



Press Release

17/2/11

Continuing increase in lawyers wishing to do legal aid work.

The Scottish Legal Aid Board published figures today which show the continuing growth in the numbers of solicitor firms registering to provide legal aid.

Over the past year* there was:

- an increase of 5% in the number of firms registered for civil legal aid (620 to 654).
- an increase of 3% in the number of solicitors registered for criminal legal aid (1353 to 1392)
- an increase of 2% in the number of firms registered for criminal legal aid (562 to 573).

In civil legal aid, the number of applications have increased by almost 40% over the past 3 years (22,028 in 2009-2010 and 15,861 in 2007-2008). The current year has seen no diminution of the higher levels of applications.

Lindsay Montgomery CBE, Chief Executive of the Scottish Legal Aid Board said, "This appears to be a continuing effect of the recession with legal firms seeking new or additional income streams, whilst the increase in civil legal aid applications is likely to be a mixture of increased need for legal help as a result of the recession and solicitors willing to take on cases which they may not have previously. This may tie in with recent data** released by the Law Society which suggests that smaller firms in some sectors were finding business more difficult."

*February 15th 2010 to February 15th 2011.

**Law Society - Cost of Time Survey.

Ends

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Notes for editors

Legal aid is help towards the costs of legal advice and representation, for those who qualify, paid for out of public funds. It is designed to help individuals on low and modest incomes gain access to the legal system. There are two main types of legal assistance: advice and assistance and legal aid. Together these are called legal assistance. Legal aid may be free, or someone may have to pay towards the cost of their case, for example through paying a contribution or from the money or property that they win or keep as a result of their legal action. Legal aid is accessed through a solicitor. Unlike most public expenditure, the legal aid fund is not cash limited. The Scottish Government will provide the Board with the funds required to meet the cost of cases which have been granted.