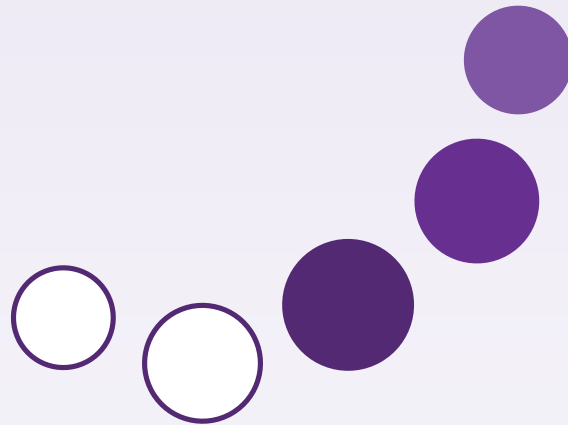


Public legal education

Improving lives, empowering communities



**Public legal education network
strategic plan 2009-2012**

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Welcome to the Plenet strategic plan covering the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2012. This plan sets out our aims and aspirations for the next three years. Please do take the time to let us have your thoughts and views. We would particularly like to hear from you if you are interested in working with us.

Plenet is a network committed to supporting the advancement of public legal education (PLE). It was established to develop the recommendations and to implement the strategic goals of the PLE and Support (PLEAS) Task Force.

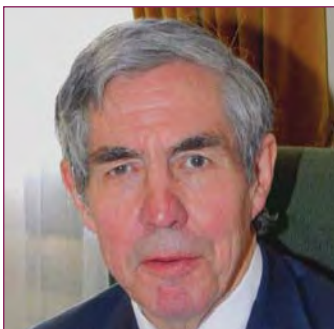
The core purposes of Plenet are:

- to take a lead in creating an identity for PLE
- to promote its use, and
- to create a centre of excellence for its successful development and delivery.

Plenet falls under the wing of the Advice Services Alliance (ASA) and has an actively-involved steering group, at the current time we have 350 members.

Martin Jones, Director

PLE is a means of promoting access to justice by providing people with knowledge of the legal system and an awareness of their rights and the ways in which they can be enforced. Learning, rights, empowerment and community are key themes of public legal education.



It is very good news that the Ministry of Justice has just renewed its annual grant-in-aid of £200,000 for Plenet for another 12 months. We have also received generous in-kind support in the past 12 months through a number of our other friends.

Plenet's long-term aim is to establish an independent centre of excellence which will underpin and champion the development of PLE throughout the UK. To achieve this, we must attract money and in-kind support from many, many different sources.

It has been most encouraging to witness the momentum which has steadily increased within the PLE movement ever since the Task Force report was published in 2007. This owes much to the commitment and passion of so many people who believe in what we are doing. This plan is just a stepping-stone towards a much wider future. It sets out the strategy which we aim to follow over the next three years, and we welcome your comments on it, so that we can refine and improve it as we move confidently onwards through this period.

Henry Brooke, Chair, Plenet Steering Group
1 June 2009

1 Background and context

In September 2004 Advice Services Alliance (ASA), the Citizenship Foundation (CF) and Legal Action Group (LAG) published a consultation paper, ***Towards a national strategy for Public Legal Education (PLE)***. In June 2005 the results of this consultation were published as ***Public Legal Education: a proposal for development***, with a key recommendation for a steering group to review how best to improve PLE.

ASA, CF and LAG then entered into discussions with the department for Constitutional Affairs (now the Ministry of Justice), and in January 2006 established the independent Public Legal Education and Support (PLEAS) Task Force.

Chaired by Professor Dame Hazel Genn, PLEAS was tasked with considering the case for a strategic approach to PLE. Task Force members were drawn from many organisations, including:

- government departments and agencies
- the legal, advice and education professions
- community and voluntary groups, and
- equal rights organisations.

Starting in January 2006, the Task Force met over a period of one year, with the aim of defining PLE and making the case for it across the sectors named above.

Through a series of meetings, research exercises and presentations, the Task Force developed an analysis of current PLE provision. This analysis included an overview of PLE's strengths and the main obstacles to its growth. These findings were then incorporated into an overarching report about the current state of PLE.

Organisations represented on PLEAS

**Advice Services Alliance • Advice UK • Age Concern England • Bar Council • BERR
British Institute of Human Rights • Citizens Advice • Citizenship Foundation
Civil Justice Council • Commission for Racial Equality • Court of Appeal • DCLG
Deptford Green School • DfES • Disability Rights Commission Law Centres Federation
Law Society • Law Works • Legal Action Group • Legal Services Commission
MOJ • National Consumer Council • Office of Fair Trading • University College London
Welsh Assembly • Youth Access**

The report found that the complexities of modern life had created a situation where a wide range of people had to face one or several relatively straightforward legal problems or issues which they were not able to resolve, due to lack of information or education about their rights and resources.

The report also found that PLE was an effective tool in enabling people to resolve these legal problems, and although there were some good examples of PLE being delivered effectively and creatively, overall provision was patchy.

The report went on to identify the main obstacles to the development of PLE:

- PLE does not have a coherent identity.
- There is no sustainable funding in place.
- Any PLE initiatives are taking place in isolation.
- Good practice is not being developed further.

Finally, the report made a number of recommendations:

- A coherent focus and identity should be created for PLE.
- PLE provision should stop being fragmented.
- Good practice should be developed and spread.
- Sustainable funding should be secured.
- An independent PLE agency should be created.

The Public Legal Education Network (Plenet) was therefore established in response to the final recommendation and to take forward the work required under the others.

To see the full report visit www.plenet.org.uk

2 Plenet structure and people

At the moment Plenet has no formal legal identity and is administered through the Advice Services Alliance (ASA) Advicenow project, which acts as the employer and fund holder.

The ASA employs two people on behalf of Plenet – Director, **Martin Jones**, and Development Manager, **Lisa Wintersteiger**. Martin and Lisa report into the PLE Strategy Group. Plenet also draws on the wider resources (both of staff and infrastructure) available through the ASA Advicenow project.

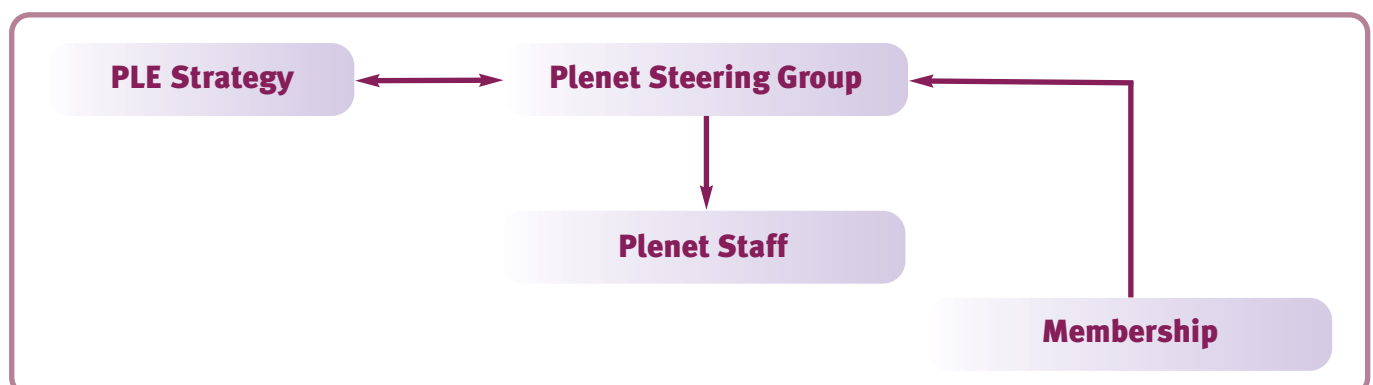
The PLE Strategy Group is chaired by Lord Bach and champions the development and value of PLE across and beyond Government.

Plenet is advised by a steering group made up of individuals who are predominantly drawn from organisations involved in the network. They are all fully committed to the future development of PLE:

- Age Concern
- Bar Pro Bono Unit
- Citizens Advice
- Citizenship Foundation
- Civil Mediation Council
- Law Centres Federation
- Legal Services Commission
- Legal Services Research Centre
- Ministry of Justice
- Susie Munro (outgoing)
- Rebecca Wilkie
- John Gillies
- Essi Lindstedt
- Sir Henry Brooke (Chair)
- Myles Kunzli
- Emily Lyn
- Alexy Buck
- Atul Sharda

Richard Grimes and John Seargeant, both independent consultants with particular expertise in the fields of education and information, are also members of the steering group.

Regardless of the form of the legal identity adopted in the future, governance arrangements will ensure that Plenet members are active stakeholders who are able to shape the future direction of the organisation.



3 Year zero

Although this plan looks forward rather than back, it is still worth noting some of the key achievements of the past year.

Membership

The membership has grown considerably since our launch in June 2008. We now have 350 members. Such a membership provides an effective reach across the:

- Third Sector
- legal profession
- field of education.

Legal Empowerment Conference

Plenet hosted its first conference on 23 February 2009, which was attended by people from 57 organisations.

Developing Capable Citizens Conference – Cardiff

In partnership with the Civil Justice Council, Plenet hosted this high-level conference in November 2008.

GAJE conference

Plenet was invited to attend and spoke at the international conference on Justice Education in Manila in the Philippines.

Products and research

Plenet has developed an effective website www.plenet.org.uk which includes a range of tools and products covering a range of subjects, including:

- PLE: Improving lives, empowering communities
- Researching and evaluating PLE: Principles and practice
- Young peoples experience of law-related events: The role of PLE
- The Better Information Handbook
- Dimensions of PLE: Adult learning and financial capability
- PLE Tools and Techniques

Although Plenet is not primarily a research body, we are involved in other research projects and we are committed to making the best use of research in our work. Our ongoing research partnerships currently involve:

- Legal Services Research Centre
- National Institute for Adult Continuing Education
- Independent Academic Research Studies.

4 Vision, mission, values and aims

By 31st March 2012...

Not only will Public Legal Education be accepted and actively used as a means of empowering individuals and communities but as a result of its use there will have been a substantial growth in the number of legally capable citizens actively participating in society

To get there we will...

Take a lead in creating a coherent identity for public legal education and in collaboration with others identify and promote excellence in the research, design and delivery of PLE and ensure that PLE is widely accepted, used and championed.

And more specifically...

Promote and embed a coherent identity for PLE as a cornerstone of access to justice.

Become a leader in building and developing the capacity of PLE through expanding the body of knowledge and expertise of what makes for effective PLE.

Support and expand an active network of PLE practitioners, and promote a sustainable and joined up approach to PLE delivery.

And in so doing will always strive to be...

• Independent • Collaborative • Empowering

We want to hear from you! lisa.wintersteiger@advicenow.org.uk 020 7398 1483 x 414

The vision, mission and values have to date been determined by work within the steering group and through consultation with members, but we would also like to take your views, thoughts and ideas into account. The aims are drawn from the PLEAS recommendations.

5 Objectives, rationale and actions

Each of Plenet's aims translates into a series of objectives, and in turn, actions, all designed to meet its overall vision and to deliver against its mission. It is however important to note that Plenet is a responsive organisation and may need to revisit both its objectives and actions as the years unfold.

Aim:

To promote and embed a coherent identity for PLE as a cornerstone of access to justice.

5.1 Objectives

- Improve understanding and use of PLE by government and by the legal, advice, education and community sectors.
- Develop awareness raising campaigns, lobbying activities and policy analysis that promotes the value and benefit of PLE.
- Produce a range of branding and marketing approaches.

Rationale

The economic recession requires Plenet to respond to emerging issues and changing priorities for government and other bodies. PLE can alleviate the symptoms and impact of recessionary pressures upon individuals.

Through a range of products and policy analysis we can demonstrate to government and other agencies the value of PLE in supporting social agendas in related fields such as unemployment, housing and homelessness, social exclusion, and community and family cohesion.

Plenet can actively help to improve the impact of public spending through maximising the benefits of existing public services delivery to include effective PLE interventions and through better evaluation of established PLE activities.

There is a need to establish a strong identity and branding for PLE, which can be achieved by continuing the process of researching public perceptions of the law and the most effective ways of presenting PLE.

Normally, the first point of entry for a person in need of legal information or services is likely to be a community organisation such as an advice agency or the medical system, (for example GPs and nurses), or a community drop-in centre.

There is a need to develop creative strategies for ensuring that these intermediaries have concise, non-threatening and informative methods for distributing information and learning materials relevant to improving education and referral processes.

Actions

With central and local government

- Work to identify shared ‘critical issues’, PSA targets and opportunities such as the White paper ‘New opportunities, fair chances’.
- Build relationships, raise awareness, and prove value through demonstration and products.
- Provide an expert point of contact for government on PLE issues.
- Work towards cross-government involvement in PLE development.

With intermediaries

- Work to raise awareness of brand and PLE concept among intermediaries.
- Develop initiatives for supporting intermediaries in key sectors, including housing, education, advice, and community development.
- Achieve acceptance of the PLE concept among a wide range of stakeholders through network expansion, curricula development, providing business cases and becoming recognised as a centre of excellence.

Aim:

Become a leader in building and developing the capacity of PLE through expanding the body of knowledge and expertise of what makes for effective PLE.

5.2 Objectives

- Supporting evidence-based approaches to best practice in PLE through research and information gathering.
- Commission strategic projects aimed at filling gaps in existing expertise by bringing together sound theoretical and practical approaches to PLE.

Rationale

Plenet will continue to focus on initiatives that aim to support preventative measures and early resolution of law-related issues. This includes the practical and emotional skills that underpin successful resolution strategies and self-help approaches.

The ongoing collection and analysis of successful PLE projects will seek to draw out the lessons that can be learned from present and past activities with a view to providing models for successful PLE interventions that can be scaled and replicated elsewhere.

Plenet will continue to develop an evaluation framework for PLE projects that both improves the ability and capacity of projects to evaluate their work, but which also brings together the results of various evaluations in order to identify the value and unique benefits of PLE.

Research that aims to support needs assessments will enable a move away from simply determining which individuals and groups are in need of PLE, to a focus on gaps in services, and developing initiatives for dealing with these gaps.

Actions

- Identify relevant research bodies that may have an interest in the field of PLE.
- Outline the case for supporting the expansion of PLE research.
- Produce a report on the nature of PLE-related research and activities and the opportunities for expansion.
- Commission scoping and research proposals.

Aim:

Support and expand an active network of PLE practitioners and promote a sustainable and joined up approach to PLE delivery.

5.3 Objectives

- Promote PLE awareness across a range of new stakeholder networks.
- Foster collaboration through the dissemination of information and organise events to keep people informed and involved in PLE developments and opportunities.
- Develop tools and mechanisms that improve the design delivery and evaluation of PLE activities, including quality assurance mechanisms.

Champion the establishment of an independent PLE centre and positively influence the funding environment in the interests of expanding PLE delivery.

Rationale

In order to build the capacity of PLE, we need to expand on a diverse and dynamic network of practitioners. With an emphasis on collaboration and partnerships, the network needs to be able to support the delivery of innovative and multi-faceted responses.

It is recognised that the needs of individuals and communities may be multi-layered, and the ability to address a variety of issues that may be experienced as access barriers based on a variety of socio-cultural factors must be considered.

The provision of PLE is therefore complicated and potentially expensive, as funding is limited. Collaboration is one way to reduce costs and ensure broad-based needs can be met as efficiently as possible.

Plenet is uniquely situated to coordinate efforts to foster collaboration, determine needs and therefore gaps, and support the development of resources, materials and intermediary training to meet PLE needs over a wide geographic area encompassing many diverse groups, both in urban and rural settings.

Plenet recognises the need to provide support to the PLE community by developing practitioner tools and training opportunities, as well as enhancing the professional development of those working in the field of PLE.

New professionals need to be encouraged to enter the field of PLE, and those already practising need to be encouraged to stay, in order not to lose their considerable talents and experience.

The medium and long term future of PLE needs to be secured through the creation of an independent centre that will champion the development of PLE across the UK. The diverse scope and cross-sector nature of PLE is best suited to an organisation that can foster links and partnerships across a range of sectors.

The need to identify and secure diverse funding resources is crucial to future sustainability and an independent corporate entity will be able to broaden its capacity to raise funds, with PLE as its consistent and central focus.

Actions

- Prepare business case for sustainable funding.
- Build a series of business models.
- Obtain commitment to three to five year staged funding.
- Develop initiatives to support active involvement in Plenet by its membership.

6 Work with us!

We would like to hear from you and for you to work with us if you have an interest in PLE as:

- part of your core business
- an area of future development.

and/or if you are:

- already established as a PLE practitioner
- considering how you could become a PLE practitioner.

We would also like to hear from you if you are considering becoming one of our members, or if you would just like to know a little more about PLE.

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This report was published by Plenet, a project run by Advice Services Alliance Advicenow.

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Plenet is funded by a grant from the Ministry of Justice.

The Advice Services Alliance is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England & Wales no. 3533317. Registered office: 6th Floor, St Mary Axe, London EC3A 8AA. Charity no. 1112627.