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Dame Meg Hillier MP  
Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts  
House of Commons  
Palace of Westminster  
SW1A 0AA  
[By email]

16/05/2024

Dear Chair,

At the Public Accounts Committee hearing on 25 March 2024 on the “Value for Money from Legal Aid”, several questions were raised on the data collected by the Legal Aid Agency (LAA) and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). These questions covered the kinds of data collected, the process of the collection and how it is both presented and used to inform operational and policy work. Following on from the hearing, the Permanent Secretary, Antonia Romeo, and I thought it would be helpful to write to the Committee with a summary note (Annex A and Annex B). This note provides an overview of the data and evidence the LAA and the MoJ collect routinely and in response to MoJ Policy development processes.

I hope that the enclosed note is useful. I am also copying this letter to Sir Bob Neill MP.

Yours Sincerely,

**RICHARD PRICE**

## Annex A

### Summary of Legal Aid Data and Evidence: Geographic Analysis, Diversity and Vulnerability

#### Introduction

The MoJ and LAA collect substantial amounts data and evidence on Legal Aid, much of which is published regularly through Legal Aid National Statistics on gov.uk, and as part of policy development work such as reviews, consultations and Impact Assessments. The MoJ works closely with stakeholders such as The Law Society (TLS) and Bar Council (BC), regularly sharing data and analysis, to feed into stakeholder advisory groups such as the Criminal Legal Aid Advisory Board (CLAAB), and to improve access to data such as through data sharing agreements. This note summarises the data and evidence we routinely collect and publish in our Legal Aid National Statistics – including the maps available in analytical tools, as well as the data and evidence we collect and analyse non-routinely, as part of the policy making process.

#### Legal Aid Statistics - published quarterly and annually

- The Legal Aid statistics, first released in 2014, has expanded over time to a quarterly release covering all Legal Aid schemes showing the volume of work both starting and completing and the associated expenditure with each closed claim.
- A bulletin, tables and analysis tools allowing access to the underlying data underpinning the quarterly release are also released each quarter and this provides more detail than the tables with breakdown by, say, offence or outcome of the claim. These quarterly releases can be found at [Legal Aid statistics - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk).
- Once a year the quarterly release is enhanced to include other areas such as diversity of clients and provider-level information on both claims started and completed. This release can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/legal-aid-statistics-january-to-march-2023>.
- This provider-level information gives a breakdown for both solicitor firms and individual barristers across the schemes. This gives figures for the providers for each quarter covering their workload and expenditure received. Alongside this information, geographical variables including postcode, local authority area and region are provided. These can be used within analysis tools - also released alongside our National Statistics - to allow users to view detailed information including some mapping tools. Our own release in PowerBI can be found here: <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiYjI5ZjUxNjktODAxYS00ZTQ3LTliMTUtZGlyYjA2MjkwZDQ3IiwidCI6ImM2ODc0NzI4LTcxZTYtNDFmZS1hOWUxLTJlOGMzNjc3NmFkOCIsImMiOiJh9>

#### Mapping Provided in Published Analytical Tools

The data that is released showing the location of each provider and their workload and expenditure is used within a variety of analytical tools also released alongside the bulletin.

These show not only the locations but also thematic maps covering local authority and regional aggregations allowing users to easily see where the Legal Aid fund is received by providers.

Each annual release has an accompanying report showing, for each provider, the work undertaken and where each office is located for both civil and crime schemes. This same report has sections covering every provider and their starts and completions over the last few years and also allows reporting on region and local authorities.

Quarterly figures are released giving the number of contracted providers in each area of law. Within this report there are procurement maps showing for each category (for example housing) the number of contracted firms for the period in each geographic area.

Finally, within the Criminal Legal Aid Datashare with the Bar Council there are maps providing regional breakdowns of diversity characteristics for the bar. Examples of these mapping tools can be seen in Annex B below.

### **Non-routine Data and Evidence**

In addition to published National Statistics, the MoJ works to identify gaps in data and evidence, and supplements this with data collection and evidence gathering exercises.

As part of the Criminal Legal Aid Review (CLAR) accelerated areas project, which began in 2018, MoJ's Legal Aid Analysis team worked in partnership with TLS, BC and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to undertake a ground-breaking data linking exercise that matched income and diversity characteristics from all four data sources (Legal Aid Statistics, TLS, BC and CPS) to provide the most comprehensive dataset on barristers and solicitors yet. The first iteration of this data was published in the Data Compendium<sup>1</sup> and is publicly available. It provides detailed *regional breakdowns* of: work volumes, barrister and solicitor firms' public fee income, duty solicitor leavers and joiners, duty solicitor age distributions, solicitor trainees, number of firms, leaving and joining firms, barrister defence and prosecution work value and volume. This data now forms part of the Legal Aid National Statistics and has become an annual publication<sup>2</sup>. This will continue to improve transparency of data and evidence and start to provide a useful time series of data for further analysis to be undertaken.

The Data Compendium was one of many pieces of evidence that fed into a further review - Criminal Legal Aid Independent review (CLAIR) - which was led by Lord Bellamy KC. As part of the CLAIR process, Lord Bellamy commissioned other research to fill evidence gaps such as the provider profitability survey.<sup>3</sup> While the results of this did not present geographical differences because of the small sample size, the survey was designed to be representative across geographic areas.

To replicate the datasets generated from criminal Legal Aid, as part of the ongoing Review of Civil Legal Aid (RoCLA), we have undertaken a similar data matching exercise for civil Legal Aid. This combines Legal Aid data with from TLS and the BC to allow for detailed income and characteristics analysis including location data. This data will be collated and

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<sup>1</sup> [data-compendium.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Legal Aid statistics - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Independent Review of Criminal Legal Aid - Annexes \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) Annex J.

analysed as part of RoCLA, providing an overview of the data publication with a series of deep dives.

RoCLA has a comprehensive data and evidence gathering programme that is due to be released across several publications later in 2024, which includes:

- **An independent economic market research report by PA Consulting.** This work seeks to understand geographical differences in supply and demand, among other things, and considers access and how user vulnerabilities such as language barriers interact with this.
- **A comparative analysis of Legal Aid systems** – The work aims to explore the approaches taken by different countries in tackling their geographic coverage challenges. The report was published on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2024<sup>4</sup>.
- **A civil Legal Aid provider survey** published on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2024<sup>5</sup>. The survey sought to be representative across all regions, though the sample size was not large enough to present findings at a regional level.
- **Qualitative analysis on users and providers of Legal Aid** – We have conducted interviews with users, providers, and trusted intermediaries within the Legal Aid system. The work seeks to understand the experiences of users of the civil Legal Aid system including geographic differences to the small sample size means that we are unable to present findings at a regional level. The research also aims to understand the impact of the current civil Legal Aid system on the experiences of vulnerable clients.
- **Data publications and deep dives** – This is a series of publications covering trends in the provider base between 2014-15 and 2021-22, including regional breakdowns but also metrics for provider (firm) size and diversity characteristics of solicitors and barristers.

One of the deep dives will seek to build on the NAO published maps, which provided a visual representation of population distance to a housing provider, expanding mapping to other categories of civil law. This work will also aim to assess client (rather than population) distance from a provider, and incorporate modelled travel times by car, foot and public transport. It should be noted that this type of analysis is complex and goes beyond releasing data already held by the department; it will have to be carefully considered in advance of any publication.

### **Legal Need and Legal Problem and Resolution Survey**

The MoJ is also collecting more data on legal need and wider potential demand for legal aid through the Legal Problem and Resolution Survey (LPRS). The LPRS is a general population legal needs survey undertaken in 2023 that will provide evidence on people who have engaged with the court system as well as those who have not, to help us to understand people's capability and willingness to engage. The 2023 study used random probability-based methods to cover a representative sample of the population. Approximately 10,000 adults living in households in England and Wales were surveyed through a combination of online and face to face interviews. This design looked to ensure the experiences of the digitally-excluded population, other vulnerable groups and those generally less likely to respond online were captured. Additionally, the LPRS 2023 collected socio-demographic data to understand how experiences differ across the population, including a range of factors to help identify barriers to accessing justice for vulnerable groups.

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<sup>4</sup> [Comparative Analysis of Legal Aid Systems \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

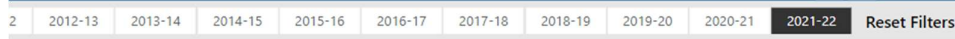
<sup>5</sup> [civil-legal-aid-providers-survey.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

## Annex B

### Mapping Examples from Legal Aid Data

#### Office Location Data from Legal Aid Provider Statistics

Each annual release has an accompanying report that includes a report showing the work undertaken by a provider. This report maps where each office is located visually for both their civil and crime schemes. See example below on the office location data for Tuckers Solicitors LLP.



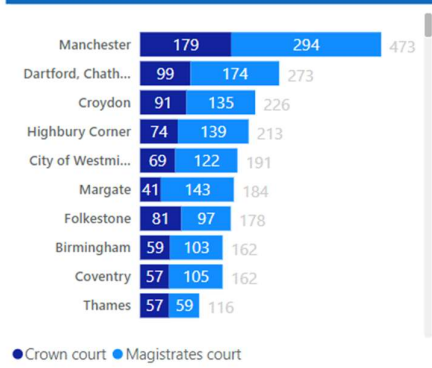
Criminal Work Started    Criminal Work Completed    Criminal Expenditure

**3,578**

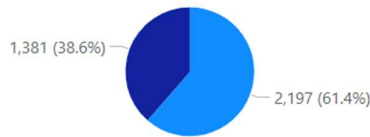
**17,036**

**£11.6M**

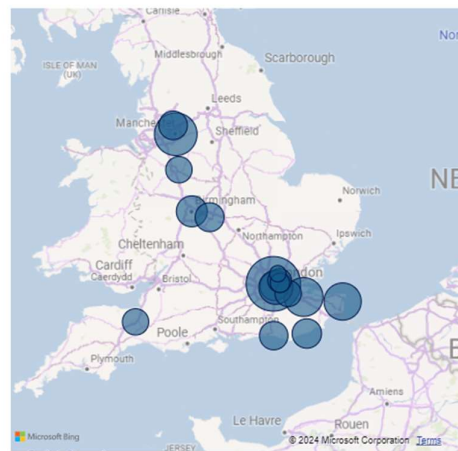
**Criminal Work Started by Court Location and Type of Representation**



● Crown court ● Magistrates court  
Overall Type of Representation (Starts Volume)



Volume of Completed Criminal Workload by office



Offices Starting Criminal Work

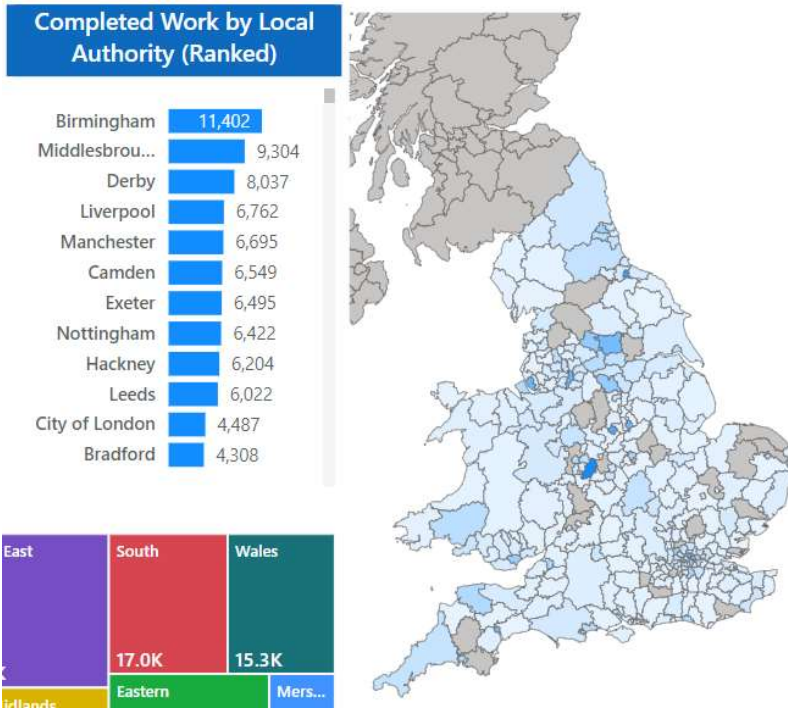
**18**

Offices Completing Criminal Work

**18**

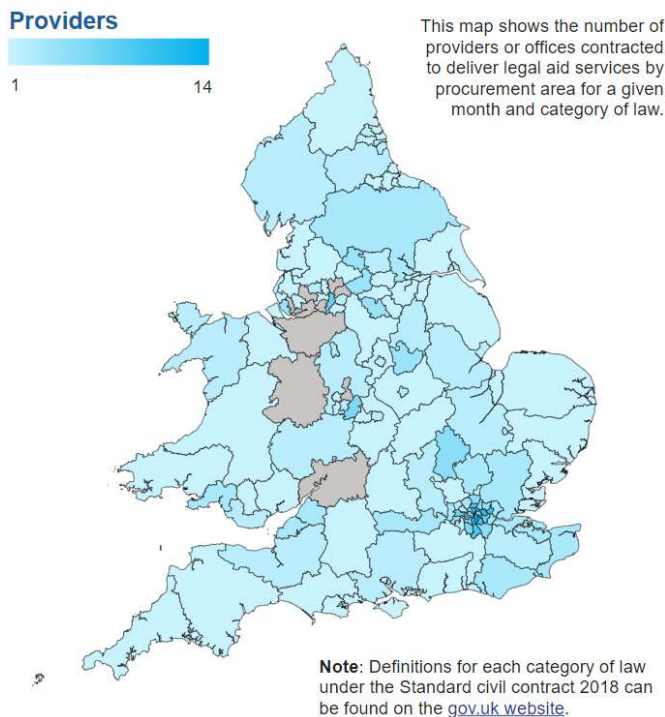
#### Local Authority Data from Legal Aid Provider Statistics

This same report also has sections covering starts and completions but also showing the local authorities and their workload and expenditure. See example below.



### Contracted Providers by Procurement Areas

Each quarter figures are released giving the number of contracted providers in each area of law. Within this report there are procurement map areas shown by each category, for example housing as below, covering the number of contracted providers for the period.



## Regional Data from Datashare with the Bar Council and Law Society

The Criminal Legal Aid Datashare with the BC and TLS contains maps providing regional breakdowns of diversity characteristics for the bar. See example below.

