



Advice and assistance reforms update

This update mailshot contains important information in relation to changes in advice and assistance coming into force on **1 May 2007**.

The changes affect both civil and criminal practitioners.

Please ensure that all staff involved in providing advice and assistance are made aware of its contents.

New forms from 1 May

As part of the process of civil advice and assistance reform, new intimation and increase forms are being introduced. As the reforms mark a separation between civil, children's and criminal advice and assistance, new and separate intimation forms for advice and assistance and ABWOR on civil and criminal matters are now being introduced.

The new children's advice and assistance application and increase forms were issued in December 2006 and are already being used widely. The new civil and criminal advice and assistance forms follow a similar style to these children's forms.

The introduction of the new forms will also see us change to a new paperless computer system. This means that forms will be electronically scanned, and what you write will be automatically put into our computer system. We expect that our new system will bring a number of benefits to the profession, such as quicker processing. The style of the new forms has been updated to enable us to use our new paperless computer system.

The new civil and criminal advice and assistance forms must be used for all grants of advice and assistance made from 1 May 2007 onwards.

From 1 May 2007, any intimation and increase received which is not on these new forms will be returned.

Starter packs

We will automatically issue you with a starter pack of the new advice and assistance forms. We will be issuing the starter packs from mid April.

The front page of this update tells you the size of the starter pack we will send to you.

The starter pack size is based on the number of civil and criminal advice and assistance applications you made in 2006, and an estimate of use if you use Legal Aid Online to send us applications. In some cases we may not show you submitted applications in 2006, but you do not require to correct this.

We have used these figures to estimate the number of forms you would typically use over a six month period, which we have then translated to one of our standard size starter packs.

Changing the starter pack size

If you are content with the size of starter pack that we have set out on the cover page, you do not need to do anything.

If you wish to change the size of the starter pack that we will send to you, please complete and return the cover page by Monday 16 April.

We will start sending out the starter packs from that date.

Packs are being sent to solicitors and not offices. You may therefore wish to discuss with other colleagues if they are receiving forms, to help identify if you wish to change the number of forms we will send to you automatically. You may wish to revise the starter pack size to reflect any changes in the type of advice and assistance cases you expect to take on this year and if you will be using Legal Aid Online to send us your applications, increases and accounts.

You will be able to order the new forms for ongoing use in the usual way from our printers, Stewarts. The starter pack will include an updated order form. Please note that if you expect to need more of the new advice and assistance forms at an early stage, it would be more helpful if you revise the size of the starter pack that will be sent to you.

Please also note that if you are to receive a starter pack with more than 100 forms, you will be sent more than one package with forms. It is likely that you will receive these packs at different times, but our mailing label will tell you how many packs you will be receiving.

If you have any questions about your order for the starter pack of forms, please contact our Communications Department on tel 0131 240 1985, or email general@slab.org.uk

Only printed forms and Legal Aid Online applications accepted

With this change in forms, we will only be able to deal with forms that are in the supplied printed format or are made using Legal Aid Online.

You should note that we will not be providing "interactive" pdf versions of the new advice and assistance forms, which have previously enabled the forms to be completed on computer. We will also no longer accept photocopied forms or forms produced in your own format such as from your own case management system.

The main reason for this change is that if forms are printed on a normal desktop printer or on a photocopier, the layout will not match that of the printed forms we supply you, and will not be read by our computer systems. However, by using Legal Aid Online, you can make applications on computer and then send them to us securely through the internet, making it faster and easier for you. Therefore, if you currently use pdf or your own versions of our forms for completion on computer, you will need to move on to Legal Aid Online service - see below for details.

It is also important that you maintain a supply of advice and assistance forms, and you may therefore wish to revise your starter pack size.

Supporting the move to the new forms

To help support the move to the new forms we will be issuing a wide range of guidance, including how to complete the forms and some example model applications. We will also be issuing new associated guidance, such as on template increases for civil advice and assistance.

This guidance will be sent to you in a separate mailing from the start pack of forms.

Legal Aid Online

The introduction of the new advice and assistance forms is an ideal time to consider trying Legal Aid Online.

Legal Aid Online is a free, quick, easy and secure way to process legal aid. Legal Aid Online allows you to make applications and create accounts using the internet, help your clients and get paid faster.

Legal Aid Online is available for advice and assistance applications, increases and accounts. Both solicitors and administration staff can use the system. All you need is access to the internet from your computer.

Many practitioners have seen benefits in using Legal Aid Online.

You can find out more about Legal Aid Online on our website www.slab.org.uk in the legal profession section.

To start using Legal Aid Online, please register your details with us. Registration is free, quick and easy. We will then be in touch to discuss setting you up for our online service. Your move to Legal Aid Online will be supported with help and training to get you up and running.

You can register your details:

- by completing the question on the attached starter pack form
- online, by going to the legal profession section of our website and following the links to Legal Aid Online
- or contact our Legal Aid Online team on 0131 240 2013 or online@slab.org.uk

Information seminars

We are currently running a series of evening seminars to fully explain the new civil advice and assistance system and the introduction of the new civil and criminal forms. The seminars provide practitioners with a good opportunity to learn about how the new system will operate and to raise any queries about its operation with senior officials from the Board.

There are still places available at the last five seminars:

- Glasgow - **Tuesday 10 April** - Radisson SAS, Argyle Street, Glasgow
- Dundee - **Wednesday 11 April** - Apex Dundee
- Ayr - **Tuesday 17 April** - Ayr Racecourse, Ayr
- Dumfries - **Wednesday 18 April** - Station Hotel, Dumfries
- Central Scotland - **Wednesday 25 April** - Dakota, M8 Eurocentral Junction

The seminars **start at 6pm** and close at 7.30pm. Refreshments are available from 5.30pm. You can obtain CPD for these seminars. They are free and open to staff in your office involved in legal aid work.

If you have not already booked, please complete the online booking form on our website www.slab.org.uk or the attached booking form to reserve a place at a seminar.

For any seminar booking queries, contact the Board's Communications Department on **0131 240 1985** or email general@slab.org.uk

Do we have your details correct?

Please tell us if the firm or address details we have used are incorrect. You should notify our Receipts and Payments Department in writing of any changes in address or practitioner details. If you have any queries on mailing addresses please contact: *Receipts and Payments on 0131 240 2080*



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Information seminars - which one do you wish to attend?

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1. What is your practitioner number - see the first page of this letter - or write in your name and firm?

2. Information on the location of venues and further details are available on our website. If you wish to be sent this information, do you wish it sent by:

- LP/DX/post - what is your address? email - if by email, what is your email address?

3. Please give us the names of any colleagues who will also attend this seminar.

4. **Legal Aid Online** - if you are interested in finding out more about Legal Aid Online, how to get started, including learning about training and support, do you wish to:

- register my firm's interest in using Legal Aid Online so that we can contact you

Return your booking form:

- *fax back to:* 0131 220 4878
- *or email your details to:* general@slab.org.uk
- *or post to:* Communications, Scottish Legal Aid Board, at our usual address

Please return your form at least 2 days in advance of the session you will attend.