

Legal Services Agency Northern Ireland– Annual Report and Accounts 2019-20

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB, Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG), has issued a report on the results of his audit of the 2019-20 accounts of the Legal Services Agency Northern Ireland (previously the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission).

The accounts received a qualified audit opinion in 2019-20, having been qualified every year since 2003 due to a lack of effective counter fraud arrangements and weaknesses in the financial estimates of provisions for ongoing legal aid cases.

The C&AG's report notes that progress has continued to be made by the Agency in estimating levels of official error in its legal aid expenditure.

Mr Donnelly commented:

“Some progress has been made by the Agency and the Department in developing an effective counter fraud strategy. However, further work is needed to produce an estimate of fraud and error by legal aid claimants and legal practitioners.”

“Progress has also been made on estimating provisions to provide a more robust estimation of the Agency's legal aid liabilities. A new case management system has been established this year and when this has had a chance to fully bed in it should improve the Agency's ability to prepare these estimates.”

ENDS

Notes for Editors

1. The Comptroller and Auditor General is Head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (the Audit Office). He, and the NIAO, are totally independent of Government. He certifies the accounts of Government Departments and a range of other public sector bodies. He has statutory authority to report to the Assembly on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which departments and public bodies use their resources. His reports are published as Assembly papers.
2. This report is available on the Audit Office website at www.niauditoffice.gov.uk.
3. The Legal Services Agency Northern Ireland Annual Report and accounts 2019-20 are available on the [Department of Justice website](#).
4. Background briefing can be obtained from the Audit Office by contacting Karen Beattie (028 9025 1003).