

Responding to the rapid rise in demand for free legal advice

News story

A new report from the Ministry of Justice demonstrates how government funding has maintained and expanded vital access to free specialist legal advice.



Through the Covid-19 Specialist Advice Services Scheme (CSASS), £5.4 million was awarded in 2020/21 by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to the Law Centres Network and Community Justice Fund (CJF) to support not-for-profit specialist legal advice organisations and Law Centres. This funding enabled recipient organisations to remain operational and adapt their services, through investing in technology, to deliver support remotely and hire more staff to keep up with demand.

Recognising the pressures on the services provided by the not-for-profit legal advice sector due to significant reduction in funding and the ongoing negative impacts of COVID-19, the MOJ has committed renewed seed investment into the CJF over the financial year 2021/22.

The report's key findings are:

- 72 organisations received funding and remained operational despite the challenges created by the pandemic.
- The average size of the grants made was £71,000. The largest expenditure was on wages for staff where 71% of funds were spent, indicating that the grants were primarily used by grantees to remain operational.
- Grantees reported increased activity than in the corresponding year prior to the pandemic – most had seen an increase in support offered to clients in areas of social welfare (namely Housing, Employment, and Debt).
- Grantees embraced remote means of communication allowing them to continue to deliver services despite restrictions – telephone was used most frequently when restrictions were in place, however, online means including email and chat functions were also adopted.

- Organisations are anticipating using a blended approach to delivery going forward – this will be dictated by client need.

Notes:

- The [full report](#) can be read on GOV.UK
- Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, MOJ and DCMS provided £5.4 million to not-for-profit providers of specialist legal advice, through the COVID-19 Specialist Advice Services Scheme (CSASS) grant.
- The funding comprised of £2.8 million from HMT, via DCMS, and £2.6 million from MOJ's budget. We awarded £3 million to law centres, via the Law Centres Network (LCN), and £2.4 million to specialist legal advice organisations through the Community Justice Fund (CJF). The CJF is a joint initiative between leading social justice organisations including Advice UK, Law Centres Network, Citizens Advice, the AB Charitable Trust, Indigo Trust, and Paul Hamlyn Foundation.
- The CJF is administered by the Access to Justice Foundation (ATJF) and is designed to provide support to not-for-profit specialist legal advice organisations.
- The Ministry of Justice invested a further £2 million in the Community Justice Fund in 2021/22 through the Sector Sustainability Grant in recognition of the sustained impact of the pandemic and reduced income of the legal support advice sector.

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