

PRESS RELEASE For immediate release

THE SCOTTISH LEGAL AID BOARD

44, Drumsheugh Gardens, Edinburgh, EH3 7SW
Tel. 01312267061

LEGAL AID EVOLVING IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

Community legal services, e-commerce with solicitors and further improvements in services to the public and legal profession are key themes in the Corporate Plan of the Scottish Legal Aid Board for 2001-03, published today.

The Board is participating in a multi-agency group, set up in October 2000 by Jim Wallace, the Minister for Justice, to consider issues such as funding, quality of service, effective referral between agencies and innovative ways of providing advice and information. Alongside this work, the Board is seeking proposals from interested organisations to develop a range of pilot projects to test different arrangements through which they could employ solicitors to provide legal aid services or to support local organisations in their function of giving advice and guidance.

Over 400,000 applications for legal aid and assistance are sent to the Board each year, and it pays solicitors for more than 350,000 cases. E-commerce, which is to be introduced between the Board and solicitors during the plan period, will dramatically reduce the amount of paper involved in these transactions, making the processes simpler, quicker, more efficient and cost effective.

Solicitors, advocates and members of the public have been consulted during the past year at open meetings and through surveys. This process of consultation is part of the Board's wider strategy to be more open in its communications with all its users, and to improve its services.

The Board's Chairman, Mrs Jean Couper, in announcing the publication of the report, said "Legal aid is evolving to meet the changing needs of society and the Board is working with others in the justice system to find the best ways of meeting these needs, through initiatives such as the community legal service pilot projects. Our move towards e-commerce will be key to our work with the legal profession to provide a more efficient and cost effective legal aid service, Our plan for the next two years is to continue to improve our service and to develop innovative, new and effective delivery mechanisms for the future,"

Copies of the Corporate Plan, which is sent to all MSPs, can be obtained from the Scottish Legal Aid Board (0131 2267061, or e-mail general@slab.org.uk).

1 May 2001

For further information contact 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.