

THE LEGAL SERVICES COMMISSION

Client interview with Cate Jolley and Caroline Jones

The Legal Services Commission (LSC) runs the legal aid scheme in England and Wales. The LSC works in partnership with solicitor and not-for-profit organisations to provide information, advice and legal representation to people in need.

Cate Jolley is the consultation co-ordinator for the LSC and Caroline Jones works within the LSC's policy department. Both worked together to introduce e-consultation across the organisation.

THE CHALLENGE OF EFFICIENTLY MANAGING CONSULTATIONS

“The LSC is undertaking a large number of consultations as part of its reform programme. The first consultation as part of this programme received a large volume of responses and manually managing the process was resource intensive. As a result of this the Commission decided to review its approach to managing consultations in the hope of making the process more efficient in terms of time and cost, and to allow us to more effectively seek, gather and analyse responses.

“The options considered as part of the LSC’s decision to move to online consultation included doing nothing and continuing as we had historically, developing standard Microsoft Word templates for respondents to use to record their response, or to invest in software.” says Caroline Jones,

WHY DID WE DECIDE TO INVEST IN E-CONSULTATION?

“We chose the e-consultation approach because:

- it supported the wider organisational aim to increase electronic working
- it would allow our processes to be made more efficient, removing the need for activities such as logging responses received
- the LSC trialled e-consultation for one consultation and this approach was broadly supported by stakeholders
- it would allow greater standardisation of approaches to consultation across the organisation, making the consultation response process easier for all stakeholders.”



WHY DID WE SELECT INOVEM'S E-CONSULTATION SYSTEM?

“As part of our tender process to introduce e-consultation for the LSC, we developed a set of 22 requirements which the software would need to offer in order to be effective for the organisation.

Caroline added, “Requirements included the need for respondents to register their details, the ability to upload offline responses, automatic acknowledgment of receipt when a response is submitted and accessibility for users with disabilities. Of the providers that tendered to provide software, INOVEM were best able to meet the consultation requirements of our business.”

WHAT IT TOOK TO GET OPERATIONAL

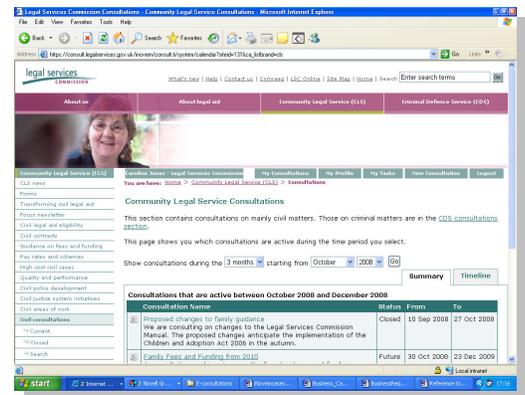
In its first year of using INOVEM's e-consultation system, the LSC has used it to manage ten consultations, of which seven used questionnaires.

“Our e-consultation system needed to be operational within approximately four weeks of the product purchase.” explained Caroline. “This included set-up, incorporation within our existing site branding, moving information from historic consultation pages and user / administrator training. INOVEM were able to implement the software to the agreed timescale and quality.”

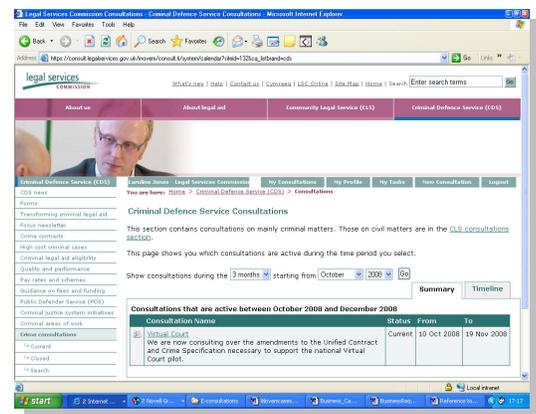
“During set up, and more broadly throughout our use of the new eConsultation System, we have found the client service provided by INOVEM to be exceptional and they have always met our needs both in terms of quality and responsiveness.”

“We were particularly pleased that:

“a) INOVEM were able to upload in bulk the consultations we had on our website prior to introducing the new service, so they would continue to be accessible to the public. Had we needed to do this manually ourselves, it would have been a very time consuming task, and ...



“b) the e-consultation system could be adapted to fit with our corporate styling as well as our website structure which has distinct sections for different groups of providers and website users, giving us three customised consultation home pages.”



WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED SO FAR?

Building on Caroline's assessment of the business case for e-consultation, Cate Jolley said, “We are pleased at our decision to introduce e-consultation software with visible benefits being made for both the LSC and the stakeholders we engage with.”

Looking back at some of the original requirements Caroline was delighted to report:

“Internally, the software has helped us begin to address the obstacles we wanted to overcome to manage consultations more efficiently and effectively and enhance our ability to analyse stakeholder views. In particular, the capability for stakeholders to register their details and receive automatic acknowledgement of responses has reduced the resource required to manage a consultation. Introducing the system has also allowed us to consider very carefully how we ask questions in order to achieve a good balance of qualitative and quantitative information and through having a centrally managed consultation system, publication and structure of LSC consultations has become more standardised and consistent.

“Externally, most LSC consultations are focused at contracted providers and their representative bodies and feedback on the new system has been positive. All consultation questionnaires include a question to gather feedback on using the new e-consultation system.

“As an example of the positive feedback received, in our first online consultation 97% of those who gave feedback about the e-consultation process felt it to be better or no different than historical methods of responding offline.”

WHERE NEXT FOR THE LSC?

Caroline continued, “The introduction of an e-consultation system has inspired us to develop our approach to consultations to maximise the benefits for the organisation in three main areas:

Guidance – “To help ensure standardised use of the e-consultation software, the LSC has developed step-by-step user guidance including standard wording for use and standard questions which must be included in all consultations (e.g. FOI disclaimer). This has ensured that there is a self-help resource for anyone managing a consultation and that consistent guidance is available.

Offline template – “Although the LSC is encouraging stakeholders to respond to consultations online, our policy remains that respondents can submit their views in other formats. Again, to encourage consistency, standard offline response templates have been introduced for those people who do not wish to respond online.

Survey pages – “Given the success of the introduction of INOVEM’s system for consultations, and demand from within the organisation for a method of canvassing opinion informally, we have introduced LSC survey pages to our website. Since its introduction we have run eight surveys targeted both to LSC staff and external stakeholders.”

LET’S GET TOGETHER

To find out more about INOVEM eConsultation Systems, Stakeholder & Community and Project & Partnership Portals, call INOVEM today on +44 (0)1488 648 468 or email info@inovem.com

INOVEM Limited, 1 Weston Court, Weston, Berkshire RG20 8JE, UK