



Always improving our service for the people of Scotland

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DEVELOPING AND IMPROVING OUR SERVICE

The Board is reviewing its strategic objectives, performance indicators and targets. We are also assessing the resources, including staffing, we require to carry out these objectives. This exercise will inform our Corporate Plan for 2000-2003.

We want the service we provide to meet the needs of those who receive that service or are involved in its delivery. To do this we will be consulting with the Law Society and the Faculty of Advocates and we also intend to hold a number of meetings with local faculties of solicitors around Scotland. We will also be looking at ways to obtain feedback on our services from applicants, assisted persons and opponents. We have already met with the Scottish Executive to obtain their input to the process and they will be kept informed throughout.

As part of this strategic review, we are looking at our systems and procedures for dealing with legal aid applications. We will shortly be engaging consultants to review our handling of solicitors' and advocates' accounts. Both of these reviews are aimed at finding ways of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of these key aspects of our work.

continued ➤



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

PLANS FOR PUBLIC MEETINGS THROUGHOUT SCOTLAND

The Board will be holding a series of public meetings throughout Scotland during the next few months. These meetings will offer the public an opportunity to discuss matters of interest with members and senior staff from the Board and allow us to receive feedback on the work of the Board.

The public meetings will be held in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Inverness, Dumfries, Dundee, Hamilton and Ayr and we aim to hold as many meetings as possible before the end of March. Details of the times and dates of the meetings will be issued shortly, and they will also be publicised in the local press.

THE NEXT SERVICE SATISFACTION SURVEY

In April 2000 we will be issuing the next service satisfaction survey of solicitors.

As in the previous two surveys, we will be distributing a questionnaire randomly to 1,000 solicitors throughout Scotland to ask for their views on all aspects of the Board's operations. The questionnaire will also be placed on our web site for the profession, SLABPro.

We will again offer those who reply the opportunity to attend focus groups in their local area or individual interviews with Board representatives to discuss issues in more detail.

We will report back through *The Recorder* on the results of the survey and how we intend to take forward the issues raised. The information gained from the survey will help us improve our services.

REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

We aim to deal with any complaints about our service in a way that satisfies the concerns of the complainant and allows us to make improvements where they are needed. To help us to do this in the most effective way, we are currently reviewing our internal complaints procedures with a view to having new procedures in place

by April. We shall be publicising the procedures for making complaints to the profession, applicants and the general public, giving us the opportunity to encourage feedback about our service and ways in which we can improve. ●

CORRESPONDENCE

We have been alerted by some firms to instances where correspondence or documents do not appear to have been received or have been misdirected. We are concerned at this and will shortly be introducing new scanning equipment to help us record and track all correspondence received by and sent from the Board. In addition, our procedures for outgoing mail have been reviewed with additional checks being introduced so that all mail reaches its intended destination. ●

COMMON DISPOSAL

A number of problems are still being encountered by the Accounts Division in assessing accounts arising from criminal legal aid cases where there has been a common disposal of a number of cases relating to the same client.

This arises where a number of matters are continued to the same day, for the same client, for common disposal before the court. Whilst it may well be possible to submit separate claims for appearing once for the one client but on separate matters, payment of solicitor's accounts is subject to the general requirement that a solicitor shall only be allowed such amount of fee as shall be determined to be reasonable remuneration for such work as is actually and reasonably done, due regard being had to economy.

The Board has to look at the total level of remuneration for this work and to do so requires details of all the work carried out for the same client, including private or non-legal aid work, at that time in the event that it requires to be pro-rated against a number of separate legal aid accounts.

In order that an informed view may be arrived at, such accounts must be lodged together, referring one to the other to provide full disclosure to the Board. Failure to do so can lead to overpayment of accounts, a matter which the Board would thereafter require to take up with the solicitor concerned, and delays where it becomes apparent from an individual account that more than one matter has been dealt with on the same day requiring further checks to be made at that late stage. ●

CODE OF PRACTICE UPDATE

Following the consultation on the proposed revisions to the *Code of Practice in relation to criminal legal assistance*, we have been discussing points arising from that process with the Law Society of Scotland and the Scottish Executive. The final draft of the Code is now with the Scottish Executive for approval and we hope that it will be published shortly. There will be an appropriate time allowed between publication of the revised Code and the date when solicitors and firms must comply with its provisions. Full details will be provided when the Code is published. ●

RESULTS OF COMPLIANCE QUESTIONNAIRE

As part of our performance monitoring, Audit Effectiveness questionnaires have been issued to all Compliance Partners whose firms have been audited since 1 July 1999. Both the response rate and the responses themselves have been very encouraging. Just over 66% of forms issued were returned and we are very grateful to those of you who took time to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire asks Compliance Partners to state their level of satisfaction with various features of the audit, including the usefulness of the audit findings and the professionalism of the Compliance Audit staff, on a scale. The figures in the table below were calculated on the basis of a maximum possible score of 100 per question.

The results for the first three months – July to September 1999 – are as follows:

1. Were the audit objectives clearly specified in advance ?	80.6
2. Was disruption to your firm kept to a minimum ?	88.1
3. Were the Auditors' requests for information reasonable ?	94.3
4. Were the Auditors courteous ?	98.7
5. Did the Auditors discuss with you their findings ?	91.6
6. Was the audit report accurate ?	85.1
7. Were the audit findings useful ?	78.7
8. Was the time span from audit to report reasonable ?	91.2
9. How would you rate the professionalism of the Auditors ?	96.0
10. Overall, how satisfied were you with the audit ?	88.1

We have also received a large number of letters from audited firms complimenting the Auditors on their professional approach and reacting positively to the audit. We are pleased to read that, for many firms, a compliance audit has been regarded in a positive and constructive light.

Further information can be obtained from David Buchanan-Cook, Manager, Compliance Audit. ●

REGISTRATION OF SECOND YEAR TRAINEES

There can be a delay between a second year trainee becoming enrolled and the issue of a restricted practising certificate, a problem which can delay their registration under the *Code of Practice in relation to criminal legal assistance*. We have liaised with the Law Society and agreed that when the Society writes to enrolled solicitors advising of their new status, a list of all those solicitors will simultaneously be forwarded to the Board. Where the trainee's financial mandate and CLA registration form have been received by the Board in advance, we should be able to process registration on the basis of their name appearing on the Society's list. We hope that this arrangement will expedite the CLA registration process for second year trainees. ●

ACCOUNTS UPDATE

Since October last year we have been processing correctly prepared and vouched criminal legal aid accounts within 30 calendar days. The introduction of a second payment run each week also means that we have reduced the time between an account being finalised and payment actually being made into your bank account, thereby improving cash flow.

We still have a large amount of mail relating to criminal accounts to be dealt with, but now that all staff are back after the festive holidays we are actively working on this. It would be helpful if you could avoid sending reminders and phoning with enquiries about this. We would ask for your continued support while we deal with this matter as quickly as possible.

For the time being, to help us to make further progress, we would ask that you continue to restrict any telephone enquiries to after 2pm. ●

ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE CATEGORY CODES

In recent months a number of new category codes for advice and assistance applications have been introduced. These cover cases involving the Human Rights Act 1998, the Scotland Act 1998 and devolution cases.

The new codes are –

DVCI	Devolution – civil only	HRCH	Human Rights Act 1998 – children’s cases only
DVCR	Devolution – criminal only	SCCI	Scotland Act 1998 – civil only
DVCH	Devolution – children’s cases only	SCCR	Scotland Act 1998 – criminal only
HRCI	Human Rights Act 1998 – civil only	SCCH	Scotland Act 1998 – children’s cases only ●
HRCR	Human Rights Act 1998 – criminal only		

ANNUAL ISSUE OF THE RESOURCE CD AND HANDBOOK

In response to feedback from the profession, we will be publishing the Scottish Legal Aid Handbook annually in June. The timing of the Handbook’s publication allows us to include the amending regulations that are introduced each year in April and any other legislation or regulation changes, and we hope that issuing it at the same time every year will provide an improved service to the profession.

At the same time we will also issue a free copy of our Resource CD-ROM which contains the digital forms and Handbook. A copy of the CD-ROM will be sent to every firm with a legal aid practitioner number.

The most up-to-date version of the digital Handbook is always on our web site for the profession, SLABPro which you can find at www.slabpro.org.uk. (The username and password for this site are shown on page 7 of this newsletter.) Throughout the year, any changes to the Handbook or the forms will be updated on SLABPro. ●

YOUR FEEDBACK ON THE DIGITAL FORMS

We will shortly begin work on the new version of our Resource CD-ROM, containing the digital forms and Handbook, and we would like your views on the effectiveness of these new services.

It would be very helpful to know if, for example: you had any problems installing the CD-ROM, the forms or the Handbook; you found any difficulties in completing or printing the digital forms; if you would like to see any additional features on the digital Handbook.

If you have any comments about these services, please write to Fiona Shaw, Communications Manager, at the address on the back page, by fax on 0131 220 4878 or by e-mail at shawfi@slab.org.uk **before 1 March 2000.** ●

ADOBE EXCHANGE SOFTWARE

We have received a number of enquiries asking if it is possible to save information in the digital forms. The software that we provided on the Resource CD-ROM, Adobe Acrobat Reader, does not allow you to do this. However, you can buy an additional piece of software, Adobe Acrobat Exchange, which will allow the completed form to be saved or to create templates containing the solicitors details or other common information. You can buy this software from the manufacturers Adobe. The Board is currently negotiating with Adobe for a discount on this software for solicitors, and we hope to have further news of this soon. In the meantime, you can obtain more information about the software from Adobe at www.adobe.com. ●

UPDATE ON HANDBOOK INDEX

The paper copy of the fourth edition of the Scottish Legal Aid Handbook, dated May 1999, contains a number of errors in the index. We apologise if this has caused any inconvenience. If you would like a copy of the updated index, please contact our Communications Office on ext. 301.

Alternatively, you can find the Handbook on our web site for the profession, SLABPro, at www.slabpro.org.uk. You need a username and password to access this site and these are shown at page 7 in this newsletter. The digital Handbook is also on version 2.0 of our Resource CD-ROM which was issued in September to all firms. If you would like a copy of the CD-ROM, contact our Communications Office on ext. 301. ●

FORMS UPDATE

CHANGE TO A&A FORM

The application form for advice and assistance (AA/APP) was updated in September 1999 to reflect the introduction of the Working Families' Tax Credit and the Disabled Person's Tax Credit. The new version of the form has 'Revised 9/99' on the bottom left side of the front page. Old stocks of this form can continue to be used, however you should only use old stocks marked 'Revised 5/98'. All older versions will not now be accepted. The updated digital version of this form is on our web site for the profession, SLABPro. ●

FORTHCOMING SEMINARS

Friday 11 February - Central Law Training - Human Rights for Criminal Practitioners - Glasgow Moat House Hotel

Wednesday 1 March - Wigtown District Faculty of Solicitors - Civil and Criminal Legal Aid -

Stranraer Sheriff Court from 5.30pm.

The Edinburgh University Law Review Seminar Series 2000 - Human Rights Issues and Update on Criminal Legal Aid -

Wednesday 22 March - Glasgow Marriott Hotel

Wednesday 29 March - The University of Edinburgh

Wednesday 5 April - Treetops Hotel, Aberdeen

WHO'S WHO AT THE BOARD

To help you find the right person at the Board to answer your query, the list below gives you a number of useful contacts.

Chief Executive – Lindsay Montgomery

E-mail – montgomeli@slab.org.uk

Chairman – Jean Couper

E-mail – couperje@slab.org.uk

Fax – 0131 220 5145

Legal Services Department

Fax – 0131 220 4879

Director – Tom Murray

E-mail – murrayto@slab.org.uk

Solicitors – Alex Anderson, Helen Bell, Eve Crowe, Douglas Haggarty, Olive Hogg, John McCleary, Philip Shearer and Catriona Whyte
Legal Executive – Claire Ewart

Audit and Compliance Department

Fax – 0131 225 9850

Director – Ian Middleton

E-mail – middletoia@slab.org.uk

Manager, Compliance Audit – David Buchanan-Cook

Finance Department

Fax – 0131 220 5133

Director – Jim Edgar

E-mail – edgarji@slab.org.uk

Accounting and Budgeting Manager – Alan Williamson

Receipts and Payments – Liz Reid

Information Systems Department

Fax – 0131 225 8357

Director – Wallace Gray

E-mail – graywa@slab.org.uk

E-mail – support@slab.org.uk

Operations Department

Director – Stephen O'Connor

E-mail – occonnorst@slab.org.uk

Manager of Civil Applications – Derek Arthur

Manager of Criminal Applications – Kingsley Thomas

Advice and assistance – Billy Mattison, Assistant Manager

Fax numbers

Civil 0131 220 4879

Criminal 0131 226 5477

A&A applications 0131 220 3462

Applications registration 0131 220 5464

Manager of Accounts Assessment – Judith

Cemery

Assistant Manager – Steven Carrie

Fax numbers

A&A accounts 0131 220 4882

Civil accounts 0131 220 3908

Criminal accounts 0131 220 4895

Treasury – Ross Marriott, Assistant Manager

Fax – 0131 220 5091

Communications Office

Fax – 0131 220 4878

Communications Manager – Fiona Shaw

E-mail – shawfi@slab.org.uk

Personnel and Development

Fax – 0131 225 7862

Personnel Manager – Linda Laughland

E-mail – laughlanli@slab.org.uk

Personnel Manager (Development) – Moira Williamson

E-mail – williamsmo@slab.org.uk

FIND US ON THE WEB

You will find more information about legal aid on our two web sites, SLABOnline and SLABPro.

www.slab.org.uk – contains information for both the public and the legal profession.

www.slabpro.org.uk – is specifically for solicitors and advocates who carry out legal aid work. It contains digital versions of legal aid application forms and the Scottish Legal Aid Digital Handbook. You need a username and password to access this site.

Please note: the username and password are

Username – solicitor

Password – 4439v2. ●

HAVE YOU RECEIVED THIS INFORMATION?

Since issue 28 of *The Recorder* was published in September 1999, the following mailshots, containing important information about legal aid, have been sent to practitioners. If you did not receive these, contact our Communications Office for a copy.

- ▶ **Letter to Compliance Partners from Lindsay Montgomery, Chief Executive, providing information on the revised requirements for time recording in the *Code of Practice in relation to criminal legal assistance* – 30 September 1999**
- ▶ **Letter to Compliance Partners from David Buchanan-Cook, Manager, Compliance Audit, with an update on various compliance issues – 25 October 1999**
- ▶ **Letter from Tom Murray, Director of Legal Services, with an update on assessment of criminal legal aid accounts – 19 October 1999**
- ▶ **Letter from Jim Edgar, Director of Finance, setting out arrangements for Fund payments and principal sums cheques over the festive holidays – 16 December 1999**
- ▶ **Letter from Jim Edgar, Director of Finance stating that the helpline for criminal legal aid accounts queries would close from February - 17 January 2000**

All this information is on our web site for the profession, SLABPro, at www.slabpro.org.uk. ●

PUBLICATION OF THE RECORDER

We aim to publish *The Recorder* at least three times a year – in January, May and September. If there is important news in between these dates, we will produce a special issue as required.

If any solicitor in your firm does not receive *The Recorder*, please ask them to contact our Communications Office, quoting the firm's code and their practitioner code, to be included on the mailing list.

You can find back copies of *The Recorder* from January 1998 on our web site for the profession at www.slabpro.org.uk. ●

CHECK YOUR DETAILS

To ensure that correspondence, *The Recorder* and other important information from the Board reaches you, please make sure that you tell us immediately if you change address or firm. Please also remember to tell us if your firm changes to or from Royal Mail and Hays DX so that we can update our records and send mail to you by the most appropriate means. You should notify our Finance department in writing of any change in address or practitioner details. If you are registered on the Criminal Legal Assistance Register, you should also notify our Criminal Legal Assistance Registration Unit on ext. 444 if you change firm or address. ●



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