

Developing the Immigration Advice Sector in Wales: a strategy

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Summary

The crisis in immigration legal services means that people seeking advice are routinely unable to access justice. This leaves many locked in crisis, poverty, or dependency. It has serious and lasting implications for social justice.

To develop, the sector needs to:

- build resilience
- train new advisors and increase capacity
- improve quality; and
- empower legal clients

There are major challenges to achieving these goals. Such is the crisis facing the sector that piecemeal and short-term responses are not enough. Problems are so entrenched and complex that without strategic and sustained intervention the immigration legal sector will continue to decline. Effective actions can be taken in Wales to rebuild services and grow expertise, but these need to be strategic, effective, and swift.

In the main body of this report, we set out a comprehensive strategy for protecting and developing the immigration legal sector in Wales. Underpinned by key principles, the strategy sets out clear goals and identifies the main challenges to achieving them. Finally, it outlines four priority areas in which Welsh Government needs to target funding to overcome these challenges and to stabilise and transform the sector.

Four priority areas for funding

We have identified four priority areas for funding, to deliver strategic actions that will most benefit the sector. The four areas are:

- **A funded supervision and support scheme** for emerging services and those wishing to move up from level 1. **This supports the goals of training new advisors and developing capacity, improving quality, and building sector resilience.**
- **Investment and support for non-legal services** would provide much-needed strategic funding for the migrant support sector that would improve legal services and free up legal capacity. **This supports the goals of developing capacity, building sector resilience, and improving quality.** It could also help to **attract and develop new advisors and empower legal clients.**
- **Empowering legal clients** is a goal in itself as well as helping to **improve quality and grow capacity.** Work is needed with clients and communities to raise awareness of rights, provide information, and provide space and support for people to come together and self-organise.

- **Developing legal aid in the charity sector** is crucial for the future survival and resilience of the sector. Legal aid is fast disappearing for immigration cases in Wales. A scheme to support charities to take up legal aid contracts has real potential to reverse this trend and tap into a vital source of funding.

How focusing funding benefits the sector

The diagram below shows the four areas for funding and indicates how targeting investment in this way meets key goals.



Ambitious and grounded

The strategy is ambitious, but it is grounded in evidence and experience. It is based on consultation and joint work with organisations and services within the immigration legal sector and across the migrant and refugee support sector. People with lived experience of migration have been at the heart of its development and have driven the strategy's ambition while also improving its relevance and practicality. The project that developed this strategy, and the output itself, are rooted in three years of research and engagement in the sector.

1. Introduction

The ability to exercise rights is fundamental to a fair society. Rights underpin efforts to tackle poverty, reduce inequality, and allow people to lead full, productive lives.

The main route to justice for people who migrate is immigration legal advice. Without advice and representation, people are not treated fairly before the law and cannot obtain and exercise their rights to work, access services, and take their rightful place in society.

The crisis in immigration legal services means that people seeking advice and help are routinely unable to access justice. This leaves many locked in crisis, poverty, or dependency, and has serious and lasting implications for social justice.

Homelessness, deep poverty, debt, exploitation, and ill-health affect people who migrate to Wales not only while they have temporary leave to remain. They have impacts beyond settlement and even citizenship. Long periods of settlement, soon to be doubled or in some cases lengthened to twenty years, mean that the cumulative effects of social disadvantage are intensified and the risk of deep poverty and destitution is heightened. Children face whole childhoods and even longer in poverty and insecurity. The negative effects of migration law are overwhelmingly targeted at racialised groups, leading to entrenched inequalities along the lines of race and ethnicity that will impact on race equality and social cohesion for decades to come. Addressing the crisis in immigration legal services is not an optional extra; it is fundamental to the vision of a fair, prosperous, and healthy Wales.

Such is the crisis facing the immigration legal sector that piecemeal and short-term responses will not be effective. Urgent and decisive action is needed. But the problems facing the sector are so entrenched and complex that without strategic and sustained intervention it will continue to decline.

This report brings together evidence to create a picture of immigration legal provision in Wales today and the scale of the crisis facing the sector. It sets out proposals for a new approach to rebuilding and developing the immigration legal advice sector, which form the basis of a Wales-wide strategy. This provides a route map for the next Welsh Government to radically regenerate immigration legal provision, providing access to justice and restoring the legal rights of migrants and refugees in Wales.

In developing this strategy, we have taken account of the enormous challenges facing the immigration legal sector, the resolution of many of which rely on policy and provision which is reserved to the UK Government. However, we strongly believe that effective actions can be taken within Wales to rebuild services and grow expertise. A strong and properly functioning legal system is essential in a fair society. The justice system may be governed from Westminster, but Welsh Government must lead in protecting and rebuilding the routes to access it from within Wales.

2. Technical terms

Given the nature of this report, some technical terms or names specific to the immigration legal sector will appear. We have provided a short glossary on [page 35](#) to help with any terms that readers are not familiar with. It also explains how we have used some common terms as shorthand.

3. Context

3.1. The UK policy context

Immigration law and policy are reserved responsibilities of the UK Government. Changes to UK immigration policy have increased the need for immigration legal services as people navigate an increasingly complex legal framework.

The Bevan Foundation report *From Desert to Oasis* outlines the legal and policy context in the UK and its impact on immigration advice need in Wales.¹ Since that report was published in May 2025, the UK Government has announced major reforms to the immigration system. The White Paper *Restoring control over the immigration system* sets out a multi-year programme, with some measures now being implemented while others are still open to consultation.²

The proposed “earned settlement” policy set out in the White Paper will, in the autumn of 2026, extend the standard qualifying period for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) from five years to ten years. This means that people who are eligible will need to have lived in the UK for ten years, have successfully renewed their visa on time and repeatedly, have been able to afford the high visa fees and health surcharge, and will likely have had no access to the welfare “safety net” that others in the UK can rely on. This includes child benefit, in-work benefits, and housing assistance. The Home Secretary has indicated that the changes will be backdated.

Extending the settlement period will mean that many more visa applications will need to be made. More people will face destitution, and more people will need to apply for fee waivers and permission to lift No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) restrictions. It will create additional demand for immigration legal services that are already at a point of crisis, and this demand will increase exponentially as the years go by. The increasing complexity of the immigration rules will add to this and will increase the already excessive failure demand that clogs the system.

The harder it is for people to renew status, progress to settlement or obtain citizenship, the higher the numbers of people with precarious or irregular status will rise.

3.2. The Wales policy context

Immigration policy is not devolved to Wales and is for the most part beyond the reach of Senedd legislation. How the Senedd and Welsh Government use devolved powers does, however, have a significant effect on how immigration law affects people in Wales and their ability to access justice and legal rights.

In 2024, the Welsh Government updated its Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan, revising and reaffirming commitments previously made under the Nation of Sanctuary policy. Commitments within the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan acknowledge and affirm Welsh Government's responsibility to maintain a functioning and adequate immigration legal sector:

- Ensure sanctuary seekers living in Wales can have equitable access to advice and advocacy services in every part of Wales through the procurement and management of the Wales Sanctuary Service.
- Monitor the availability of immigration legal advice and advocate for the UK Government to ensure sufficient capacity. Provide limited legal advice capacity to prevent most harmful outcomes.
- Maintain the Sanctuary website as the priority source of up-to-date information about rights and services in Wales for sanctuary seekers. Ensure website continues to be accessible in many languages. Ensure information about key immigration status changes is communicated properly.
- All unaccompanied migrant children will be treated as any looked after child by Welsh local authorities. All looked after children have statutory right to advocacy.
- In 2024 to 2025 the Welsh Government will prioritise implementing the Programme for Government commitment to uphold the rights and best interests of Unaccompanied Children.

Welsh Ministers and local authorities are legally required to have 'due regard' to children's rights, which have been incorporated into Welsh law. The approach taken in Wales is "child first and migrant second" - the principle that no child should be discriminated against and should have equal access to support.

While Welsh Government has committed to exploring a guardianship service for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Wales³, including assessing the resources needed and how it would align with other statutory services, little progress has been made beyond this commitment. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has consistently called for the establishment of a guardianship service for all Unaccompanied Children in the UK, a call that has only been heeded so far by one of the four UK nations (Scotland).

Welsh Government has a legal obligation to "respect, protect, and fulfil human rights".⁴ In addition to the seven core international human rights instruments that the UK Government has signed up to, Welsh Government has adopted its own Strategic Equality and Human Rights Plan. Current Welsh policy focuses on refugees and people seeking

sanctuary but often falls short in practice. It frequently fails to safeguard the rights of many other migrant groups.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 places a legal duty on public bodies to act sustainably and to meet present needs without compromising future generations. The focus is on ensuring that future generations have at least the same quality of life as people in Wales do now. Without urgent and sustained development of the immigration legal sector, the health, prosperity, resilience, equality, and cohesion of future generations in Wales is under serious threat.

The disproportionate impact of immigration policy on racialised communities drives inequality, social division, and racism. The Welsh Government is obligated under the UK's Equality Act 2010 (Section 149, Public Sector Equality Duty) to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

3.3. Accreditation schemes and regulation

There are two main types of immigration legal service. These are legal aid, which requires practitioners to be accredited to a Law Society scheme (called IAAS), and services regulated by the Immigration Advice Authority (IAA).

Put simply, legal aid mainly covers asylum and human rights cases, people who have immigration needs as a result of domestic and gender violence, and, via a system called Exceptional Case Funding (ECF), people who would not normally be eligible for legal aid but whose human rights would be breached if they were not able to access it. This last category, ECF, is largely not available in Wales because most legal aid firms do not offer it as it is considered financially unviable.

Services regulated by the Immigration Advice Authority (IAA), can be provided free of charge (these are largely within the charity sector) or fee-charging (mostly in the private sector).¹ The IAA services we refer to in this report are non-charging services run on a not-for-profit basis. They were mainly established to meet the needs of migrants in challenging situations and without the means to pay, but who fall outside of the scope of immigration legal aid. Increasingly, they are serving people who are eligible for legal aid but are unable to find a legal aid service.

Our report *Developing the Immigration Advice Sector: mapping need and provision* gives an overview of the regulatory systems and of provision in Wales.⁵

¹ The Immigration Advice Authority was formerly known as the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC).

4. Principles and focus

Underlying the strategy are four key principles that emerged from our research. These are based on the primary aim of our migration work, which is to ensure access to immigration justice for those who need it and do not have the means to pay.

During the research phase, users of legal services called strongly for local, community-based and community-aware services that also include and employ them. People highlighted the huge challenges they face in finding and in keeping legal representatives and the poor quality of service and client care that they frequently endure.

Legal service providers outlined the overwhelming demand for their services and the constant firefighting that leaves them unable to develop new staff and to grow services to higher levels where more complex work can be undertaken. We witnessed the major impact of failure demand: the additional pressure on legal services that stems from the complications caused by a lack of services or poor-quality provision.

Emerging from our research was the need for a long-term vision for sector development that acknowledges the current lack of resource and which injects significant and sustained investment into the sector with the aim of growing resilience and boosting the ability of services to draw from a wider source of income and funds. Viewing the immigration legal sector as an integral part of the migrant support and community sectors is central to its resilience and future stability.

While we have focused on services within Wales, we do not view Wales as existing in isolation. The immigration legal sector in Wales is (and needs to be) connected with a wider network of advice provision and support. It is affected by developments at UK Government level and in the rest of the UK, and what happens in Wales has an impact beyond Wales's borders. Alongside the principles set out below, this understanding underpins the strategy and proposals.

4.1 Principle 1: Invest in the sector

The immigration advice and legal sector is severely depleted, but there remains a core of dedicated and skilled people who deliver services, work hard for legal clients, and use creative ways to determinedly push for change. It makes sense for any intervention to use this valuable resource and to avoid introducing schemes or projects that threaten to disrupt or override efforts that are currently proving to be effective.

Any plans to develop the sector must involve the sector and should recognise how actions in one area impact on another. Development of the sector needs to engage a cross-section of representatives from legal services, support services, and communities of experience. Useful sources of support may already exist outside of Wales and should be used where relevant, but it is vital that any interventions are embedded in the sector within Wales. The bulk of financial investment should go to the sector itself and be used

to grow skills and services from within. Trusting and investing in the immigration legal sector and its organisations and staff will reap benefits in sustainability and independence.

This strategy makes no apology for calling for a large financial investment from Welsh Government. The aim, however, is to invest in the sector so that it can develop and thrive. Ultimately, the aim of regeneration funding must be to build a planned, sustainable sector which attracts funding or income from devolved and non-devolved sources. This will make it a more viable option for funding and allow Welsh Government investment to be reduced over time as the sector stabilises and becomes more self-sufficient.

Alongside funding to regenerate and strengthen the sector, more funding for frontline advice is needed. This need is particularly acute in north Wales and in rural areas, but more legal services are needed everywhere. Funds for direct delivery of accredited immigration legal advice and representation should be built into mainstream social welfare funding (currently largely administered via the Single Advice Fund - SAF). This will make frontline advice and representation more sustainable in the longer term. Welsh Government should also work to identify where immigration legal advice intersects with statutory duties, liaising with health boards, local authorities, and others to outline how immigration advice impacts on race equality, homelessness, poverty, and health. Working with trusts and foundations to advocate for needs in Wales and encourage and support match funding would also be of strategic use.

A new approach to investing in the sector will demand creativity and a willingness to overcome challenge and risk, but it will reap rewards. Identifying and leveraging funds from relevant budgets, making maximum use of UK Government funding in the form of legal aid and other government pots, supporting funding bids and creating partnerships that tap into diverse sources of funding, working with trusts and foundations to highlight need, and supporting legal providers to develop services that increase income, are all areas in which Welsh Government has a role to play.

4.2 Principle 2: Embed legal advice in migrant support

Our research suggests that the most effective route to finding immigration legal advice is through a migrant or refugee support agency.⁶ Some charities providing support to migrant communities, asylum seekers, and refugees spend many hours of time chasing referrals, finding available legal representatives, making appointments, and following up on cases. They offer ongoing emotional support to clients, help people to complete forms and understand documents, and assist people to gather evidence. In short, they provide many hours of essential, non-accredited work that takes pressure off legal advisors and enables them to devote more time to specialist legal representation. This is an underused and under-supported resource.

Overwhelmingly, feedback we received from people needing and using legal services was that they want legal services to be local, embedded in services they trust (or their access to be supported by trusted support services), staffed by people who have lived experience of migration, delivered in the languages they speak, and respectful of their culture and

needs. Embedding legal advice in migrant support, whether charities develop legal services themselves or work in partnership with legal providers, recognises the valuable role they play and provides a more seamless and supportive experience for legal clients.

4.3 Principle 3: Reduce failure demand

Failure to find legal advice in time leads to cases becoming ever more complex. There are several reasons for this. People's need for immigration legal advice is time-sensitive and therefore urgent. Clients under extreme stress make poor legal choices. The length of time they need to wait and the seeming impossibility of finding legal representation can drive people to make ill-advised applications or turn to unregulated sources of advice. In the absence of good quality legal provision, low-quality services can seem attractive.

People using legal services are often not given the knowledge that they need to identify a good quality service or even a legitimate legal expert. For immigration legal clients, this lack of knowledge and failure to provide information is especially acute. People spending a long time in the asylum system or on long routes to settlement may experience compounding damage to their cases. Representatives' time is increasingly taken up in undoing the mistakes of the past. The demand for complex casework continues to grow adding even more pressure to an already overstretched sector.

In rebuilding the immigration legal sector in Wales, efforts should be made to identify and resolve issues that cause or increase failure demand. The immigration legal sector cannot be well-functioning and efficient if it is bogged down in unnecessary and time-consuming work.

5. Goals

This strategy coalesces around four key goals which emerged from our research. These are based on common concerns of people using services and of those developing and delivering them.

5.1. Build sector resilience

Welsh Government has provided some urgent development support for the immigration legal sector to prevent further collapse and to encourage interest from prospective new advisors. There is now a need for more strategic and long-term action to rebuild the sector and to ensure its resilience and sustainability.

In what is a very deep and lasting crisis, we have identified several key challenges to sector resilience that Welsh Government must address, and a strategy for investment and support that would reap more consistent and impactful results.

5.2. Train new advisors and grow capacity

There is a dire lack of qualified immigration advisors in Wales. Even existing services cannot recruit and retain enough expertise. Increasing legal provision would require an intake of new advisors.

There is a huge gap between the need for immigration legal services and the level of current provision. More capacity is needed within existing services and new services must be developed. Some new immigration legal services are emerging, but these face serious challenges that need to be addressed so that they will be successful and in future will offer high level legal services. Capacity in both IAA and Law Society accredited services is needed to meet the needs of all migrants with urgent need for immigration legal advice and without the means to pay. Development is also needed in adjacent sectors to increase complementary non-legal services that boost legal capacity.

Various ways of building capacity are addressed, including funding and development for the migration support sector, partnerships that support career pathways, and referral relationships and complementary working. Skills sharing and practice development will help advisors to hone practice and adapt to legal changes quickly.

5.3. Improve quality

Good practice, excellent client care, and improving service outcomes and experiences are at the heart of the strategy. Raising the quality of legal services (both the advice given and the systems in which legal services operate) improve clients' outcomes, reduce failure demand, protect vulnerable people, and aid sector and practitioner development.

5.4. Empower legal clients

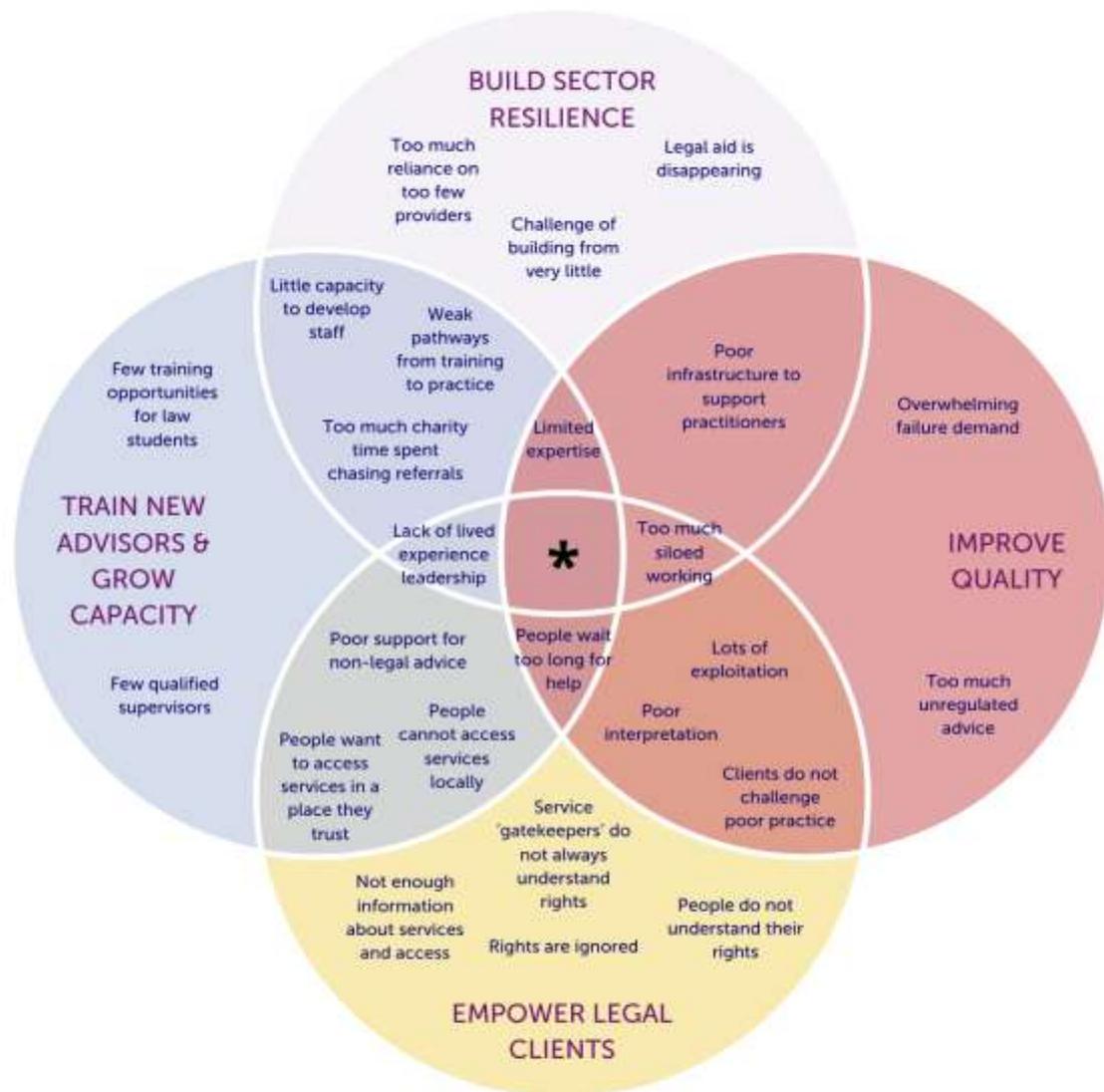
Wales has some excellent immigration legal services. However, people seeking immigration advice do so across the UK, in unregulated environments, and online. Even when using accredited advice, immigration legal clients are too often seen as lucky recipients of charity rather than being respected as clients. Rights and expectations of a regulated advisor are too often not explained. Some providers do not abide by their obligations as legal representatives. Helping people to recognise and have confidence in challenging poor practice helps to reduce failure demand and to improve services.

The immigration legal sector in Wales needs more legal advisors and representatives with lived experience of migration; more trustees, managers, and leaders who have personal experience of the immigration system; and more engagement and co-production with migrant communities. This will create a sector that is better suited to the needs of the people who use it. It will also improve trust and help to improve outcomes.

5.5. Challenges

Each goal faces significant challenges which the strategy must address. An overview of these is shown in the diagram below. This diagram (Figure 1) illustrates how interconnected the four goals are, and how challenges cut across these. The strategy needs to implement changes that impact on several areas at once. Funding small-scale projects in isolation and without an overarching strategic plan is unlikely to have a transformative effect on the sector as a whole.

Figure 1: Challenges and goals



Cross-cutting challenges	
*	People pushing for change are burning out. Funding is low, short term, and fragmented

6. Build sector resilience: challenges

6.1. There is very little of the sector left to build on

Building a sector from such a small, fragmented base is a huge challenge. The immigration legal services that remain in Wales either have a small turnover of cases or are operating at scale, which is a risk. Unmet need in both regulated schemes is huge. This makes it difficult to plan and reorganise services or to operate beyond crisis mode. The sector is in a steep downwards spiral but urgent action could reverse that trend.

Both legal aid and IAA in Wales rely precariously on single providers. There are no IAA services which meet the casework needs locally of people living in north and west Wales and only a single immigration legal aid provider (one person), based in Wrexham. Legal aid is disappearing, and with it, UK Government funding for complex representation.

6.2. There is little capacity for developing staff

Low salaries, financial pressure, and the strain of high workloads lead qualified advisors to move on from free legal service provision. They are mostly not replaced as there is neither the available expertise nor the ability to develop staff. Senior practitioners need to meet the demands of complex casework and do not have spare capacity to supervise and support emerging providers. Training and development is costly and often comes to little as trained staff are not retained, sometimes moving to more lucrative private practice or out of the immigration legal sector altogether. Time, energy, and resources that could be used for development are taken up with firefighting. The sector continues to shrink and practitioners who are left are over stretched and under supported.

6.3. Funding is too little, too short term, and not strategic enough

Wales does not get its fair share of funding from trusts and foundations.⁷ Wales is often viewed as just another region, while its older population, high rate of unincorporated organisations, and geographic and infrastructure challenges are not always taken into account when apportioning funding.⁸ Local authorities and other statutory bodies often do not fully recognise the relevance of immigration legal services to their spheres of duty.

Welsh Government has offered some vital funding for the immigration advice sector and has engaged with providers and support agencies to explore options for support. More funding is needed for direct advice and representation, particularly in areas of low provision and areas of greater need. Funding needs to be incorporated into mainstream programmes such as the Single Advice Fund as well as being given via targeted funds.

This strategy focuses on injecting funding where it can be most effective and where it can have most impact alongside other funding and other resources. Partnerships, referral pathways, and complementary services are key, as are building foundations for future work and development.

7. Train new advisors and grow capacity: challenges

7.1. There are few training opportunities for law students

There are no practice-based immigration and asylum courses currently delivered by university law departments in Wales.² There are no apprenticeships in immigration law. There are only two opportunities for students to gain practical experience in immigration and asylum law. These are The Fresh Claims Project (a partnership between Asylum Justice and Cardiff University, funded by Welsh Government) and the Swansea University Law Clinic. Classroom-based training (a series of lectures and online lessons) is available via Newfields Law Academy (also funded by Welsh Government).

7.2. There are not enough pathways from training into practice

Though successful, existing training schemes they do not offer a structured pathway into work. Some former students of the Fresh Claims Project have taken up immigration roles, but other graduates told us they had not found placements within accredited services that would allow them to train and qualify as immigration advisors.

Many entry level caseworker roles require IAA accreditation, yet students have very limited opportunities to become accredited before they apply. Organisations often do not have the resources or capacity to train a graduate. These barriers almost completely block the route to immigration law. Initial training without an established pathway into practice leads to frustration for potential new advisors and missed opportunities for the sector.

7.3. There is too much siloed working

Existing partnerships are often built on informal connections and operate by goodwill. More formal structures are needed to support communication, development, and create new partnership work. There is a lack of partnership working between the legal sector and organisations supporting non-refugee migrant communities, which tend to be much smaller and less well funded than those in the asylum field. Better cross-working is also needed between IAA and Law Society accredited services.

7.4. Non-legal advice services need better support

The non-legal work that support agencies offer is often unrecognised and poorly supported and funded. Better links between support agencies and legal providers would improve referrals and support ongoing work. What funding and support is available is too heavily restricted to the asylum sector. Other groups of migrants with significant needs and without the means to pay are too often excluded. These include Gypsy, Traveller, and Roma communities, people on temporary visas with No Recourse to Public Funds, current and former international students, and people on long routes to settlement.

² An immigration law module will begin at Cardiff University in January 2027

8. Improve quality: challenges

8.1. More practice development and shared learning is needed

Welsh Government hosts several forums for updates or information-sharing amongst migrant support organisations or immigration legal providers. These include groups such as the EU Citizens Forum, the Immigration Legal Advice Network, the Planned Migration Forum, and others. In addition, there are UK-wide networks such as Refugee Legal Hub, the Free Movement Forum, the Immigration Hub facilitated by Law Works and chaired by the Fresh Claims Project, and the Legal Aid Organising group run by Migrants Organise.

At first glance, there is much available, but provision is fragmented, engagement is often not consistent, meetings are not always designed and driven by practitioners, and time is not always used efficiently to address issues that are important to legal advisors and support agencies. In wider UK networks local issues can get lost, while broad agendas can mean that there is little space to explore practical solutions or for practice-focused learning.

8.2. Lack of legal advice drives unregulated advice

Many people in Wales are urgently searching for immigration legal advice and representation. Communities, friends, and supporters are keen to help. It is relatively easy to slip from sharing one's own experience or trying to support an acquaintance to giving unregulated or incorrect advice without realising it. Besides these well-meaning sources of unregulated advice, unscrupulous and unaccredited advisors prey on people in need of immigration advice, often charging large fees. There is too little awareness of how to distinguish between good and poor practice, little rights knowledge, and not enough protection for people who are at risk of exploitation.

8.3. People who use legal services do not challenge poor practice

Not all people who use legal services are told about their right to complain or to go to a regulator or ombudsman for help. Even when they are told, they may not take this information in. Due to lack of available interpretation, people with little English language are often forced to communicate with legal representatives in English, with some having to resort to online translation services or continue with no translation at all. Trauma means that people do not always hear or remember what they are told, and they may not be able to read English or may not notice written information about how to complain.

Even where people do understand their right to complain, they may not know how to exercise this right or may be too afraid to raise concerns.

9. Empower legal clients: challenges

9.1 People who use legal services often do not understand their rights

People we spoke to in our research largely did not understand their rights or know that they had rights. Many people told us that their legal advisor did not give them a client care letter explaining their right to complain, despite this being required under IAAS and IAA standards. It is likely that some advisors do not follow the required procedures or that they do not explain properly or in a trauma-informed way, what people can do if they are not happy with the service they receive.

9.2 Gatekeepers of services often do not understand people's rights

People delivering services in the statutory or mainstream charity sector do not always understand people's rights. Complex restrictions such as the No Recourse to Public Funds condition, and the complexity of immigration policy, often mean that people are not told what they are entitled to and may be refused services that they have a right to. Frequent changes to law and policy provide a huge challenge in keeping up to date.

9.3 People do not know about available services

It is too difficult to find information about immigration legal services that are open for referrals and too difficult for individuals to contact them directly for an appointment. Access to immigration legal help is often divorced from support that people receive to help them access other services and help.

9.4 Legal services are not run by the people who use them

Immigration legal services are used by people with experience of migration but not enough are provided by people with lived experience of migration. There is too little opportunity for people with lived experience to shape and design services. There is even less lived experience leadership and management, particularly by women. People need to be fully engaged in and lead the services and systems that serve their needs.

9.5 People cannot access legal services locally

Most people in Wales are denied local immigration legal services. They must travel long distances or meet with a legal representative remotely. This affects access to justice and makes it more difficult to develop a trusting relationship with an advisor. It also makes it less likely that people can engage with former clients of a service and so reach informed judgments about the service they use. Too few immigration legal services are closely linked to relevant support, triaged alongside other services, or delivered in trusted organisations, in clients' own languages, or within their own communities.

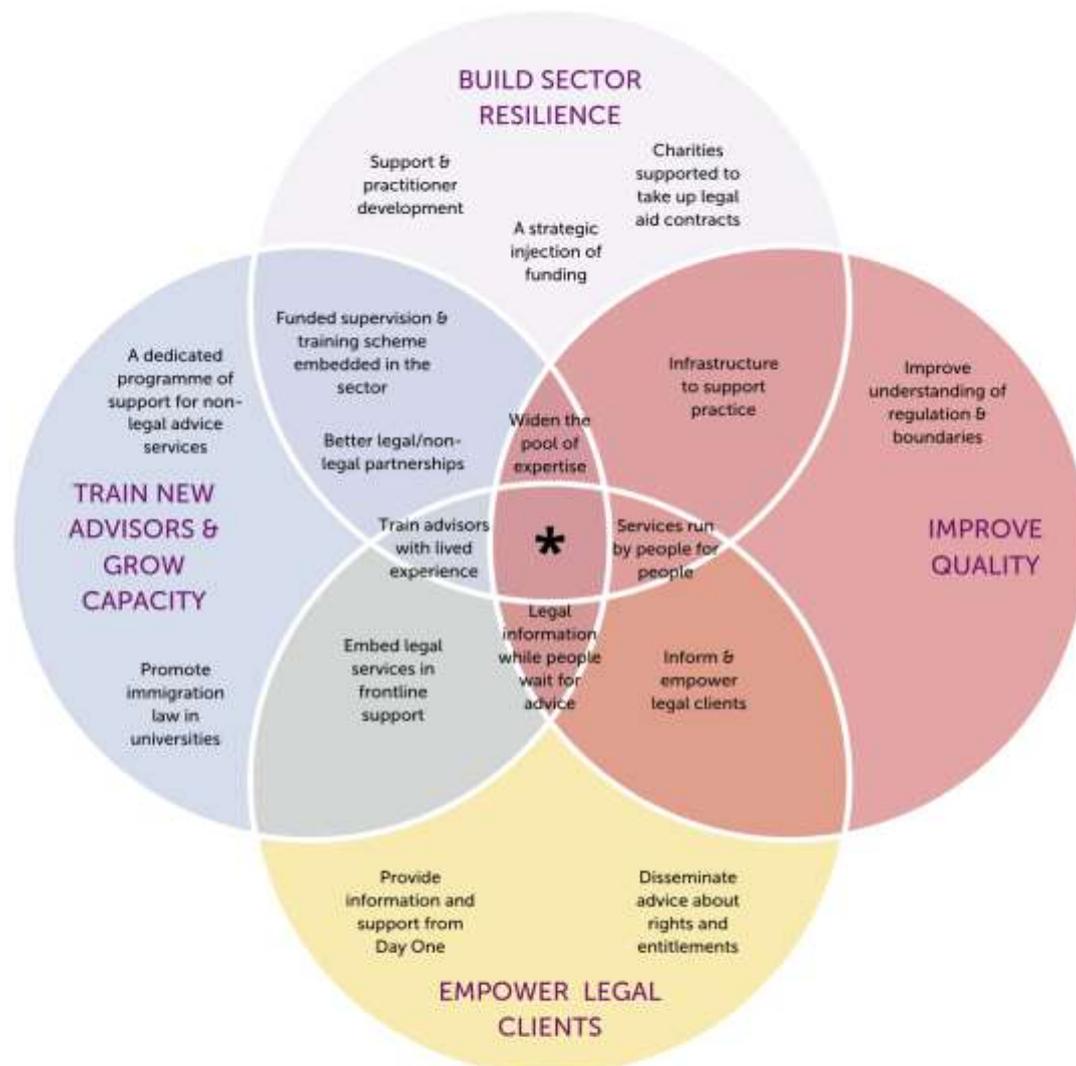
10. The strategy: an overview

10.1. Addressing challenges and achieving goals

Figure 2 below provides an overview of proposed solutions to the challenges described above and shown in Figure 1. Because of the complex relationships between challenges and goals, the interventions set out in the strategy need to cut across more than one project area. The solutions below have therefore been worked into proposed areas of focus for funding that address multiple challenges. This also makes the strategy proposals more sustainable and cost-effective.

The four funding priorities are detailed in the following sections.

Figure 2: How the strategy addresses key challenges



Cross-cutting recommendations	
*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train advisors from migrant support sector Support people already driving change Guardianship for Unaccompanied Children Welsh Government: more influencing power

10.2. Turning funding to investment

The immigration legal sector is in such a fragile state that it needs a realistic injection of funds to turn it around. Small tweaks, or disconnected funds directed at a single project or target group, will ultimately result in partial, short-term gains unless they are an integral part of a larger strategy. Welsh Government needs to form a strategic delivery plan to ensure that funds spent on the sector are an investment that reaps long-term rewards.

We have identified four strategic areas, which are detailed in the following sections. Focusing on these areas to achieve the outcomes in the diagram below (Figure 3) will address the challenges identified in Sections 6-9 and transform the sector.

It is anticipated that funding will reduce after a period of initial investment. There are several reasons for this:

- The strategy aims to develop resilience and in-house development capacity within the sector which will operate independently once services and advisors are established. Focusing on a rolling programme of funded supervision and support that is embedded in the sector will enrich services and build expertise.
- The strategy aims to build on both IAA and legal aid services. Legal aid, while now largely unviable in the private sector, can be combined in mixed models with other sources of funding in the charity sector. Legal aid contracts enable organisations to bill for advice and representation, tapping into a vital source of UK Government funding. Focusing resources on identifying and overcoming the challenges that prevent charities taking up legal aid contracts is cost-effective and ultimately draws funding for immigration legal advice into Wales.
- Upskilling support agencies to provide complementary non-legal services and to avoid the pitfalls of unregulated or damaging advice frees up vital capacity in the legal sector. Charities require financial support for their work, but the cost of assisting people with simple form-filling, preparing documents, and gathering evidence is less than specialist high-level legal work. It also reaps social justice and social welfare benefits that lower costs elsewhere.
- Empowering legal clients means that more people can do things for themselves. Poor practice is more effectively challenged, and people better understand their rights and entitlements and need less assistance. While rights and empowerment are ongoing needs, they can become partially self-sustaining by building knowledge within communities, targeting information at key points in a prospective legal clients' journey, and equipping people to help others.

Funds should be front-loaded as sector investment but should run alongside regular models of funding for frontline services. Long-term funding for direct delivery of legal services should be incorporated into mainstream funding schemes alongside other social welfare, health, and community funding.

Better partnerships and connections within and between sectors are important to improve efficiency and maximise the impact of funding.

10.3. Four priorities for funding

We have identified four priority areas for funding to deliver strategic actions that will most benefit the sector. The four areas are:

- **A funded supervision and support scheme** for emerging services and those wishing to move up from level 1. This would provide supervision for advisors already accredited at IAA Level 1 and associated support for legal services. It comprises a single funded scheme which we recommend that frontline organisations within the sector are commissioned to deliver. We will produce a costed proposal for this scheme in a later publication. **This provides solutions related to the goals of training new advisors and developing capacity, improving quality, and building sector resilience.**
- **Investment and support for non-legal services.** Investing in non-legal services would provide much-needed strategic funding for the migrant support sector that would improve legal services and free up legal capacity. **This provides solutions related to the goals of developing capacity, building sector resilience, and improving quality.** It could also help to **attract and develop new advisors**, by bringing in prospective legal advisors from the migrant support sector, and could build in mechanisms to **empower legal clients.**
- **Empowering legal clients** is a goal in itself as well as feeding into the goals of **improving quality and growing capacity.** This work needs to be prioritised by thinking of it as a distinct focus with specific goals. Direct work is needed with clients and communities to raise awareness of rights, provide information, and provide space and support for people to come together and self-organise
- Finally, **developing legal aid in the charity sector** is crucial for the future survival and **resilience of the sector.** Legal aid is fast disappearing for immigration cases in Wales. A scheme to support charities to take up legal aid contracts has real potential to reverse this trend and tap into a vital source of funding.

10.4. Targeting funds

The diagram in Figure 3 shows the four areas for funding and how targeting investment in this way meets key goals.



11. A funded supervision and support scheme

11.1 Rationale

In the current environment, additional outside help is needed to supervise and train staff and move beyond the “chicken and egg” situation where building services requires expertise that currently does not exist. The supervision and support scheme outlined below is designed to overcome this situation by providing a rolling 3-year programme of supervision and support which will produce advisors capable of operating independently at Level 2 IAA and above. These advisors will become part of a strong practitioners’ network. They will also be able to offer supervision and support to new and emerging advisors within their legal service.

11.2 The proposal

A funded development and support scheme for immigration legal services should be a core commitment of the next Welsh Government. This could be delivered by a single organisation or a collection of organisations and does not require the establishment of a new entity. The key is the coordination and planned delivery of services via a single funded scheme or hub. This scheme would offer supervision, training, and development support to immigration legal services and partners.

As part of this strategy development, the Bevan Foundation has facilitated an experts’ working group exploring how support and development for legal services could best be delivered. A more detailed briefing outlining the working group’s proposals will be published in the coming months. Briefly, the group proposes that the scheme should:

- be hosted by a frontline organisation or consortium of organisations within the refugee and migrant support sector in Wales – placing investment and trust in the sector while supporting its development;
- support a) services that provide legal advice to asylum seekers and b) services that provide legal advice to other groups of migrants (focusing on both ‘immigration’ and an ‘asylum’ provision)
- provide a programme of training and supervision that covers both immigration and asylum to offer rounded experience and benefit from the quality standards of both IAA and Law Society accredited training.

11.3.11 Provide a programme of funded supervision and training

To support training and a planned pathway to legal practice for new and aspiring advisors, the scheme should:

- offer supervision of advisors via direct employment of two qualified supervisors – one IAA accredited and one Law Society accredited – with approximately four advisors/services supervised at one time

- deliver a rolling programme of training for legal advisors from emerging or developing legal services
- provide funded placement experience in both an IAA-regulated setting and a legal aid setting.

The placement programme would provide rounded experience and dual qualification through IAA immigration and Law Society accredited asylum routes. Advisors would progress with funded supervision and support through IAA levels 1 and 2 and would gain training on casework and file management to Law Society accredited legal aid standards, following which they would be able to undertake the IAAS Senior Caseworker assessment.

The scheme would provide a clear pathway into practice by providing free supervision for advisors recruited by organisations developing or growing immigration services. The training programme would complement existing university training and taster schemes and would also encourage recruitment from within the migration support sector, increasing opportunities for lived experience participation and training people who understand client needs.

At the end of the training programme, advisors would be able to independently operate at IAA level 2. While on placement with a legal aid provider, advisors would be able to contribute financially to their placement, since they would be able to bill for work under their host's legal aid contract.³

The growth of legal aid in the charity sector is a key opportunity for realising funding that could support legal representation and disbursements (see glossary) that are essential to offering complex casework and high-level legal services.

11.3.12 Provide development support for practitioners

The scheme should provide infrastructure for the sector by facilitating forums and practitioner meetings for new and established advisors. The supervision and training role would give the scheme's host a good overview of the sector and enable them to maintain strong contacts with a range of legal service providers. Welsh Government support for a part-time development role linked to the training and supervision programme would maximise resources and help to drive excellence within the sector. Where possible, this role should encourage the development of partnerships between legal and non-legal support organisations and help to facilitate referral pathways.

Infrastructure that supports day-to-day practice is vital to maintain high standards of advice provision and to share learning. A strategic review of existing mechanisms and networks for information sharing and discussion would help Welsh Government to offer these in a more focused way and to close gaps and avoid duplication. Supporting organisations within the migration legal sector or support sector to lead and administer

³ This part of the proposal is informed by a proven scheme run by Devon and Cornwall Refugee Support (DCRS)

networks and building in regional focus would encourage ownership and help to develop an infrastructure that is more embedded in and relevant to the practitioners and organisations that it serves.

A dedicated programme of training, support, and shared learning could play a crucial role in revitalising and upskilling the immigration legal sector in Wales.

11.3 Other considerations

12.2.11 Grow advisors where they are needed

Supporting services to develop their own advisors is an effective way of developing expertise. Advisors with proven commitment to supporting migrants and communities are less likely to be lost to private practice and more likely to be resilient in what is an extremely challenging role. Growing such services within the migrant support and community sectors leads to more advisors with lived experience, with relevant language skills, and with an understanding of the challenges that lie ahead for them and for their clients. However, care needs to be taken to offer appropriate support and protect boundaries, particularly where advisors are helping people from within their own community or in very challenging situations.

An immigration advisor needs a mix of skills. Legal expertise is essential, but resilience, compassion, and understanding of support and cultural needs are also key qualities.

12.2.12 Provide clear pathways for students

Having a structured programme of supervision will provide a clear pathway for graduates from university law courses as well as for people who already work within the sector. Efforts should be made to support students with lived experience of asylum and immigration who wish to follow routes into immigration law.

12.2.13 Work with universities to promote immigration law

Welsh Government should work with universities to encourage the development of immigration and asylum law courses and practice-based modules. Welsh Government could play a role in highlighting the skills shortage in the immigration legal sector in Wales, and in promoting IAA accreditation as an alternative route into law.

12.2.14 Create rounded opportunities for students interested in immigration law

The training and development scheme outlined above would benefit from strong links to universities with practice development opportunities in the immigration law field. On their route to immigration legal practice, graduating students should be encouraged to consider placements and volunteering opportunities in migrant and refugee support roles, offering a more rounded experience that will benefit them as advisors.

12. Investment in and support for non-legal services

12.1 Rationale

Non-legal advice and support plays a crucial role in enabling people to access and use legal services. For example, Oasis Cardiff report that in 2024-5, helping people to find immigration legal representation comprised 20% of their casework. Support organisations also provide valuable services that complement legal representation and free up capacity. These include helping people to complete forms, explaining key documents, helping people to gather the right evidence, and completing fee waiver applications. Recognising and supporting the role that non-legal support services undertake is vital for a well-functioning immigration legal sector. More investment and training in this area would free up considerable amounts of specialist legal time.

12.2 Proposals

12.2.1 Create and support better partnerships

Partnerships between non-legal support services and legal providers help people to access legal advice. They also help to combine specialist legal advice with ongoing advocacy and support and by doing so improve experiences and outcomes. Where both a legal and a support agency have a vested interest in seeing a case to conclusion and continue to engage with each other in the interests of the client, clients receive more holistic support. Ultimately, such partnerships can help people to avoid exploitation and to hold legal representatives accountable.

Welsh Government has a key role to play in funding more formal and longer-term partnerships. This also applies to existing funding arrangements: Welsh Government could review these to explore whether partnership work could be better supported or more explicitly built in. Targeting new funds at partnerships and cross-sector work will help legal services to grow in a more sustainable and client-focused way. Alongside the programme of supervision and training above, this focus will embed more legal services to within frontline support and bring in more advisors with relevant experience.

12.2.2 Embed legal services in frontline support

Models where legal services are embedded within broader support provision extend and deepen the partnership approach. These can offer drop-in sessions for initial advice, appointments on fixed days, or act as permanent outreach or a localised service run by a legal service provider. Having such a partnership can allow higher level accreditation to be offered with an IAA Level 1 service or enable legal services to supervise or train support workers to offer legal advice under their accreditation. As a funder of advice and support, Welsh Government is in a position to encourage such models where they are feasible. This would respond to a strongly expressed wish by people with lived experience to access immigration advice near to where they live and in places they trust.

Closer working and space-sharing between legal and support providers helps legal specialists to develop more understanding of client needs and could help support services to improve legal knowledge or identify better ways of providing complementary non-legal support. Partnerships that support non-legal organisations to develop in-house legal services or move to higher levels of accreditation would be particularly valuable for sector development.

12.2.3 Improve understanding of regulation and boundaries

Training people on *not* giving legal advice plays a major role in improving quality. Many people offering support to migrants and sanctuary seekers do not fully understand the legal restrictions on giving immigration advice or cannot always identify what constitutes regulated immigration advice under the law. This applies especially to organisations and services which do not operate within the migrant support sector. The good intentions of such organisations should be bolstered by training and guidance. This is needed by a range of bodies, from grassroots organisations (which are also typically less well funded and supported) to mainstream statutory and other services which do not have a specialist refugee or migrant focus.

Linking people up with existing training and promoting information and understanding could significantly reduce incidences of unregulated or damaging advice. It is important that people feel able to ask for help and guidance without fear of prosecution.

12.3 Other considerations

12.3.1 Fund both sides of a partnership well and in parallel

Both sides of a partnership need funding that adequately supports their work and recognises their specialist role. Funding that runs concurrently and comes from the same source reduces the likelihood that a partnership will falter because one partner's funding comes to an end.

12.3.2 Create a better system for appointment allocation

In the longer term, thought should be given to reviving or redesigning the system of central allocation of legal appointments that once existed for people in initial asylum accommodation. Alternatively, technology could be used to provide a one stop or 'open door' system for a wider range of immigration legal appointments that could create a better, simpler, and faster route from support to specialist legal help. This would significantly reduce pressure on frontline organisations who spend many hours searching for legal appointments for their clients. Being able to redirect this caseworker time to non-legal support or addressing other needs would improve capacity and benefit clients.

13. Empowering legal clients

13.1 Rationale

Users of legal services taking part in our research had a great appetite for advice about rights and entitlements. Many people with immigration legal needs have little knowledge about what their basic and everyday rights are and how to exercise them. Complex rules relating to immigration and No Recourse to Public Funds mean that many people do not know what services and benefits they are entitled to, and what they can access. Both people with lived experience of migration and people who gatekeep services need to know and understand the extent of migrants' rights and entitlements.

In relation to legal services, people we spoke to in our research often did not know how to recognise a genuine legal advisor, how to identify good practice, what to expect from an immigration legal representative, or what their rights were as legal clients. Very few knew how to complain about poor service or even that they had a right to complain. Our Experts by Experience group identified the need to empower people seeking legal advice and have made recommendations to support this.⁹

13.2 Proposals

13.2.1 Inform and empower legal clients

People using immigration legal services need to be given much more support to complain and to report unscrupulous advisors. While this is largely a problem for regulators and enforcement agencies, Welsh Government could play a valuable role in helping to raise people's awareness of their rights, funding and hosting rights information, and helping to signpost existing sources of information about rights and entitlements.

Bevan Foundation's Experts by Experience have developed excellent recommendations in relation to providing rights knowledge in a trauma-informed way, including:

- produce and disseminate clear rights information in relevant community languages
- set out what to expect from a legal representative and how to complain
- provide rights information in lots of places where people with immigration legal needs spend long periods of time, such as solicitor offices, dining halls in initial accommodation, support services, schools, and GP waiting rooms
- provide information in very simple forms, in short and easy to take in snippets, and repeat it frequently.

13.2.2 Establish a guardianship scheme for Unaccompanied Children

Protecting children's rights must be a key priority. A guardianship scheme for Unaccompanied Children complies with calls from the United Nations Committee for the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and aligns with Welsh Government's stated respect for children's rights. Bevan Foundation has produced two briefings outlining the importance of a guardianship scheme for Unaccompanied Children in Wales and how this should be implemented.¹⁰ Training guardians to Level 2 IAA as in the Scottish Guardianship Scheme would improve children's legal outcomes, protect children's rights, and provide strong, independent, and relevant advocacy throughout their care experience and beyond. It would also provide a pool of people with knowledge of immigration law and understanding of children's needs as legal clients, who would work adjacent to the immigration legal sector. This pool of expertise could also form a potential source for future immigration practitioners.

13.2.3 Provide useful information to people when they first arrive in Wales

People with lived experience of migration told us that a welcome pack would be a valuable resource for refugees and other migrants first arriving in Wales. There are challenges in providing this, notably that such information needs to be regularly updated and that there are existing resources that it would be better not to duplicate. An online resource that brings together existing information may be a more feasible option than developing something new. We plan to do more work with people with lived experience to identify what information people would find most useful on arrival in Wales.

13.3 Other considerations

13.3.1 Disseminate advice about rights and entitlements

As well as information about rights when using a legal advisor, people we spoke to wanted and needed a broader range of knowledge about rights and entitlements. Bevan Foundation's Experts by Experience group has worked on identifying some of these needs, and participants with lived experience of No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) have produced a guide outlining rights and entitlements for people with NRPF.⁴ Other guides and sources of information are urgently needed. These should be co-produced with people with lived experience of migration.

It is important to note that producing information is just the beginning of the process of improving rights knowledge. Disseminating that information, ensuring it is in a format that people can access, use, understand, and share, and ensuring that it is maintained and updated, are key considerations from the outset.

For people who have recently arrived, particularly those who have been through a traumatic experience, the principles in 13.2 above about offering simple information in familiar spaces, on a repeating basis, are important to note.

⁴ To be published

13.3.2 Support more people with lived experience to deliver services

Increasing the number of people with lived experience of migration who deliver immigration advice and support is fundamental to inclusion, engagement, and equality. Services that are staffed and led by people with experience of using them are also likely to be more relevant, inclusive, and understanding, and to have practical advantages such as improved language support and better cultural awareness. Beyond this, leadership roles for people with lived experience are vital.

13.3.3 Provide services that are focused on people, delivered by people

Services that rely upon a person communicating with and supporting another person or people are the heart of the charitable and wider service sector. In an age where there is increasing push to adopt new technologies and provide more remote and AI legal services, our research found strong evidence that people using immigration legal services need time and human contact to support them through what is often a traumatic and confusing process. Trust is a key concern in the relationship between legal client and representative, and our research has found that this is often lacking. Direct, face to face contact is very important in building trust. Welsh Government should hold fast to the principle that people-centred and people-staffed services are of the greatest value and deliver the best outcomes for clients.

13.3.4 Inform people while they wait for advice

Helping people to access information while they wait for legal advice would help to alleviate anxiety and reduce their need to turn to unregulated sources of help. Information about legal options would also help staff and community members offering support to signpost to reliable sources rather than be tempted to offer advice. This might mean improving sources of online or written information or promoting existing information, such as the Right to Remain toolkit, so that people can signpost rather than advise.¹¹ There is a shortage of information for people outside of the asylum system, such as current and former international students and people with No Recourse to Public Funds.

14. Developing legal aid in charities

14.1. Rationale

Our research suggests that charities and non-profits who currently offer immigration advice have significant concerns about taking up a legal aid contract. Complex systems, burdensome administration, and brutal auditing were cited as key reasons why current providers would not consider entering the sphere of legal aid.

Increased provision of legal aid is a vital route to increasing immigration advice funding in Wales. Legal aid is funded by central government, and this source of funding for complex and high-level advice is fast disappearing due to its lack of financial viability for the private sector. As IAA services step into the breach, responsibility shifts further to the devolved budget. Developing more legal aid services in charities would help to stabilise this shift and ensure that people whose cases are within scope can exercise their right to immigration legal aid.

Finally, legal aid is a crucial source of funding for disbursements. Disbursements enable legal providers to cover crucial costs such as expert reports, medical reports, interpreters, barristers, and client travel (where a client is destitute). Such costs are often essential for higher level and complex casework and representation at court or tribunal. Without legal aid, these costs can strain budgets. Not being able to afford them undermines legal work. Being able to meet them improves the effectiveness of representation, increases fairness for clients, and helps to make a case stronger.

14.1.1 Support mixed models

Mixed models (charities with IAA accreditation alongside a legal aid contract) can be a valuable addition to charity sector advice services. They allow for a seamless move for clients from casework to high level representation. They provide valuable income that can be complemented by and can augment funding from devolved government, trusts and foundations, local authorities, and others, providing diversity of income and better financial resilience.

14.1.2 Provide support and protect charities

Welsh Government should work with charities and not-for-profits to establish what support is needed to take up legal aid contracts and what barriers need to be overcome. Welsh Government should also work with the UK Government and the Legal Aid Agency, to create a better environment in which charities and not-for-profits can hold a legal aid contract with confidence and trust. Protecting charities from aggressive auditing, late payments, and claw-back of payments is essential.

15. What else should Welsh Government do?

15.1 Gather evidence and use influencing power

Welsh Government already learns from the sector to feed into influencing but this could be improved, with better mechanisms for gathering evidence from frontline organisations and those engaged in policy influencing. Welsh Government needs to advocate strongly and confidently for the immigration legal sector in Wales with the UK Government, with trusts and foundations, with regulators, and with statutory bodies within Wales. Advocating for increased funding and offering to match income raised from trusts and foundations could make investment in legal services in Wales more attractive and make a significant difference to third sector services.

15.2 Work with regulators to improve accreditation schemes

Welsh Government should work closely with the IAA, the Law Society, and the Legal Aid Agency to push for improvements to key systems and accreditation schemes. Key issues include simplifying and speeding up IAA accreditation and supporting movement between different regulatory schemes. Movement between schemes is unnecessarily restrictive, particularly for IAA-accredited advisors wanting to move into legal aid work. Currently this cannot happen without advisors retraining and being assessed under the Law Society accreditation scheme. Support for mixed models, where providers hold IAA accreditation alongside a legal aid contract, also needs improvement. Services operating under double regulation face more auditing and two sets of requirements that could potentially be better coordinated.

16. Conclusion

Above, we have set out a comprehensive strategy for protecting and developing the immigration legal sector in Wales. Underpinned by key principles of sector investment, community-based advice and support, and tackling failure demand, the strategy sets out clear goals and identifies the main challenges to achieving them. Finally, it outlines four priority areas in which Welsh Government needs to target funding to overcome these challenges and to stabilise and transform the sector.

The strategy is ambitious, but it is grounded in evidence and experience. It is based on consultation and joint work with organisations and services within the immigration legal sector and across the migrant and refugee support sector. People with lived experience of migration have been at the heart of its development and have driven the strategy's ambition while also improving its relevance and practicality. The project that developed this strategy, and the output itself, are rooted in three years of research and engagement in the sector.

The strategy calls for collaboration and strong decision-making. While developing this work, we have found clear evidence that within the sectors referred to in the strategy, there is an abundance of commitment, ideas, and willingness to work together to save the sector and secure access to justice in Wales. Despite working or living under extreme pressures, immigration specialists, support workers, and people in need of legal services gave their time, their enthusiasm, and their expertise to help build a strategy that is workable, realistic, and based on a deep understanding of the sector.

We have gathered more evidence and ideas than can fit into the pages above. Over the coming months, we will delve deeper into different aspects of the strategy, producing short briefings to support implementation of the proposals outlined above.

Glossary

Disbursements: third party costs paid in order to progress a legal case. Legal services with a legal aid contract can claim back necessary and reasonable costs from the Legal Aid Agency. Such costs typically include interpreters, and medical and country reports.

Charities: in this report, we use the term “charities” to mean an organisation that serves social, community, or charitable purposes and which does not make profits for shareholders or members. We do not use it to indicate only registered charities. We use the term “charities” because it is widely understood. In this report it represents other commonly used terms such as “civil society organisations”, or “third sector organisations”. We occasionally also use the term “not-for-profit”.

Exceptional Case Funding (ECF): provides legal representation for cases via the legal aid scheme. ECF was intended as a “safety net” to provide legal help or representation where a person’s case does not fall within the scope of legal aid but if they did not get legal help there would be a risk of their human rights being breached.

Expert by Experience: someone who uses the benefit of their personal, lived experience to shape a service or project.

Failure demand: the additional demand placed on services because people have failed to receive a service in time or need additional help because of poor advice or mistakes.

Guardianship scheme: a statutory service providing independent guardians for Unaccompanied Children (otherwise referred to as Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children or UASC). The scheme offers legal advice, welfare and emotional support to help children navigate complex systems.

Immigration Advice Authority (IAA): the UK Government body which regulates individuals and organisations providing immigration advice, where they are not legal professionals such as solicitors or barristers (these are regulated by their professional body). Formerly known as the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC). It is illegal to give immigration advice in the UK without being regulated to do so.

Immigration and Asylum Accreditation Scheme (IAAS): an accreditation scheme run by the Law Society. IAAS is a recognised quality standard for legal practitioners providing immigration advice under a legal aid contract (IAA regulation is not).

Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR): a form of permanent immigration status in the UK, also known as ‘settlement’. Indefinite Leave to Remain gives a person the right to live, work and study in the UK without restriction, and gives access to benefits where eligible.

Law Society: an independent professional body that represents, promotes, and supports solicitors. The Law Society regulates

Legal aid: UK Government-funded legal help for people who are unable to afford access to justice. Legal aid is restricted to certain categories of case.

Legal Aid Agency: A UK Government body (an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice) which administers the legal aid scheme in England and Wales.

Lived Experience: experience that comes from the life someone has lived or their direct, personal experiences (as opposed to “learned experience”, which is gained “second hand”, for example while working).

Matter starts: the term used for cases “opened” or “started” under a legal aid contract.

Nation of Sanctuary: a policy and funding framework and set of ambitions which stem from the Welsh Government’s intention to become the first “Nation of Sanctuary” – a welcoming, safe country for refugees and asylum seekers.

No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF): an immigration condition applied to most migrants on temporary visas and those without legal status. It restricts access to most of the welfare system, such as housing assistance and universal credit.

Legal Ombudsman: an independent official body that investigates complaints between clients and their legal service providers.

Settled status: an immigration status under the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) which allows a person, usually after five years of continuous residence, to live, work and study and in the UK indefinitely.

Settlement period: a continuous period of time during which someone must have been lawfully resident in the UK before they can apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR).

Single Advice Fund (SAF): a programme funded by the Welsh Government. It funds the delivery of free social welfare information and advice, such as on benefits, debt, housing, employment, and discrimination.

Temporary status: an immigration status which allows individuals to work, study or otherwise remain in the UK for a defined period of time. Also known as “limited leave to remain”. Permission is usually granted by the issuing of an immigration visa.

Unaccompanied Child (or Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child (UASC): a child (someone under 18 years old) who is separated from their parents or guardians. Unaccompanied Children are usually making an application for asylum or leave to remain on a human rights basis. They are entitled to local authority care, accommodation and financial support as Looked After Children (children looked after by the local authority).

Unregulated advisor: someone offering immigration advice or representation illegally. Under UK law, advisors must be regulated by a relevant professional body or the IAA in order to offer immigration legal advice. This applies whether the advisor takes a fee for their services or not. It is illegal to offer immigration legal services unless regulated by the Law Society (solicitors), the Bar Standards Board (barristers), CILEX, or the Immigration Advice Authority (IAA). Providing unsupervised advice beyond someone’s accredited level is also against the law.

Appendix

How we developed this strategy

We have held various conversations, discussions, and engagement exercises in the development of this strategy. We set out to take a collaborative approach to this work, bringing diverse representatives around the table to share knowledge and contribute to the strategy's development. In the course of this work, we have engaged predominantly with the following stakeholders:

- immigration advice and legal providers (through individual interviews, a round table discussion, and an experts' working group looking specifically at supervision and support);
- community groups, grassroots organisations, and frontline services providers (through individual interviews and a round table discussion);
- people with lived experience of immigration (through focus groups in north Wales in consultation with Refugee Kindness, a community review session, and drawing from our previous research into the experiences of just under 60 people with immigration legal needs in Wales);
- prospective and trainee immigration advisors (via individual interviews)

We have also drawn on written research and spoken to people in regulatory and statutory roles. The project was guided by our advisory group, which was made up of people with both lived and learned experience.

Our advisory group

We initially established two advisory groups. One group was made up of professionals with mainly learned experience (though this group also included professionals with lived experience of migration). Alongside this we established a group of people with lived experience of migration encompassing experience of different visa routes. This group comprised people with current legal needs as well as those with settled status. It included varied experience: some participants had an academic interest in migration or were working or volunteering in the migrant support sector and were able to contribute this learned experience along with their lived experience.

The groups met separately at first, and in later sessions came together to form a single advisory group. The group acted as a sounding board for the project, made suggestions to improve outcomes, and provided feedback on outputs, direction, and scope.

Endnotes

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- ³ Welsh Government, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: Welsh Government Response (Welsh Government response to UNCRC Concluding Observations report 2023), p.82, July 2024, <https://www.gov.wales/united-nations-convention-rights-child-welsh-government-response-2024>
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- ⁵ Kanneh, I and Matthey, M, Developing the Immigration Advice Sector in Wales: mapping need and provision, Bevan Foundation, December 2025 (see pages 10-12 for overview, page 23 for IAA services) <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/resources/mapping-immigration-advice-wales/>
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- ⁹ Kanneh, I and Matthey, M, Experiences of Justice: seeking legal help for immigration and asylum in Wales (recommendations of the Experts by Experience working group) <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/resources/experiences-of-justice-seeking-legal-help-for-immigration-and-asylum-in-wales/>
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- ¹¹ The Right to Remain Toolkit: a guide to the UK immigration and asylum system, Right to Remain <https://righttoremain.org.uk/toolkit/>