

Preparing for CCMS... We considered the introductory information (pack) produced by LAA and ensured that our computer systems were compatible. We also identified fee earners and staff who would be likely to use the system.

Initially, we rolled out to fee earners who were involved in childcare work, as Special Children Act applications were introduced first in the pilot. One person inputted the applications initially and was available to assist other fee earners as they began to input theirs. Again, with financial payments, one person dealt with the initial claims and, subsequently, assisted other fee earners.

“Consideration was given to limiting the use of CCMS to certain fee earners and support staff. So we had two people dealing with housing, mental health and civil matters and three dealing with family matters, spread between our two offices.”

Training staff... Various people did the courses (we looked at the LAA’s online training modules) and attended meetings with the LAA. The LAA also attended an in-house training session.

“The assistance of the LAA’s pilot casework team was invaluable for providing assistance in the early stages.”

Dealing with issues... There were various issues: technical problems (system availability and busy/error messages) and case-related matters. We liaised regularly with the LAA’s Online Support (technical team) and the pilot (casework) team.

We also experienced difficulty downloading documents to respond to actions and notifications; and there have been delays when trying to input information. There were initial problems in moving from an emergency to a substantive certificate (when further urgent amendments were required).

There have also been historical issues with the payment of claims, with payment delays and manual payments being authorised and some duplicate payments made. [Now resolved.]

“The system is generally much quicker now than it was. Also there have been various updates to improve CCMS which have helped, e.g. the ‘copy’ feature for applications which are similar, the ability to now submit emergency and substantive applications as one and, more recently, the ‘urgent’ flag for urgent matters not granted by delegated functions.”

“Hopefully, the speed and efficiency of claims, including payments on account and bills, will continue. The continuing improvements to the system, over the last two years, have assisted with the submission of applications for certificates and amendments.”

Working with clients... The actual time it can take to input an application, when the system is slow, and with clients not having all the necessary information available at the interview (particularly on means) has proved problematic.

So, in most cases, the final version is completed when the client is in the office (when they can sign it). In some (emergency) cases, again, the application is prepared in advance and taken to the hospital, court or meeting where the client signs it before we submit.

“These issues have been helped by the (LAA’S) provision of a means assessment list, which can be given to the client in advance. The introduction of the new form that can be signed in advance by

certain people, e.g. Children's Guardian's - to permit an emergency application to be submitted prior to signature on the actual application - has also helped."

Managing notifications... The fee earner who submits the application (or the nominated person) can access notifications for their own cases. We have one person able to access all notifications for all fee earners / cases, which is done from time to time to check for any outstanding matters.

"Since the introduction of the email alert, fee earners do check their notifications regularly."

Technical questions... We use Internet Explorer and run our computer system on a network in the office with everyone having their own PC or laptop.

If you could change one thing? We'd like a book-marking system so that you can go straight to a certain point in an application or claim rather than having to go right through the whole section again, e.g. if you have one outstanding item on a means or merits test to complete. [The LAA's response is in the footnote.]

Improvements and benefits... We like most the facility to be able to see what is happening on a case, e.g. the status of an application or a bill, and know exactly what information and documents are going to be required in support.

Billing particularly seems to be dealt with speedily and efficiently... Initially, applications were dealt with quickly but now seem to be running at pre-CCMS national timescales. [The LAA's response is in the footnote.]

Advice to other firms... Become familiar with the system – to use CCMS to best advantage, you need to be using it regularly. Therefore, consider whether certain fee earners / administrative support staff should deal with CCMS work for the whole firm rather than each person dealing with their own matters.

"Most fee earners deal with their own matters or have their own administrative support who deals with inputting and checking their cases.... However, in some cases, a fee earner may deal with so few legal aid matters that they do not really get the opportunity to familiarise themselves with it. Someone dealing with it day-to-day will probably accept the system more readily."

Footnote

We have made a number of technical changes which have improved the experience of users when downloading documents, and reduce any delay when entering information.

The LAA is currently rolling out a navigation tool which will allow users to move through screens – we're getting early user feedback and will continue to take account of views to review whether further enhancements can be made.

In terms of processing times, we're currently meeting our timelines for paper and CCMS work.