



Press Release

10th December 2010

Legal aid solicitor survey shows high satisfaction and commitment to legal aid

An independent survey for the Scottish Legal Aid Board has shown a commitment to legal aid and overall high levels of satisfaction with the legal aid procedures operated by the Board, particularly its online services.

The Scottish Legal Aid Board today published the findings of its independent survey of legal aid solicitors. The survey involved phone interviews with 416 solicitors, across civil and criminal legal aid firms, to gather evidence of the profession's views on legal aid and the guidance and support provided to them by the Board.

Findings included:

- A significant majority of solicitors are willing to take on more civil legal aid clients (in 2005 43% had said that they had stopped taking on new clients, this is now down to just 2%).
- Solicitors are very positive about continuing to provide legal aid services; 88% "certain" / "likely to" be doing legal aid in three year's time (compared to 63% in 2005, a 26% increase). These findings support the Board's experiences of increasing numbers of solicitors wishing to do legal aid work - both civil and criminal legal aid.
- High levels of satisfaction with legal aid processes and guidelines available from the Board. (With very low levels of dissatisfaction indicated across applications and criminal accounts. More varied views were expressed about civil legal aid accounts processes).
- Very strong support for the Board's online legal aid processes (e.g. 92% for those who submit criminal summary applications were satisfied with the process).

The survey also sought solicitors' views on aspects of the Summary Justice Reforms on behalf of the Scottish Government, which included reform of Summary Criminal Legal Aid. Findings included:

- 80% of solicitors felt that allowing appointed solicitors to grant criminal ABWOR (assistance by way of representation) for guilty pleas had succeeded in helping to bring about earlier resolution of cases

- about two thirds of solicitors felt that the changes to remuneration were assisting in the earlier resolution of cases.

Lindsay Montgomery, C.B.E., Chief Executive of the Scottish Legal Aid Board commented, “Overall the results are very positive and encouraging not only about the board’s processes and communications, but also in terms of solicitors’ positive attitudes to continuing to provide legal aid services. This reflects the board’s experience of increasing numbers of firms registering to undertake legal aid work.

We are already looking at areas where levels of satisfaction are lower than average (albeit still the minority view) to establish where there might be scope for development. I am very grateful to those who took part in the survey.”

Solicitors are on the front line of legal aid provision and are integral to enabling access to justice, so seeking the profession’s views in this independent way gives us useful information on solicitors’ experiences of the Board’s systems, which will be used to further develop and improve legal aid policy, practices and procedures.”

The summary research briefing (from MVA Consulting) and full results are available on the Board’s website at www.slab.org.uk .

Ends

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Notes to 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.