a complementary and not conflicting service.
- Communication to the profession has begun to explain and promote the purpose and methodology of the service. The Client Care programme has received significant press coverage in the Gazette and on the Law Society website during week commencing 3 March 2009.
- Work has begun to design the communications strategy to the firms to be supported by the consultancy service.
- Work is underway to identify and engage the services of 20-30 consultants who will deliver the service across the country.
- An expert has been engaged to draw up the consultancy package that will be delivered by the service. The package is currently at design stage and expertise has been called in from appropriate departments of the Law Society and LCS to ensure that the package integrates existing knowledge and expertise.

Expenditure for this quarter – £4,000 for consultancy fees for the preparation of client care materials.

Project 2 - Client care and complaints handling helpline

The Law Society has reported to the Commissioner that:

- Work on establishing the model of the Lawyerline service has been completed. LCS was consulted to understand the basic requirements of the service that was provided by them. Remit of the new Law Society model has been developed and agreed and will be refined once the service has been tested in practice.
- Lawyerline was re-launched by the Law Society on 30 March 2009. All LCS Lawyerline calls are now redirected through to the new service.

- An internal advertisement for a full time post to run the service was advertised and interviews took place on 26 March. It is expected that the member of staff will take up the new appointment by May 2009.
- Law Society website has been updated and leaflets redesigned to explain the purpose of the new service along with a press release. The Law Society intends to begin a high profile campaign to market the service to the profession.

Expenditure for this quarter – none.

Project 3 - Diversity Access Scheme

The Law Society has reported that online applications have opened for the Diversity Access Scheme 2009. Two additional places have been accommodated for as agreed.

Expenditure for this quarter – none.

Cumulative costs summary for the Client Care Programme

Consultancy Services	£4,000
Client Care Helpline	£0
Diversity Access Scheme	£0
Client Care Manager	£0

Total expenditure during Quarter 1 = £4,000