

## PLP research: insufficient evidence that Mandatory Telephone Gateway meets Parliamentary and policy intentions

Public Law Project's research findings on the Mandatory Telephone Gateway indicate:

- Parliamentary and policy intentions in respect of the Gateway are not being met;
- The evidence-base for the Gateway remains weak, and
- That these matters should be addressed before expansion of the Gateway is considered.

Parliamentary intention behind LASPO was to 'ensure' access to legal aid in the 'highest priority cases' and the policy rationale behind the Gateway also placed a clear emphasis on the concepts of client needs, client convenience, better value for money, and a high quality service. The Government assured the House of Lords that:

*'telephone advice is effective and efficient ... The benefits are twofold[:] The first benefit is access ... The second benefit is quality ...*

*the community legal advice helpline already offers specialist telephone advice ... We trust that this provides sufficient knowledge on which to base our volume estimates and have a good sense about the realism of ensuring accessible services.'*<sup>i</sup>

However, PLP research findings indicate:

- Very low levels of awareness
- Significantly lower volumes of advice being given than anticipated  
85% to 90% fewer Debt matters started than anticipated
- Continuing reductions in volumes of Debt and Discrimination advice being given  
50% and 58% decrease in Debt and Discrimination matters respectively, when comparing first quarter with latest quarter
- Less value for money in Debt matters once additional gateway costs are included  
100% to 170% increase in cost per Debt matter resulting in a beneficial outcome
- Caller difficulties navigating the Gateway for a transfer to a Telephone Adviser  
14% of callers transferred to a Telephone Adviser
- Significant numbers of matters concluding without any recorded benefit  
37% of Debt and 40% of Discrimination matters result in 'outcome not known', 'client ceased to give instruction' or 'no recorded benefit'

---

**End notes**

- <sup>i</sup> HL Deb 14 March 2012, vol 736, cols 285-6

**Further notes**

- The Mandatory Telephone Gateway was introduced in April 2013 by the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO). It is the only route by which initial legal aid advice and assistance can be accessed (other than in respect of the limited categories of 'exempt' individuals). In the first instance, it has been introduced as mandatory in three areas of law (Debt, Discrimination, and Education). All calls are triaged through an (unqualified) Operator Service, and only those permitted to pass through the Gateway are connected to a Telephone Adviser. The Gateway is intended to be rolled out to all other areas of civil law (except asylum) following a Ministry of Justice review (which has now been published).
- PLP is an independent, national legal charity which aims to improve access to justice for those whose access is restricted by poverty, discrimination or some other form of disadvantage. Its three main objectives are: increasing the accountability of public decision-makers; enhancing the quality of public decision-making; and improving access to justice. PLP undertakes research, policy initiatives, casework and training across the range of public law remedies.
- For further information contact David Oldfield ([d.oldfield@publiclawproject.org.uk](mailto:d.oldfield@publiclawproject.org.uk) / 020 7843 1264).