

Preparing for CCMS...

Our partners and staff met to discuss what CCMS meant for our business. Some were concerned by the negative feedback they'd heard from firms involved in the pilot but it was agreed that we should get on board early on (in the 'early adopter phase') to access support (provided during this phase).

We identified who would need to use the system and registered all of these individuals – all our solicitors and also support staff – across our three offices. Everyone then went live together. This was important for team morale.

We identified who would be able to do what in the system (there are different roles and responsibilities on CCMS). We then trained each person according to their role, so they specialised, until each individual could confidently complete their role.

“We didn't make any changes to our internal practices. We just adapted to working online rather than on paper - it's still the same work ultimately... Where we are today is no different to any other software package we use. It hasn't been straightforward but we have remained positive throughout when leading our team through it.”

Training staff...

We collated a manual for staff – practice wallets – and produced our own 'easy step' guide. This worked really well. We also assigned someone as the 'lead' for queries so that one person had an overall picture of where staff were struggling and where training and support were necessary.

Legal Aid Agency training – the online modules and quick guides – was done as a team; and we created a pyramid so that all staff had a channel through which they could ask questions and raise concerns.

“Rolling out together helped team morale. Everyone went through the training together so they knew who was responsible for what and had someone to go to if they had a query. We also picked key people who could work well as a team.”

Dealing with issues...

These were around submitting applications and there were frustrations on both sides with lots of calls to the LAA's support team. The system has improved a lot and the staff at the call centre have improved their service. Possibly there was a lack of experience on both sides (in the early adopter phase). Both needed to become familiar with the new system and keep on board with training.

“Applications go through fairly quickly now and the system has improved dramatically.”

Working with clients...

There were problems at the beginning in terms of amount of time spent with clients. Now we collate as much information as possible prior to the client interview – collecting evidence in advance – and we advise the client on what they need to bring in beforehand.

“We try to minimise client delays in the interview, and complete and upload the application when the client is with us.”

Managing notifications...

Some of our Personal Assistants receive notifications – so notifications aren't just visible to fee earners. Additionally, all support staff are linked to one Personal Assistant.

An Office Manager (for back-up) and Personal Assistant in each office see all notifications. This ensures that no notifications are forgotten during holidays and absences.

“You need to maintain a strong network so that individuals work confidently and cover for each other. This works perfectly for our practice.”

Technical questions...

We use Google Chrome to connect to CCMS, we all have our own computers and our emails are set up to mobile phones. In terms of billing, we're using IRIS and Cost Master billing software although we'll be changing to SOS Connect.

If you could change one thing?

The recoupment system needs assimilating into CCMS. We used to be able to send a cheque but now we need to contact someone to ask for a recoupment and this wastes time.

[NB: The LAA is looking into this issue, building it into its continuous improvement programme.]

Improvements and benefits...

We've seen improvements in LAA technical support, system stability and with the (billing) bulk upload pilot. In terms of the latter, since this came in, it has been tremendous, saving lots of time and limiting rework. The layout of costs is easier (when BACs payments come in and we need to track payments). It's a great improvement.

“The benefits are being able to look at all case information. It works really well for the firm. The system now flows from beginning to end... The bulk upload (billing function) is easy to use - it's a much faster turnaround and saves a lot of time. Payments are quicker too which is always good for cashflow.”

Advice to other firms...

Set up a strong team that is ready for a challenge; and train them so they are confident in what they need to do and know that there is a person they can turn to should the need arise. Also promote confidence within the team and get feedback – negative and positive – on how they're getting on.

“Communication is key, do not be afraid to ask for help, do the online training and give each other morale support by passing little things on to assist other team members.”