



**Young Legal Aid Lawyers (YLAL): Statement on criminal legal aid
19 June 2015**

YLAL is concerned that the government has decided to proceed with plans to cut criminal legal aid by a further 8.75%, introduce dual contracts for Duty and Own Client work and restrict the number of Duty contracts available to 527 without any further consultation with the profession, other than an email 48 hours before the cuts were announced, asking for information to be provided within 24 hours on the impact on firms of the initial 8.75% cut. This can in no way be seen to be a proper consultation.

YLAL notes that the Criminal Law Solicitors Association (CLSA) and London Criminal Courts Solicitors Association (LCCSA) are currently balloting their members on direct action in opposition to the further 8.75% cut and the dual contract scheme. In May 2015, the Criminal Bar Association (CBA) carried out a survey of its members to ask whether they would support action, 'no returns' and 'days of action' in the event that the government decided to proceed with the dual contract scheme. An overwhelming 96% said they would support such direct action.

The CBA executive announced yesterday that, in the current circumstances, it "will not call for barristers to forgo work in opposition to the [dual contract] scheme". YLAL notes that the Chairman of the CLSA and the President of the LCCSA have sent an open letter to the Chairman of the CBA, expressing their concern that the CBA executive no longer reflects the view of the majority of its membership.

As a group of junior lawyers drawn from all branches of the legal profession and bound by our commitment to publicly funded work, YLAL believes it is vital that the profession unites to protect the interests of all legal aid lawyers and, most importantly, those in society who are in need of legal aid. We are particularly concerned that the junior bar will be badly affected by these cuts, creating doubts about the future of the profession and making this a vital time for unity. We therefore wish to send a strong and clear message of support to all members of the profession who take a firm stance against the cuts to legal aid and other changes which threaten our ability to effectively represent our clients.

YLAL believes that the impact of the proposed changes to criminal legal aid, taken together with cuts implemented by the previous government, will be harmful to the provision of criminal defence and will have particularly negative consequences for junior barristers and solicitors. We hope that all representative bodies can open a dialogue and recognise the need for the bar and solicitors to work together, with a joint strategy to campaign against further damaging cuts to criminal legal aid. YLAL will seek to engage with groups and individuals to assist in any way that we can.

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