



LAW CENTRES FEDERATION

Promoting Equal Access for All



Law Centres Federation

Encouraging the development of publicly funded legal services for those most disadvantaged in society



Aims & background

The Law Centres Federation encourages the development of publicly funded legal services for those most disadvantaged in society and promotes the Law Centre model as the best means of achieving this. To improve access to justice, we promote good Law Centre practice and innovation in the delivery of high quality legal services to the Community.

The first Law Centre to be opened in the UK was North Kensington Law Centre (1970) with Camden Community Law Centre closely following. There are fifty-four Law Centres nationally with about half located in London. The LCF is the representative voice of all Law Centres in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The objectives of the LCF are to:

- Provide support and development services to Law Centres
- Contribute to the development of new Law Centres
- Contribute to the development of publicly funded legal services nationally and internationally
- Undertake social policy work in conjunction with member Law Centres.

activities

The Law Centres Federation provides support and developmental services covering the whole range of Law Centre needs, including training, information, facilitating the sharing of knowledge and resources, and improving standards. Through its policy and education work, it aims to achieve improved access to legal services. Its work is funded by grants from government and charities and by membership subscriptions.

Large numbers of people still have no access to a Law Centre. The Law Centres Federation advocates and negotiates nationally for recognition of their needs and presses for the establishment of a national network of Law Centres.

The Law Centres Federation works with all those who share the same aim of increasing access to justice including funders such as the Legal Services Commission and local authorities, and organisations such as the Law Society, Bar Council, Legal Aid Practitioners Group, Society of Labour Lawyers, Society of Black Lawyers, the Advice Services Alliance, and other organisations with similar aims around the world, including those in Europe. We are a founding member of the International Community Legal Services Network.

The Law Centres Federation plays a key role in highlighting many issues concerning the delivery of legal services. The failures of legal aid and the need for a national system for the provision of free and accessible legal advice and representation are two such issues. We are also concerned that there needs to be a system of legal education and training which ensures that lawyers are able to adequately understand and represent in areas of social welfare law.



We believe that publicly funded legal services should be capable of delivering redress for groups of people through ways which do not simply involve providing representation on an individual basis. Legal advice and advocacy for groups, for example, tenants' organisations and women's groups, are some such ways which should be funded. Identifying gaps in services and working to fill these, the Law Centres Federation

has contributed to the development of new organisations such as EarthRights, and the Public Law Project. Law Centre funding remains precarious and in the main dependant upon local political priorities but access to justice is too fundamental a right to be left to these considerations. The case for a secure system of funding for a national network of Law Centres is strong and cannot be overstated.

law centres



Providing free legal advice and representation both to individuals and to community organisations, Law Centres play an important role in developing the rights of communities and effecting changes in policy and legislation. Housing, employment immigration and nationality, discrimination, welfare rights, education, community care and health are some of the areas of law that Law Centres have been at the forefront of developing. Employing qualified and experienced staff, including solicitors and barristers, they are able to take action in the pursuit of legal remedies at every level in all the courts, including those of Europe. Test cases are identified for their potential for bringing benefits to thousands of people.

Law Centres target their work so that their resources are made available to those sections local communities which have the greatest need, for example, the unemployed or low paid, disabled people, black and minority ethnic people, women and children.

Through community and education work Law Centres seek to increase people's awareness of their rights and options, and to facilitate their access to the legal system and other avenues with the aim of securing a solution to their problems. Through the Law Centres Federation they are able to comment on, and propose changes to, both incoming and existing legislation.

All Law Centres are contracted to provide legal help and are quality marked at specialist help level.



Membership

- Full membership entitles organisations which meet all the requirements to use the title Law Centre.
- Observer status is available for those organisations which are aiming to be full members.



Accountability

The Law Centres Federation is an independent Company Limited by Guarantee and a Registered Charity. It is managed by an Executive Committee elected each year by member Law Centres, and is accountable to them.

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