

## The Legal Services Commission - Brief

# Becoming a lean service organisation

### Introduction

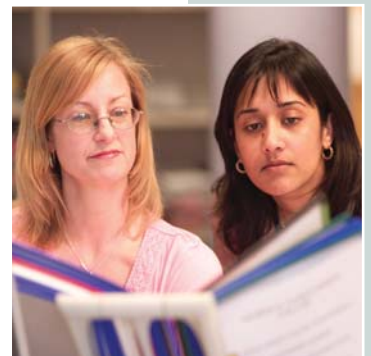
The Legal Services Commission (the Commission) gives legal advice and help to people on low incomes. It runs the Legal Aid scheme in England and Wales. The government funds Legal Aid is for people who cannot afford to pay for legal help. Each year, the Commission has a budget of £2 billion and helps over two million people. It funds lawyers and not-for-profit advice bodies to:

- advise people on legal problems
- advise people held in police stations
- help people understand their rights and the law
- represent them in court if needed.

The Commission wants to provide a more efficient and effective service. To help do this, it uses lean production techniques.

### Lean production

Lean production is used to reduce waste. It also improves efficiency. 'Just in Time' (JIT) and Total Quality Management (TQM) are two key processes. JIT is about producing goods to order. The business does not hold any significant level of stock, either of finished products or required supplies such as raw materials. JIT normally refers to production organisations but it can be applied to a service organisation like the Commission. For instance, the Commission can use online data instead of paper records. It has made its forms easier for people to complete so fewer mistakes are made first time. This saves time. TQM is a management system which aims to meet customer expectations first time, every time. Everyone in the organisation needs to take responsibility for producing a quality service.



The Commission has used TQM in different ways:

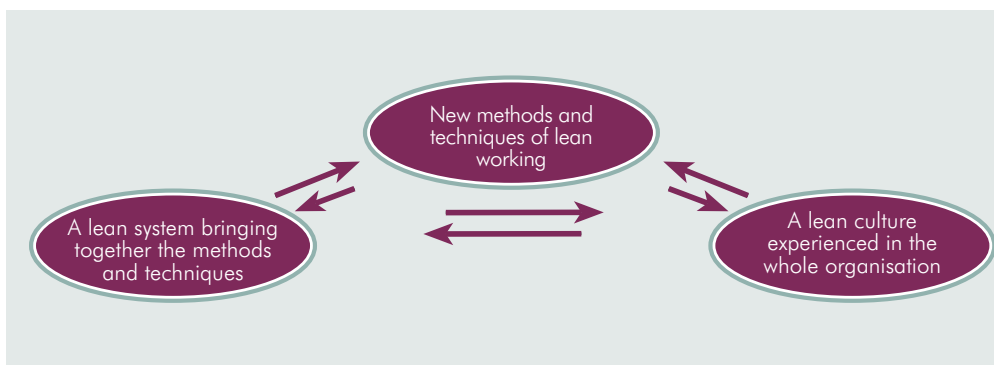
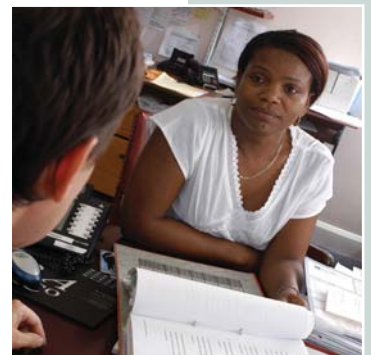
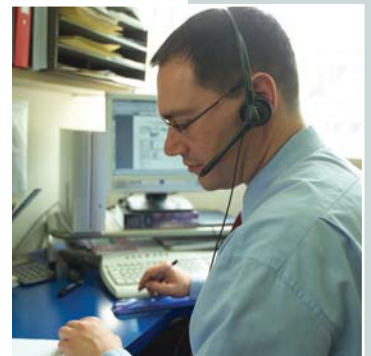
- It has put in place a simpler process of handing over and signing-off forms.
- It has cut down on wasteful correspondence.
- Paper files that are no longer needed are destroyed.
- There are team and continuous improvement meetings.
- Service claims can now be made on one form.
- 80% of phone calls are now answered first time.

### The benefits of a lean service

Lean production benefits the Commission in each stage of its processes for dealing with a customer query. Customers get a quicker service. Providers have a simpler, more sensible system. By 2011 the Commission will have cut its budget for administration by up to a third (£30 million).

### Implementing a lean environment

For the Commission to adopt a lean approach, it had to find out through research what its customers wanted. The next step was to create aims to work towards, for example, improving customer service. The Commission tried different approaches to find out which worked best with customers. It also trained all staff in how to cut out time-consuming activities. For lean production to work, an organisation needs to adopt new systems, methods and techniques of working.



## Quality Assurance (QA) and Continuous Improvement

QA records what should happen in a system or process. QA then measures how a service is performing against its targets. Through QA the Legal Services Commission provides better value for money for the taxpayer. It also gives better service to its customers.

Continuous Improvement involves everyone. There is a scheme to encourage the Commission's staff to propose ideas. Through sharing ideas, new ways of working have been found.

## Conclusion

The Commission provides services such as Legal Aid. Using lean production helps it to improve its practices and reduce waste. This helps to ensure it is using public funding in a way that gives the best value for money.

