



Press Release

16 December 2010

Scottish Legal Aid Board publishes annual review 2009-2010

The Scottish Legal Aid Board today published its annual review and statement of accounts for 2009-2010 which show:

- the cost of legally aided cases remained almost unchanged at £150.5m
- a 24% increase in civil legal aid applications
- the Board's running costs down by almost £1m in real terms over the past 3 years
- whilst facilitating increased access to justice, the Board saved the taxpayer over £40m in direct savings through its controls on applications and accounts
- that the Board along with the Scottish Government achieved efficiency savings in legal aid of £10.9m
- increased access to justice for people facing problems associated with the economic downturn through a programme of grant funded projects, including expansion of the in-court advice service through Scotland's sheriff courts and through directly employed civil solicitors.

Iain A Robertson CBE, Chairman, commented, "This has been an extremely busy year for the Board with the highest number of civil legal aid applications for a decade. We have increased efficiency, reduced bureaucracy and delivered value for money; it now costs the taxpayer less in real terms to run the Board than it did three years ago, yet we are responsible for delivering much more than we were then. We are committed to providing access to justice and value for money for the people Scotland."

Lindsay Montgomery CBE, Chief Executive stated, "Scotland is very fortunate to have a non cash limited system of legal aid which is able to respond to changes in people's needs, as has happened during the recession. As a result many more people have been able to access civil legal assistance over the past year.

However, a system like this can only operate successfully if there are robust controls over legal assistance and its cost. This is a key role which the Board provides. These controls become even more important with the increased pressure on public finances."

As well as the large increase in civil legal aid applications 2009-2010 saw a number of significant changes in civil legal aid which has increased access to justice in Scotland:

- The provision by the Scottish Government to the Board of £3m, over two years, of targeted funding for additional and new services to help people with legal problems associated with the economic downturn. These included new grant funded services and expansion of the in-court advice service across Scotland.
- Scottish Government increased financial eligibility for civil legal aid for people with disposable incomes of up to £25,000. This resulted in 616 additional grants of civil legal aid for people who previously would not have qualified financially, although with substantial contributions.

The Board also reported on its work to simplify legal aid and to reduce bureaucracy. It further expanded its legal aid online service which allows solicitors to submit applications and accounts online. This system is more efficient and economic for both solicitors and the Board. From April 2011 the Board will only accept online applications.

Iain A Robertson CBE commented, “The move to legal aid transactions with solicitors being wholly online is a key part of the Board’s strategy to further reduce its running costs. We also believe that in order to deliver continued access to publicly funded legal assistance, but at lower cost, further changes will be required in the way legal aid operates. This will impact on the Board and the legal profession. The Board is already working with the Scottish Government and the Law Society’s Legal Aid Committee on proposals for how this can be achieved.”

Ends

Journalists please contact:
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Notes for editors

1. Details of payments to the profession are available on our website www.slub.org.uk. Click on the tab for publications then on the link to the annual review 2009-2010.
2. Legal aid is help towards the costs of legal advice and representation, for those who qualify, paid for out of public funds. It is designed to help individuals on low and modest incomes gain access to the legal system. There are two main types of legal assistance: advice and assistance and legal aid. Together these are called legal assistance. Legal aid may be free, or someone may have to pay towards the cost of their case, for example through paying a contribution or from the money or property that they win or keep as a result of their legal action. Legal aid is accessed through a solicitor. Unlike most public expenditure, the legal aid fund is not cash limited. The Scottish Government will provide the Board with the funds required to meet the cost of cases which have been granted.