



Ten Years of LASPO – YLAL Statement

1. This month marks ten years of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (“LASPO”) being in force. Before LASPO legal aid was available for almost all areas of law. Overnight, LASPO excluded large areas of the law from legal aid. To name but a few areas, legal aid became unavailable for most issues relating to debt and welfare, employment, and most private family law. For those areas that remained, LASPO restricted the specific types of cases where legal aid would be eligible and tightened the rules around eligibility for legal aid, excluding many on low incomes who were previously eligible.
2. LASPO was designed not to facilitate access to justice, but to limit it. It is a product of the austerity politics that has decimated the welfare state and which has caused untold misery to people across the country. In the ten years since LASPO’s implementation, Young Legal Aid Lawyers (“YLAL”) has called consistently for repeal and reform.
3. Just months after LASPO came into force, YLAL released [research](#) which demonstrated the worrying spill over effect it was already having elsewhere in the advice sector. Five years on in 2018, we [told the MoJ](#) this harmful piece of legislation was failing to achieve its stated aims - except of course, radically reducing spending on legal aid, which it has undeniably succeeded in doing.
4. Ten years on from LASPO, young legal aid lawyers are still here, and we are still fighting. We are inspired by those who have come before us and are motivated by a commitment to social justice and ensuring that legal advice and representation are available to all, regardless of circumstances. We believe that legal aid means justice.
5. We choose to mark this moment not by focusing solely on the scale of the crisis, but by also stressing the need to begin to imagine now what the future of legal aid must look like. With a general election on the horizon, this moment has to be seen as a fork in the road and an opportunity to make a case for how things must be different.
6. As junior lawyers working on the front line, we are in no doubt of the need for radical, transformative change. We see first-hand the human impact that LASPO has

had on people, and we refuse to accept that vulnerable people should be routinely denied access to justice.

7. We note that in the select few areas where civil legal aid is available:
 - 49.8m people (84%) do not have a legal aid lawyer in their local authority who can help with a welfare and benefits appeal ,
 - 42m people (71%) do not have a legal aid lawyer in their local authority who can help with a community care matter
 - 53m people (90% of the population) do not have a legal aid lawyer in their local authority that can help with issues relating to education
 - 39m people (66%) do not have a legal aid lawyer in their local authority to help with immigration and asylum issues; and
 - 25.3m people (42%) do not have a legal aid lawyer in their local authority that can help with housing issues¹

8. Things do not need to be this way. The damage done by LASPO can be undone. Repealing LASPO and replacing it with a well-funded, sustainable legal aid system must be a priority of any government - present or future - which is serious about ensuring access to justice.

9. Just as we call for the repeal of LASPO, we call for an end to the exploitative working environment that LASPO has enabled and allowed to flourish over the last ten years. To be a young legal aid lawyer ten years on from LASPO means accepting the prospect of low-paid, often even unpaid, work. It means not being guaranteed a real living wage. It means being subject to vicarious trauma, and not having access to wellbeing support. All too often, it can lead to burnout.

10. The legal profession – like justice itself – must be genuinely accessible to all. The future legal aid system that we campaign for cannot rely, as it does now, on the goodwill, empathy, and commitment of the workforce that sustains it. All legal aid lawyers deserve good working conditions and to be fairly paid for the work they do.

11. At what we hope will be a critical juncture, YLAL urges legal aid lawyers working to come together and organise to fight for the survival of the public service we are committed to. We stand in solidarity with groups of workers up and down the country - including members of the criminal bar - who have taken a stand for meaningful change in recent months. It is time for all legal aid lawyers to stand up and affirm what we already know: things do not have to be this way, legal aid does have a future, enough is enough.

¹ As per [the Law Society's updated Legal aid dessert maps dated 31 March 2023](#).

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About Young Legal Aid Lawyers

Young Legal Aid Lawyers ('YLAL') is a group of aspiring and junior lawyers committed to practising in those areas of law, both criminal and civil, that have traditionally been publicly funded. We have around 3500 members including students, paralegals, trainee solicitors, pupil barristers and qualified junior lawyers throughout England and Wales.

We believe that the provision of good quality, publicly funded legal assistance is essential to protecting the interests of the vulnerable in society and upholding the rule of law. As well as campaigning for a sustainable legal aid system, our core objectives are to increase social mobility and diversity within the legal aid sector, to promote the interests of new entrants and junior lawyers and provide a network for people beginning their careers in the legal aid sector.
