

The Advice Services Alliance 2006

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CLS Support Director
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Senior Project Advisor

We provide practical support and guidance to organisations applying for or operating legal aid contracts and the Community Legal Service Quality Mark. We deliver training to 250 organisations a year; operate a telephone and email consultancy service; publish briefings; and provide regular updates through an email bulletin service.

Main achievements in 2005/6

- We launched a secure users area on the ASA corporate website. This provides CLS Support users with access to our briefings and our email bulletins and enables them to send an enquiry to our consultancy service online.
- We published the results of our 2005 annual survey of NFP organisations, which focused on Level 1 work. The results increased our understanding of the pattern of Level 1 use amongst NFP organisations and helped us identify key areas to focus on in our subsequent Guidance on interpretation of the Level 1 rule.
- We delivered 7 training courses, running 41 events across the country (including a new course on Eligibility). We trained 590 people from 247 organisations.
- We restructured our training programme so that in 2006/7, training will be available as a rolling programme throughout the year, rather than in the spring and summer only.

Plans for 2006/7 include:

- A new series of email bulletins focussing on future changes in publicly funded legal services including the Preferred Supplier scheme, CLACS and CLANS and new methods of payment.
- A survey of NFP organisations to cover recruitment, retention and workforce development.
- Delivery of our annual training programme of 7 courses. 52 events have been advertised. All our courses continue to be accredited by the Law Society, each attracting 4.5 continuing professional development (CPD) points.
- A Review of our training programme to develop courses covering the new challenges facing NFP organisations.
- Investigating the feasibility of providing tailored on-site consultancy to organisations, focussing on the practicalities of change, including governance and management issues.

“Hi folks — just a note to say how much I and my specialist team appreciate your email bulletins. They’re straight-forward, easy to read and understand and full of the sort of useful practical advice we need. Keep ‘em coming!”

CAB Specialist Services Manager

Martin Jones

Project Director

Theresa Harris

Information Manager

Mary Weber

Features Manager

Antonia Murfin

Locum Features Manager

Advicenow's website, www.advicenow.org.uk, provides access to the best internet information on rights and the law and we promote high quality information as an integral part of advice and legal services.

We bring together information from ASA members, government bodies, and specialist agencies.

This information is selected carefully; quality checked and summarised to ensure it is accurate and up-to-date.

We also publish our own information giving a lively and readable overview of rights and legal issues. Case studies, quizzes and cartoons provide an easy way into legal issues combined with practical information on how to deal with problems. Much of this material is available as free downloadable leaflets.

Living Together and Family Mediation

Our Living Together campaign challenges the myth of common law marriage and provides cohabiting couples with the information they need to safeguard their interests. We have produced a wide range of free information guides: the number of downloads is now over 1.2 million. We work with a PR company to get our message across via the mass media and have achieved widespread coverage of the key issues on TV, radio, national and local press and in magazines. We've even influenced a story line in Emmerdale, working with scriptwriters to ensure they presented the story of a cohabiting couple splitting up accurately.

The Family Mediation campaign used the same techniques to show how mediation works and to promote the Family Mediation Helpline.

Commissions

We have produced 17 titles for the Legal Services Commission including Divorce — a survival toolkit; Claiming compensation; Bailiffs and debt collection; and How to get good asylum advice. A number of these titles were independently evaluated by talking to users and advisers in advice agencies and other community organisations. The report emphasises the need to explain the law in a practical way, relating directly to the real life problems of clients. We have also produced information for advisers as part of a DTI funded project to prepare for age discrimination legislation which came into effect in October 2006.

Public Legal Education

Following a successful consultation exercise (carried out jointly with LAG and the Citizenship Foundation) we now play a leading role in the independent Task Force, chaired by Professor Hazel Genn, which is developing proposals to promote and improve public legal education.



The Policy Team

Ann Lewis

Policy Director

Shanta Bhavnani

Quality of advice

Adam Griffith

Legal Services

Val Reid

Alternative Dispute Resolution

We represent the interests of the advice sector and its clients.

We respond to policy developments and initiate debate on issues of importance to the advice sector.

ASA has been involved in the development of funding programmes. We have worked closely with the Big Lottery Fund which launched its Advice Plus programme, worth £50 million, in June 2006. We also advised the Department of Trade and Industry on the Financial Inclusion Fund, which will contribute £45 million to the development of face-to-face debt advice services.

The Carter Review of Legal Aid Procurement, published in July 2006, will have a significant impact on the advice sector. ASA has responded to these proposals and will lead contractual negotiations with the Legal Services Commission (LSC) on the future delivery of legal aid services by the advice sector.

We also responded to proposals for change to the regulation of legal advice and the LSC's plan to contract only with preferred suppliers.

In February 2006, we gave evidence to the Constitutional Affairs Select Committee on the future of compensation claims.

Our Policy Bites e-mail update was launched in 2006. This provides summary information about developments relevant to legal advice services policy.

We continue to provide information on developments in Alternative Dispute Resolution through regular updates and our ADRnow website. User feedback on the site is overwhelmingly positive, and the average monthly page requests now exceed 100,000.

We have also developed resources for advice agencies which include A Practical Guide to Outcomes for Advice and training on Costing your Services.

Finally, our March 2006 conference 'Advice uncovered', was attended by 200 people. We received excellent feedback and, as a result, have decided that these conferences will take place annually.



Advice uncovered:
the real value of what we do

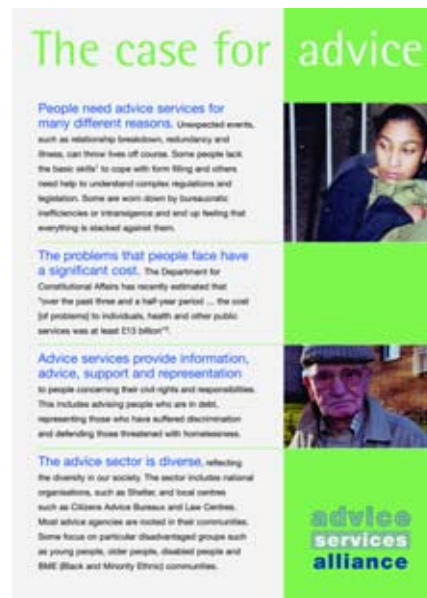
A one-day conference examining the changing sector and looking at how we can make the case for advice

FRIDAY 24th MARCH 2006

Friends House
173 Euston Road
London NW1 2BJ

www.asauk.org.uk/conference

advice services alliance



The case for advice

People need advice services for many different reasons. Unexpected events, such as relationship breakdown, redundancy and illness, can leave people off course. Some people lack the basic skills to cope with form filling and others need help to understand complex regulations and legislation. Some are worn down by bureaucratic inefficiencies or intransigence and end up feeling that everything is stacked against them.

The problems that people face have a significant cost. The Department for Constitutional Affairs has recently estimated that "over the past three and a half year period ... the cost (of problems) to individuals, health and other public services was at least £15 billion".

Advice services provide information, advice, support and representation to people concerning their civil rights and responsibilities. This includes advising people who are in debt, representing those who have suffered discrimination and defending those threatened with homelessness.

The advice sector is diverse, reflecting the diversity in our society. The sector includes national organisations, such as Shelter, and local centres such as Citizens Advice Bureaux and Law Centres. Most advice agencies are rooted in their communities. Some focus on particular disadvantaged groups such as young people, older people, disabled people and BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) communities.

advice services alliance

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Adviceuk

Age Concern England

Citizens Advice

DIAL UK

Law Centres Federation

Shelter

Shelter Cymru

Youth Access

The Advice Services Alliance (ASA) is the umbrella body for independent advice services in the UK.

We promote the development of high quality services and co-operation between advice organisations.

We have a Policy Team whose current priorities include Quality of Advice, Legal Services, Alternative Dispute Resolution and Advice Sector Funding.

Our project, Community Legal Service Support, provides information, training and consultancy to advice agencies applying for or maintaining their Community Legal Service Quality Mark or legal aid contract.

Our award-winning Advicenow website aims to help people make sense of the law and their rights by providing access to accurate, up-to-date information.

During the year we ran two successful national conferences. We also ran seminars for members on key policy issues facing the sector, including the Community Legal Service strategy. We played an active role in the Access to Justice Alliance, which campaigns for the protection and proper funding of civil legal aid.

We continued to produce policy briefings and practical guidance for advice agencies, respond to government proposals relating to advice, and represent the advice sector in discussions with policy makers.

For further information on the work of ASA and access to our policy reports and briefings, please visit our website at www.asauk.org.uk. This also contains links to our other websites: ADRnow — exploring alternatives to Court and Advicenow — making sense of the law and your rights.

ASA information

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Supporters



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