

PLES Task Force inaugural meeting 12 January 2006

Paper 1/04

Discussion paper: Task Force Terms of Reference, priorities and working methods

This paper gives a brief introduction to the PLES Task Force, sets out the draft Terms of Reference for discussion, and describes the broad options for priorities and working methods for the Task Force. These indications are meant only as a general guide for the discussion, and are not intended to be prescriptive.

1. Background

In September 2004 Advice Services Alliance (ASA), the Citizenship Foundation (CF) and Legal Action Group (LAG) published a discussion paper *Towards a national strategy for public legal education*. The paper was circulated widely for consultation, and some twenty responses were received.

In June 2005, ASA, CF, and LAG published the results of the consultation in *Public Legal Education: a Proposal for Development* (Paper 1/03).

Following publication of the proposal, the three organisations entered into discussions with the Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA), and the establishment of an independent Task Force, funded by the DCA, to develop a strategy for PLE was agreed in August 2005.

2. Membership

Task Force membership consists of a Chair plus members appointed because of their knowledge of and interest in the issues, influence with key stakeholders, and their willingness to champion the development of a national strategy. The Task Force will also have the right to co-opt additional members for general or specific purposes. The key stakeholders to be consulted by or to be members of the Task Force include a range of governmental, professional and voluntary sector interests:

- legal professionals
- advice workers
- legal educators
- life long learning professionals
- citizenship educators
- social and community groups and leaders
- relevant government departments

3. Terms of Reference

Over a fixed period of time not exceeding twelve months, the Task Force will develop and promote the case for a national strategy for public legal education reflecting:

- individuals' entitlement to know about their legal rights and responsibilities

- individuals' need to gain the skills to make effective decisions affected by their legal rights and responsibilities
- the community's need for public legal education as an integral part of the provision of effective advice and legal services

To achieve this the Task Force will consider, investigate and recommend how such a strategy should be taken forward, and will:

- Define public legal education (PLE) and set boundaries for the project
- Articulate the case and win support for PLE across government, among policy makers, within the legal and education professions and the voluntary and community sector
- Review existing examples of delivery of PLE and identify the needs, outcomes and required resources to deliver a national strategy
- Consider if, and if so how, PLE can be qualitatively evaluated on a cost effective basis
- Make recommendations to achieve the objective set out above

4. Priorities and working methods

At this first meeting it is anticipated that members will want to discuss and agree the broad scope and character of the work of the Task Force over the coming year. This discussion will be guided by the (draft) Terms of Reference set out above.

A key issue seems to be that PLE is a broad and relatively ill-defined topic, and will require the Task Force to seek to develop an understanding and a definition that will make it clear to both government and other potential providers what PLE is and is not, in terms of its aims, activities and outcomes.

Developing a *strategy* for PLE also implies championing PLE across government and elsewhere, and so suggests an approach that will include proposals that are clear not only about goals, activities, and target groups, but about funding and sustainability. The *recommendations* that the Task force will make will need to be practical and feasible, so that when the Task Force report is received, readers will readily grasp what their own agencies can and should do, and with whom, to further promote PLE.

The Task Force will need to produce a report on its investigations and findings, and the work of the Task Force towards this report could take place using a number of different methods, for example:

- Working groups or sub-groups, ad-hoc or permanent, to investigate specific aspects of PLE with reports to the full TF
- Research commissioned as needed
- Seeking or receiving presentations from interested parties
- A larger reference group to consult on issues as they arise

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