

PRESS RELEASE

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THE SCOTTISH LEGAL AID BOARD

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PUBLIC MEETING IN DUMFRIES SCOTTISH LEGAL AID BOARD ASKS FOR YOUR VIEWS

The Scottish Legal Aid Board is holding a public meeting in Dumfries to obtain feedback on the legal aid system in Scotland.

The Board wants to hear people's experiences of the legal aid system and the views of anyone with an interest in legal aid or the wider justice system. It is looking for feedback on how the legal aid system works now and how it could be improved in the future. Staff from the Board will also be able to answer any general legal aid queries about cases that members of the public have been involved with.

The meeting will be held on
21 March
Station Hotel, Lovers Walk, Dumfries
5.30pm - 7.00pm

The public meeting is part of a wide ranging review by the Board of how it operates and how it can develop and improve its service. Feedback received from consultation with the public and others will inform the Board's strategic plans for the coming years and it will be passed on to Scottish Ministers to help them in developing government policy on legal aid. The Board is holding four public meetings during February and March and is also consulting with organisations involved in the justice system.

Chairman of the Scottish Legal Aid Board, Jean Couper, encouraged the public to attend the meetings. "It is very important that we hear the views of the public on the operation of the Board and the legal aid system. We want to ensure that the service we provide meets the needs of the people who are directly affected by legal aid - perhaps having received legal aid for a case, being the opponent in a case where the other person has received legal aid, or even having been refused legal aid."

Editors' Notes

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 Scottish Ministers on legal aid matters. In 1998/99, the cost of legal aid in Scotland was just over £ 138 million. The Board collected £9 million in contributions, expenses and amounts recovered from assisted persons, giving a cost to the taxpayer of £129 million. The cost of running the Board was £7.6 million.

The Chairman would be available for interview prior to the public meetings.

For information contact: Fiona Shaw, Communications Manager, on 0131 226 7061.

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