

# 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<br>£ | % CHANGE FROM 98/99 | 98/99<br>£ | 97/98<br>£ |
|------------------------------|----------------|---------------------|------------|------------|
| 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<br>£'000 | % OF TOTAL SPEND | % CHANGE FROM 98/99 | 98/99<br>£'000 | % OF TOTAL SPEND | 97/98<br>£'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        |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>130,157</b>     | <b>100</b>       | <b>-5.8</b>         | <b>138,125</b> | <b>100</b>       | <b>145,065</b> | <b>100</b> |

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.