

Statement of the Joint V Law Societies on the Legal Aid Agency Data Breach

21 May 2025

The Joint V Law Societies express deep concern at the recent data breach affecting the Legal Aid Agency, which may have compromised highly sensitive personal information of legal aid applicants and contracted firms. As we understand it, the breach may include details such as applicant financial information, previous convictions, allegations that did not result in a conviction, and sensitive information about domestic abuse in the case of family law applicants.

This breach represents not only a grave data protection failure but a potential threat to the safety and wellbeing of some of the most vulnerable individuals in society. Many of those affected are already at risk and have come to the justice system for protection and support. The exposure of such personal and often traumatic information could have serious consequences for their privacy, security and mental health.

Our member practitioners working in legal aid have been significantly affected. The ongoing outage of the LAA's online portal has left them not knowing how to submit applications for legal aid or to process claims for payment. A contingency plan has not been forthcoming and information as to how practitioners should continue working is scarce. For firms already working on the narrowest of margins, this interruption in work, and possibly in income places them at real risk of financial instability. These are firms whose commitment to access to justice sustains entire communities – their survival cannot be taken for granted.

Delays in processing legal aid applications also add further pressure to a court system already under strain. Hearings may be postponed, vulnerable clients left unrepresented, and justice delayed – or denied – for those who cannot proceed without public funding.

We call upon the Legal Aid Agency to:

- Urgently update practitioners with clear guidance on contingency arrangements for making legal aid applications, submitting bills, and applying for payments on account and interim payments;
- Commit to full transparency about the nature and extent of the data breach, including its impact on clients and practitioners;
- Ensure the restoration of functionality for vital systems such as the online portal as soon as possible, and provide regular progress updates;
- Engage meaningfully with practitioners to understand the operational and financial consequences of the disruption, and to ensure appropriate mitigation and support.
- Reassure practitioners and applicants of the steps taken to ensure that a similar breach cannot occur in future.

Legal aid providers have consistently gone above and beyond to uphold access to justice in increasingly difficult circumstances. They – and their clients – deserve urgent action, honest communication, and robust support.

21st May 2025

Bristol Law Society
Birmingham Law Society
Leeds Law Society
Liverpool Law Society
Manchester Law Society

The views expressed in this statement are not necessarily the views of the individual members or directors of the Joint V Law Societies