Final engagement session on exploring current legal aid funding tools

Legal Aid Reform



Recap – Engagement under Legal Aid Reform

Context for Today's Session

- First engagement session in January, where we introduced the wider Legal Aid Reform programme
- workshops held throughout March and April
- Today marks the final session in this *initial* engagement series focused on current funding tools under legal aid.

Positioning Within the Legal Aid Reform Programme

- This engagement series is only one component of the broader Legal Aid Reform programme.
- Legal Aid Reform is not a single project; it comprises multiple workstreams aimed at identifying and exploring opportunities for change and improvement.
- Today's session concludes the engagement specifically on funding tools, not engagement under the wider, long-term reform programme.

Framework of themes to structure our engagement

- What legal aid funding is there to achieve (across the range of available funding methods – judicare as core and also other methods) – what expect to see achieved

- How funding tools are flexible and fit for purposes – no fixed mix or model in mind – what range have in toolbox to achieve intended ends, how flexible and fit for purpose

- What kind of evidence, learning and user insight can be meaningful and effective in this context

- Who decides what - governance

Engagement strategy

- **Top session**
  - information session
  - opportunity to hear about information related to ongoing reform
  - SLAB's approach – how we want to work
  - opportunity to ask questions
- **Workshops**
  - topic specific
  - smaller in-depth workshops
  - experience with accessing and using the different legal aid funding methods
  - exploring the flexibility of our current funding methods
- **Tail session (this session)**
  - information session
  - opportunity to hear updates related to ongoing reform
  - opportunity to hear about key findings or outcomes from the workshop
  - gather insights and recommendations for improvement/change

Workshop

- Engagement with stakeholders across the third sector, law centres, academia, and the legal profession to explore more flexible use of existing legal aid funding tools

- Workshops examined how different funding tools are used individually and in combination, where they add value, and how they could be adapted to better meet needs and strategic objectives.

- Focus on understanding not only each funding method but also how different approaches support different types of work and deliver distinct outcomes.

Workshop - framework

- Stage 1 – Establishing a common baseline on current legal aid funding tools
- Stage 2 - How does the use of legal aid funding tools impact on business decisions
- Stage 3 – Capabilities of legal aid funding tools
- Stage 4 – Strategic themes

Workshop - aims

- Deepen our understand of how different funding tools – under legal aid – work in practice
- Explore new possibilities and advantages around using some of these tools individually or in combination
- Explore the strategic value of using a mix of tools
- Sharing insight and experience from the previous workshops
- Identifying opportunities to improve how funding tools can be used so they better meet our needs

Workshop – overall reflections

Support for combining funding tools

- Support for combining judicare + grant funding
- Recognition that each tool serves different purposes; neither can meet all needs alone
- Judicare valued for its flexibility in accepting cases and its responsiveness
- Grant funding seen as essential for targeted, proactive, strategic provision

Workshop – overall reflections

Current legal aid funding tools

- Current legal aid funding tools need review and reform
- Across civil, children's and criminal legal aid, stakeholders want tools that are more flexible, have clear governance, and are easier to use
- Grant funding remains essential for strategic, preventative, and targeted work
- Judicare remains central to legal aid
- All funding mechanisms need to be flexible, administratively proportionate, and more responsive to emerging needs
- Strong interest in exploring existing but non-used tools, such as grant funding for children's legal aid, and Advice & Assistance for advice organisations

Workshop – overall reflections

Mixing funding tools

- Law centres and advice agencies already combining grants + judicare
- Mixed approaches help target reach, adapt to local context, and improve efficiency
- Stakeholders keen to test practical pilots using combined tools
- Ideas included: partnerships between advice agencies and private solicitor firms building on existing models

Workshop – overall reflections

Openness to innovation

- Strong interest in innovative, variable, or “high-trust” approaches alongside existing tools
- Agreement that current funding tools are in need of review and reform

Dependencies identified included:

- Broader use, including community-led use of grants
- Multi-year funding
- Clearer decision timelines
- Streamlined reporting (including re-use of internal reports)

Need for increased grant amounts, longer term planning, and stronger support for law centres and advice agencies.

Workshop – overall reflections

Engagement outcomes – areas of shared interest

- Recognising that a mixed and flexible funding toolbox is needed at strategic level
- Raising awareness of the wider funding toolbox and supporting wider partnership models with providers across sectors
- Exploring under-used powers and tools
- Exploring options to build on capabilities and tackle limitations
- Exploring options for additional tools – appetite for a high-trust funding tool

Next steps and introduction to the next set of engagement

- Continue with engagement on other areas under Legal Aid Reform

- Engagement cycles between broad discussions and focused specialist sessions

- The next workstream will focus on developing a purpose for legal aid and evidence-based planning

Next steps and introduction to the next set of engagement

Purpose of Legal Aid

We've identified the need for a dual purpose:

1. Rule of law purpose – independent of the government of the day
2. Strategic purpose – supports policy priorities and system change

A clear purpose provides the foundation for forward planning, accountability, and prioritisation.

Next steps and introduction to the next set of engagement

Building an Evidence Base

To support the Investment Planning Framework, we need a strong evidence structure.

We want to understand **what types of evidence** are needed to:

- guide future priorities
- shape the design of legal aid-funded services
- assess whether services work for the people and purposes they're intended to support

Next steps and introduction to the next set of engagement

Future Engagement

- We expect to continue with a **mix of broad sessions** and **smaller, focused workshops**
- We will reach out to a **select group of stakeholders** with the specific expertise needed for the next phase
- Not being contacted immediately is **not** a reflection of the value of anyone's insight
- We anticipate running the next round of smaller sessions in **July**

For more information please visit:

www.slab.org.uk

