

THE SCOTTISH LEGAL AID BOARD

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PRESS RELEASE

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SCOTTISH LEGAL AID BOARD LAUNCHES ANNUAL REPORT 1999/2000 AND CORPORATE PLAN 2000-2003

The Scottish Legal Aid Board today published its Annual Report 1999/2000 and Corporate Plan for 2000-2003, giving details of the expenditure on legal aid in the past year as well as looking ahead to future developments.

Expenditure on legal aid in Scotland was £127 million in 1999/2000 – a decrease of £11 million on the previous year. This is the second year in succession that expenditure on legal aid has fallen. The Board collected a total of £10 million in contributions, expenses and amounts recovered from assisted persons following the successful outcome of their cases, giving a net cost to the taxpayer of £117 million (£129 million in 1998/99).

The reduction in the cost of legal aid was mainly due to a 10% reduction in the cost of criminal legal aid, from £75.4m last year to £68m in 1999/2000, although the cost of civil legal aid also fell by 8% from £32.1m in 1998/99 to £29.5m in 1999/2000.

The cost of running the administration of the Board increased from £7.6 million in 1998/99 to £8.5 million in 1999/2000. This was mainly due to increased capital expenditure in new financial systems which will be implemented during 2000/01.

Jean Couper, Chairman of the Scottish Legal Aid Board, said:

“1999/2000 has been a challenging year for the Board. However, we have resolved the difficulties in payment of criminal legal aid accounts, we have made significant progress in a number of areas, we now have a strong management team in place. In the next year and beyond, we will make significant improvements to the quality of the service we provide to solicitors, advocates, applicants and taxpayers.”

During the past year, the Board has made significant progress and implemented a number of key initiatives, including

- a comprehensive review of all procedures and systems for dealing with applications for legal aid and accounts submitted by solicitors and advocates to identify areas for improvement
- a wide ranging consultation process with the legal profession, the public and others with an interest in legal aid
- development of a new mission statement, corporate objectives and performance measures
- following difficulties early in the year with the payment of criminal accounts, we implemented an improved payment process and a commitment to pay properly prepared and vouched criminal accounts within 30 calendar days.

In its Corporate Plan for the next three years, the Board aims to

- assist the Government to develop and implement legal services in the community to improve access to justice for those who need it
- improve significantly the operations of the Board, both in the speed of handling cases and the quality of decision making
- enhance the Board’s communications with all those with whom it deals
- introduce e-commerce between the Board and the legal profession to improve efficiency and effectiveness
- publish service standards for all aspects of the Board’s work so that anyone involved in a legally aided cases knows the level of service they can expect from the Board.

For further information contact Fiona Shaw or Charlotte Townsend at the Scottish Legal Aid Board on 0131 226 7061. The Scottish Legal Aid Board is a non-departmental public body which assesses legal aid applications and scrutinises and pays accounts submitted by solicitors and advocates. It also provides advice to the Scottish Ministers on legal aid matters.



ANNUAL REPORT 1999/2000 - KEY STATISTICS

NUMBERS OF APPLICATIONS AND GRANTS

Legal aid type	1999/2000	% CHANGE FROM 98/99	98/99	97/98
Civil				
• applications	23,106	-3.3	23,890	26,043
• grants	14,551	-7.1	15,661	17,405
• without contribution	11,642 (80%)	-7.5	12,581 (80%)	14,278 (82%)
Summary criminal				
• applications	64,818	+1.0	64,156	68,434
• grants	59,188	+1.1	58,534	59,644
Criminal grants by courts	10,705	-15.0	12,588	11,622
• solemn	9,233	-2.1	9,431	8,906
• section 23 (1) (b)	1,472	-53.4	3,157	2,716
Advice and assistance				
• intimations	316,822	+1.8	311,187	321,452
• applications for increase	119,533	+8.1	110,611	107,276
• increases granted	107,114	+11.2	96,348	92,623

AVERAGE CASE COSTS

Legal aid type	1999/2000 £	% CHANGE FROM 98/99	98/99 £	97/98 £
Civil	1,918	+8.7	1,764	1,685
Criminal (including appeals)	1,022	-4.1	1,066	1,073
• district court	557	-16.9	670	672
• sheriff court	964	-1.2	976	1,009
• high court	9,507	+14.7	8,288	3,138
• solemn (all courts)	3,452	+18.1	2,923	2,540
• summary (all courts)	769	-6.2	820	845
Advice and assistance	102	-1	103	99

TOTAL AUTHORISED EXPENDITURE

Legal aid type	1999/2000 £'000	% OF TOTAL SPEND	% CHANGE FROM 98/99	98/99 £'000	% OF TOTAL SPEND	97/98 £'000	%
Civil	30,246	23.3	-5.8	32,093	23.2	34,311	23.7
Criminal	69,438	53.4	-7.9	75,420	54.6	82,054	56.6
Advice and assistance	28,287	21.7	-0.6	28,460	20.6	27,005	18.6
Children's scheme	1,725	1.3	+0.4	1,719	1.3	1,639	1.1
Contempt of court	31	0.0	+10.7	28	0.0	31	0.0
Public Defence Solicitors' Office	430	0.3	+6.2	405	0.3	25	0.0
Total	130,157	100	-5.8	138,125	100	145,065	100

N.B. The figures in this table relate to amounts authorised for payment by 31 March 2000, while figures in the text and Accounts relate to amounts actually paid out and may therefore be slightly lower.