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To:

All legal aid practitioners

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Dear colleague

Legal Aid Online

Legal Aid online is at the forefront of our work to make the legal aid system in Scotland as efficient as possible. As we have stated previously, virtually all legal aid business with solicitors will be online by April 2011. We will discontinue many of our paper based procedures at that time. It is our intention to work closely with the profession to ensure that the transition from paper to online systems is as smooth and easy as possible.

It is clear that the online system already in place substantially reduces the timescales involved in processing legal aid applications and accounts. Having virtually wholly online communications with the profession will enable the Board to minimise the cost to the taxpayer of our administration as well as providing efficiencies and economies for the profession. Our latest service standards further increase the gap in turn round times between paper and online services.

Many solicitor firms are already online:

- Around 65% of firms are already using legal aid online
- Well over 70% of advice and assistance intimations are made online
- In the first three months since their launch over 30% of civil legal aid applications and over 40% of summary criminal applications are made online and these figures are continuing to grow.

Currently, you can do the following work online:

- Make a grant of advice and assistance or ABWOR or an application for ABWOR and apply for an increase
- Make an application for summary criminal legal aid
- Make an application for civil legal aid
- Make an application for sanction and other post-grant work in a civil or summary criminal case (regardless of whether you submitted the original application online)
- Create and submit an advice and assistance or ABWOR account.

We are rapidly extending the services which are available online. By March 2010, you will be able to do the following work online:

- All remaining types of civil legal aid applications (for example, transfer and amendment applications) and applications for payment on account of fees (stage payments). The full block fee account and detailed fee accounts will follow later in the spring.
- All remaining types of summary criminal legal aid applications (for example, transfer and exceptional payment applications) and accounts.
- Sanction applications for solemn criminal legal aid.

By summer 2010, you will be able to do the following work online:

- Children's legal aid applications and accounts
- All remaining types of solemn criminal legal aid applications and accounts will be available in time for the transfer of decision-making in solemn criminal cases to the Board
- Online advice and assistance accounts will be further developed following feedback we received.

We would like all solicitors to start using Legal Aid Online as soon as possible so that you and your staff build up experience before April 2011 and we can help you solve any issues now and avoid leaving it to the last minute. We want to assist you in making this transition:

- We can arrange to visit local faculties or groups of firms for training sessions.
- We hold meetings of Legal Aid Online User Groups across the country to gather feedback and identify where changes may need to be made. There are meetings scheduled for February and March 2010.
- Online help is available through the Online Learning training pack.

In addition to Legal Aid Online, we will use the Board's website at www.slab.org.uk as the primary source of information about legal aid. We will be updating the Board's website over the next few months to improve its structure and content. The website will be the primary source of information about legal aid and the Board and will provide direct access to Legal Aid Online and the Scottish Legal Aid Handbook.

The Scottish Legal Aid Handbook is available on our website and is updated regularly. This is our principal source of information about the Board's legislation, policies and procedures in relation to applications and accounts. The handbook is being updated and will be completed in March 2010, although the revised section on solemn legal aid applications will await the outcome of our consultation on the application of the 'undue hardship' test. The handbook is available on the Board's website in the 'Legal Profession' section.

If you have any questions about Legal Aid Online, please contact Diane Ireland on 0131 240 2013 or email irelanddi@slab.org.uk.

Yours sincerely



Lindsay Montgomery
Chief Executive