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TO: Head offices of civil legal assistance firms

Direct dial number: **0131 240 1893**

Your ref:

Please quote the department above and
our reference: firmsurvey/web

December 2007

LEGAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES OFFERED BY YOUR FIRM - INFORMATION FOR THE PUBLIC

I am writing to ask for your help to improve the information available to the public on the legal services offered by solicitor firms through legal assistance (legal aid and advice and assistance). I would be grateful if you or a colleague can complete the enclosed survey form about the legal assistance services your firm offers by **Friday 21 December 2007**.

Why we are asking for this information

The Board values the work of the legal profession in delivering legal aid services to enable people to access the justice system. Our research has shown that members of the public may not know where best to seek information about legal aid and how to access legal assistance solicitor services. This survey is therefore a key element to a number of services we are developing to help provide the public with improved information on legal assistance.

The information you provide through this survey will enable us to give clear, up to date information that enables members of the public to make a quicker and more informed choice about where they might access legal assistance. The information will also be valuable to advice agencies, other solicitors, and others who refer clients to legal assistance solicitors.

The information you provide will improve the information we provide through our Legal Aid Helpline and website. Our Legal Aid Helpline on 0845 122 8686 is aimed at the public to provide information on legal assistance, if they may qualify and where to find legal assistance solicitor services. Our website also includes these services, including an easy to use service to enable someone to find their nearest legal assistance solicitor.

Currently information on legal assistance solicitors through these services is limited to basic contact details and whether firms carry out civil or criminal work. The information you provide in this survey will therefore allow us to improve these services. We aim to publish the information provided through the survey in early 2008.

In addition, whilst we have seen ever growing use by the public of our helpline and website, the improvements to these services will be linked to a promotion programme to build awareness of where to get up to date and comprehensive information on legal assistance services.

We will also use the information you provide through this survey to update our central records, including our registers of firms who can undertake civil and criminal legal assistance.

About the civil legal assistance advice categories

One of the principal improvements to make finding a legal assistance solicitor easier for the public is to provide information on the types of civil case your firm offers under legal assistance. The majority of new information asked on the survey focuses on civil case categories. These categories are worded in plain language for ease of use by the public, around the typical situations and problems they may have. The categories were developed through consultation with the legal profession, advice agencies and others. The list of categories and typical examples of problems are attached. We will enable the public to use these categories and examples to search for local legal assistance solicitors who undertake these types of case.

Why we have listed you as the contact solicitor for your firm

We have written to you as we believe that you are the solicitor who undertakes the most civil legal assistance work in your firm, or you are a principal solicitor. You may prefer to pass this to a colleague to complete if they are more involved in legal aid work. As we intend to send requests to check and update details on a regular basis, please tell us on the survey form if another colleague should be the contact point for your firm.

Completing the survey forms

Your enclosed survey form details the contact information we currently hold on your firm, and if you are registered for civil or criminal legal assistance. You should check and confirm that these details are correct. We also then ask you to provide more information on the services you offer and contact details for each of your firm's offices, including the categories of case you undertake through civil legal assistance.

Where you have more than one office, the survey includes contact information on each office. We expect that most offices in the firm will offer the same services as the main office, so the main survey form asks you to confirm this. In situations where one office provides different services to your main office - for example different types of case are undertaken - please also complete the enclosed blank additional office survey form, printed on blue paper. Please also inform us if you have any new offices which we have not listed.

You can return the survey information on your firm to us either by mail, fax or online:

- mail them to us by LP, DX or royal mail
- fax the forms back to us on 0131 220 4878
- alternatively you can submit the survey online by following the links on our website www.slab.org.uk/profession. You will need your firm code to do this, which is printed in section A of the survey form.

Please note that we will be in contact with you if we have not received a survey return from your firm, so that we can ensure the information we hold is as up to date and accurate as possible.

If you have any questions about completing this survey form, please contact Susan King, Research Officer in the Policy and Development Department on 0131 240 1893 or email KingSu@slab.org.uk.

I do hope that you will assist us to improve the information available to the public, and will see this as an excellent opportunity to inform the public of the legal assistance services you offer. I would like to thank you in advance for taking the time to provide this valuable information.

Yours sincerely



Lindsay Montgomery
Chief Executive

Legal assistance advice categories

Our directory of legal aid solicitors will be able to be searched for problems in the following categories of law:

Civil legal assistance categories of problems

| Category | Examples of problems |
|--|---|
| Benefits and tax credits | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welfare benefits • Tax credits • Entitlement and problems |
| Compensation, damages and personal injury claims | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal injury claims such as after slips and trips, accidents at work or road traffic accidents • Industrial diseases such as deafness, vibration white finger and occupational asthma • Criminal injuries compensation |
| Complaints and claims against professions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Claims against solicitors • Complaints about professional bodies • Complaints against the police • Professional negligence, such as by an architect or surveyor, except for medical negligence - - <i>see the specific topic</i> |
| Consumer problems | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unsatisfactory / faulty goods and services • Consumer contracts e.g. unfair or unlawful contracts |
| Death related matters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wills - including making one • Dealing with someone's estate when they die or inheritance issues • Fatal Accident Inquiries |
| Debt, money and tax | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debt problems • Consumer credit • Bankruptcy and sequestration (that is, property being seized to pay debts) • Tax issues • Pensions |
| Discrimination and human rights | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrimination on any grounds of diversity such as race, disability, religion, sexual orientation or gender, but not discrimination at work (<i>see employment for these problems</i>) • Human rights |
| Education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education problems • Special educational needs |
| Employment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal problems at work like terms and conditions of employment • Unfair dismissal • Redundancy • Employment tribunals • Discrimination on any grounds at work |
| Family - divorce and separation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divorce and separation • Civil partnerships • Mediation (an impartial third party helping to sort out a dispute) |

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| Family - residence, contact and other matters involving children | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact and residence matters • Adoption and other permanent care |
| Family - interdicts and domestic violence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interdicts (court orders to stop , for example, an ex-partner entering someone's house) / non harassment orders • Domestic violence |
| Housing and homelessness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal problems with the home you own • Rented accommodation problems • Rent and mortgage arrears • Eviction • Dampness • Disrepair • Adaptations for disabilities • Homelessness • Neighbour disputes • Crofting |
| Immigration, asylum and nationality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immigration issues • Seeking asylum / refugee • Help for immigrants when they have cleared entry procedures with matters like work permits |
| Medical negligence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Claims against doctors, dentists, health bodies or others relating to medical issues |
| Mental health and adults with incapacity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health • Adults with incapacity (arrangements to help and protect people unable to make decisions about their own care or financial affairs) • Vulnerable adults (that is, people who are vulnerable to neglect or abuse because of age, infirmity, illness or mental or physical disability) |

If your problem is not on the list above it may be under one of the other two types of legal assistance:

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| Children's hearing cases and appeals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appeals against decisions of children's hearings • Protection and supervision • <i>For other matters involving children, see that topic - such as family or education</i> |
| Criminal cases | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All types of criminal charges such as murder, drugs, assault, theft, motoring offences, anti social behaviour orders (ASBOs) • Criminal investigations • Arrest and detention at the police station • Fines |