



Legal Aid
Agency

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The Committee Clerk
Justice Select Committee
House of Commons
London
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[by e-mail]

30 July 2026

Dear Committee,

Thank you for inviting me to appear before the Justice Committee on 9 June as part of your Access to Justice inquiry. The Legal Aid Agency (LAA) and Ministry of Justice are carefully considering the Committee's findings on legal aid, published on 17 July, and will provide a full response in due course.

Before turning to the matter on which I undertook to update the Committee in writing, I should note that this will be my final correspondence with the Committee on this issue. From 3 August, I will take up a new role in HM Government which will, among other responsibilities, involve leading work to address the challenges facing the Civil Service Pension Scheme. During the transition period, LAA Deputy Chief Executive, Lucy Jones, will serve as Interim Chief Executive until a substantive appointment is made. The Committee will be informed of that appointment in due course.

It has been a privilege to engage with the Committee during my time as Chief Executive of the LAA, and I am grateful for the Committee's continued interest in the important work of ensuring fair, prompt, and effective access to civil and criminal legal aid in England and Wales.

As I indicated during my evidence to the Committee, officials in the Ministry of Justice and the LAA have been carrying out extensive work to analyse the exfiltrated data and identify those individuals whose information may have been affected by the cyber-attack. Good progress has been made, including in developing our understanding of the overall scale of impact. However, further analytical work and quality assurance are still required before we can reach robust conclusions.

As I explained to the Committee, this work is particularly complex. The relevant information is spread across a number of legacy systems and much of the exfiltrated data is unstructured, fragmented or incomplete. This reflects the way in which legal aid casework is administered. The LAA manages cases rather than maintaining a single consolidated record for each individual. Where someone has multiple cases over time, and may also have changed address or other personal details, it can be difficult to determine whether separate records relate to the same person.

The analysis is further complicated by the fact that individuals can appear within the data in different capacities. For example, a person may be recorded as a client in one case and as a party or opponent in another. The LAA holds less identifying information for individuals recorded in these latter roles, which means records cannot always be matched with confidence. As a result, any estimate is more likely to overstate than understate the number of unique individuals affected, as records that cannot be linked reliably must be treated as separate individuals.

It is also important to recognise that the data within the affected dataset varies significantly in both sensitivity and completeness. In many cases, the information concerned consists only of limited personal data, such as a first name and surname.

To address these challenges, the LAA and Ministry of Justice have undertaken substantial reconciliation and cleansing of the dataset before carrying out de-duplication work to identify unique individuals. This process is being supported by software specifically designed to match and de-duplicate large and complex datasets.

Alongside this work, we are developing a searchable index to support efficient interrogation of the dataset and to help identify affected individuals. Initial search and matching activity has now been completed and initial testing indicates that the index is operating as intended. This represents an important milestone, but further validation, quality assurance and detailed analysis are required to test the reliability of the results, refine our understanding of the number of people affected, and ensure that any future communications are based on the most robust information available.

This work will continue over the summer. I appreciate that this means the timetable I referred to in June has been extended. However, it is important that we complete this work thoroughly and accurately before drawing final conclusions. My successor will write to you again later this year with a further update and a more definitive assessment of the position.

I hope this update is helpful and provides reassurance that this work remains a priority for both the LAA and the Ministry of Justice. Thank you again for your continued commitment to ensuring that legal aid remains a viable and attractive career path for publicly minded legal professionals and, most importantly, that those who are eligible can access justice and legal aid services when they need them.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading 'J Harbottle'.

Jane Harbottle
Chief Executive