

CLSB Risk Register

Last reviewed: 26 March 2025

This risk register was developed in March 2023 following a review of the CLSB’s risk framework. It maps the potential risks that could impact the CLSB’s effectiveness, either directly or indirectly, through their influence on the market that we regulate. Previous versions of our operational and regulatory risk registers are available by [contacting us](#).

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A. Sources of risk for horizon scanning (market risks)

These sources have the potential to generate new risks or exacerbate existing ones, and are therefore key targets for horizon scanning. They relate to what is happening in the costs law market, in areas such as:

- client demand and need;
- the supply of services by Costs Lawyers and other market participants;
- the overall legislative and regulatory environment affecting the market; and
- the impact of activity in other parts of the legal sector, including actions of other regulators.

Category of risk	Main sources of risk
Political/legal/regulatory	Changes in public sector spending, court rules or legislation driving costs control/capping.
Political/legal/regulatory	New regulation of ancillary industries, such as third party litigation funding.
Political/legal/regulatory	Changes in the Civil Procedure Rules or common law more broadly.
Economic	Trends in the litigation market and commercial developments in litigation funding options.
Economic	New entrants to the market and new service offerings, as well as consolidation of firms.
Social	Consumer use of online legal services, including the emergence of costs risk.
Social	Demand for different pathways to legal professional qualification.
Technological	Progress in court digitisation and e-billing.
Technological	Law firm take up of technology, including case management and billing systems, as well as the use of AI.
Technological	Adoption of blockchain technology and smart contracts.

B. Risk areas for ongoing monitoring

These are specific risks, identified from horizon scanning across the risk sources described in section A above, that could foreseeably impact the regulatory objectives in section 1 of the Legal Services Act 2007. These risks are subject to ongoing monitoring to determine whether their impact can and should be actively managed by the CLSB (see section C below).

Even though many of these risks are outside of our control, their impact can be mitigated generally by fostering:

- Robustness – building strength and depth in the profession by increasing numbers, improving the quality of both initial and ongoing training and widening the range of expertise and skills the profession is able to offer.
- Resilience – improving the ability of Costs Lawyers to redeploy their skills within a changing market.

Regulatory objective	Costs law market related risk outcome	Relationship to risk sources
Protecting and promoting the public interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Capping of recoverable costs– Reduction in the size of the NHS litigation budget– Wasting of court time by unqualified costs draftsmen, authorised practitioners lacking in costs competency, or poor practices of Costs Lawyers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Risks from unqualified suppliers– Risks from ineffective regulation– Risks from public sector budget cuts targeting litigation, or other forms of intervention in the costs market, in ways that prioritise short term budgetary savings over longer term public interest
Supporting the constitutional principle of the rule of law	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Shrinking legal aid budget and falling solicitor numbers providing legal aid services– Court promotion of technology and mediation to overcome backlog– Civil procedure review designed to improve the functioning of the courts and introduction of e-billing as standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Risks from policy, legislative or rule changes that impact on demand for Costs Lawyer services or viability of providing services to those with legal need
Improving access to justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Individuals or groups excluded from access to justice by excessive costs or costs uncertainty– Expansion of fixed costs regime, reforms to PI regime, reforms to judicial review	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Risks from inadequate supply of costs information services– Risks from policy reforms designed to reduce availability of contested litigation

Regulatory objective	Costs law market related risk outcome	Relationship to risk sources
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Solicitors unable to claim full legitimate costs from legal aid budget without Costs Lawyers – Third party funders discouraged by inadequate budgeting and uncertainty of rules around contingency arrangements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Risks from insufficient numbers of legal aid trained Costs Lawyers – Risks from inadequate service from Costs Lawyers or unqualified costs draftsmen
Protecting and promoting the interests of consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Consumers unable to access independent advice on costs – Consumers are excluded from civil litigation or are inadequately served due to limitations on funding options (including fixed fees on specialist legal services) – Self-represented litigants incur significant adverse costs risk/liability due to lack of individualised advice – Consumer risk from unregulated no win no fee advisors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Risks from insufficient supply of Costs Lawyers focused on consumer market – Risks from “capture” of Costs Lawyer services by professional (mainly solicitor) clients – Risks from public sector budget cuts targeting litigation or policy interventions designed to stem legal costs – Risks from gaps in regulation
Promoting competition in the provision of legal services by authorised persons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Law firm mergers hampered by lack of accurate information about WIP; investors discouraged by lack of clarity around value of law firms – New entrants to the legal sector cannot access independent information about value of certain areas of litigation activity – Increased use of technology in law firms substituting for Costs Lawyers – Concerns about market risks disincentivise new qualifiers or encourage qualified Costs Lawyers out of the profession 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Risks from insufficient supply of properly trained Costs Lawyers to provide essential services – Risks from new service areas with potential risks to clients and firms – Risks from the activities of other regulators – Risks from lack of awareness/ability of Costs Lawyers to embrace and adapt to technology

Regulatory objective	Costs law market related risk outcome	Relationship to risk sources
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Costs firms offering new unregulated services alongside reserved legal activities, such as litigation funding options for clients SRA regulation fails to prevent employer collapse creating problems in the Costs Lawyer market 	
Encouraging an independent, strong, diverse and effective legal profession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insufficient numbers of Costs Lawyers are available to the market generally Insufficient supply of independent costs law firms and practitioners in the market Costs Lawyers' independence is undermined by an actual or perceived conflict between the interests of their immediate (professional) client and their underlying client Costs Lawyers are not appropriately trained and up-to-date Costs Lawyer demographics do not reflect society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risks from insufficient supply of properly trained Costs Lawyers Risks from Costs Lawyers being absorbed into solicitors firms/SRA regulation Risks from "capture" of Costs Lawyer services by professional clients Risks from ineffective CLSB regulatory arrangements Risks from limited diversity of new entrants to the profession Risks from amalgamation of costs law firms affecting culture and standards
Promoting and maintaining adherence to the professional principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disciplinary issues/complaints about Costs Lawyers leading to poor consumer outcomes Failure of Costs Lawyers to maintain proper standards of work Costs law firms unwilling or unable to implement sufficient systems and controls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risks from ineffective CLSB regulatory arrangements Risks from lack of entity-level regulation in the costs market

C. Key risk areas for mitigation

These consolidate the key risks identified in section B over which we have some degree of influence or control through our regulatory levers, and which we can therefore work to mitigate over time. The need to proactively manage these risks influences our regulatory activities, including our approach to supervision and the priorities in our annual Business Plans. The table below sets out the priority workstreams that are aimed at mitigating or managing these risks in the current year.

	Regulatory risks	Current priority initiatives for mitigating risks
1.	Poor client outcomes arise from substandard conduct, inadequate service or lack of competence amongst Costs Lawyers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2025 Business Plan priority 2: <i>Identify and deliver workstreams to comply with the Legal Services Board’s anticipated new policy tools in the following areas: professional ethics and the rule of law; the economic crime regulatory objective; disciplinary and enforcement processes; technology and AI.</i> • 2025 Business Plan priority 4: <i>Build out and promote the new Ethics Hub, creating additional materials in response to emerging risks and themes identified through complaints and supervisory activities.</i> • 2025 Business Plan priority 8: <i>Extend our work on ongoing competency to explore whether competency checks are warranted for practitioners returning to authorised practice.</i> • 2025 Business Plan priority 10: <i>In collaboration with ACL Training, evaluate the second year of delivery of the new Costs Lawyer Qualification, including by: carrying out the annual monitoring process under the Accredited Study Provider Scheme Handbook; developing additional guidance and materials on the regulatory aspects of qualifying, based on student feedback; communicating the responsibilities and benefits of regulation to new student cohorts..</i> • Update and augment supporting materials for CPD and complaints procedures, and publish “lessons learned” for the profession, following supervisory audits (H1 2025). • Implement new supervision framework for client care letters (H1 2025).
2.	Costs Lawyers offer new areas of service without adequate consumer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2025 Business Plan priority 2: See above.

	protections or assessment of risk to consumers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2025 Business Plan priority 7: <i>Investigate opportunities to benefit from recent international trade agreements made in the wake of Brexit by exploring the mutual recognition of professional costs qualifications from other jurisdictions and the scope for Costs Lawyers to offer services abroad.</i> • 2025 Business Plan priority 9: <i>Deepen our understanding of services offered by Costs Lawyers into and out of the market in Wales.</i>
3.	Regulatory deterrents or barriers to innovation limit the Costs Lawyer profession.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2025 Business Plan priority 2: See above. • 2025 Business Plan priority 3: <i>Work with the Ministry of Justice to pursue opportunities, following the general election, to table the relevant legislation to make Costs Lawyers eligible for judicial appointment.</i> • 2025 Business Plan priority 6: <i>Work with ACL Training and the employer Trailblazer Group to secure approval for a new Costs Lawyer apprenticeship standard, and implement changes to our regulatory arrangements and other resources to facilitate integration with the existing entry route.</i> • 2025 Business Plan priority 9: See above.
4.	Independence of the profession is compromised through capture by certain types of clients or practising arrangements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2025 Business Plan priority 4: See above. • 2025 Business Plan priority 5: <i>Develop new guidance to support the materials in the Ethics Hub on (i) whistleblowing and (ii) bullying and harassment.</i> • 2025 Business Plan priority 6: See above.
5.	New Costs Lawyer Qualification fails to attract sufficient student numbers or sufficiently diverse cohorts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2025 Business Plan priority 1: <i>Implement the communications strategy developed in 2024, aimed at supporting each of the five strategic goals in our mid-term organisational strategy in a cohesive and systematic way.</i> • 2025 Business Plan priority 6: See above. • 2025 Business Plan priority 7: See above. • 2025 Business Plan priority 10: See above.
6.	The Costs Lawyer Competency Statement or Costs Lawyer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2025 Business Plan priority 8: See above.

	Qualification fails to ensure that newly qualified Costs Lawyers are equipped for modern practice.	
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D. Risk areas for longer-term structural reform

Our recent research and project work has identified structural risks in relation to the regulation of the costs law market. Mitigating these risks is fundamental to our regulatory approach and informs our longer-term strategic planning.

Risk statement	Source of risk	Strategic question to answer
There is a gap in how the public interest is defined/considered in the context of legal costs.	Costs Lawyers rarely serve consumers directly. There is a significant public interest issue at the heart of the costs market, but this may lie less in the protection of consumers and more in dealing with the market failure in legal costs management generally. Such a market failure appears to exist as there is no actor, outside the courts, that is currently tasked with ensuring the efficient use of resources to achieve appropriate and proportionate resolution of legal problems.	What does promoting the public interest mean in the context of the costs law market?
The authorisation of Costs Lawyers is not aligned with the public interest.	If the CLSB regulates primarily to protect consumers, it risks becoming increasingly less relevant to Costs Lawyers, who can work outside the scope of authorisation. Yet the regulatory agenda driven by the Legal Services Board, in fulfilment of its remit under the Legal Services Act, is focused on consumer-facing work and addressing unmet legal need. This model is misaligned with the public interest problem that needs to be addressed in the costs law market, and thus with impactful regulation of the Costs Lawyer profession.	What should the role of Costs Lawyers be in the legal market (i.e. what are Costs Lawyers for?) and how can that best be differentiated, through the CLSB's regulatory framework, from the role played by unregulated advisers to promote the public interest?