



Summary criminal legal assistance reform: Legal Aid Online

Implementation date: 30 June 2008

TO: All criminal legal assistance solicitors who use Legal Aid Online

Online update: 27 June 2008

Your practitioner number

Your firm and branch code

LEGAL AID ONLINE UPDATE JUNE 2008: SUMMARY CRIMINAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE REFORMS CHANGES FROM 30 JUNE 2008

This update contains information about changes to Legal Aid Online that are linked to reforms of criminal legal assistance, coming into force on 30 June 2008. Please ensure that all staff involved in providing criminal advice and assistance/ ABWOR using Legal Aid Online are made aware of its contents.

This update was also issued by email and is available on our website.

Attached to this update are printed copies of the two new Client Mandate Forms which are in use from 30 June 2008 - see section 5 for more details.

1. Changes to Legal Aid Online

As from Monday 30 June 2008, Legal Aid Online will be updated to reflect the changes required to meet the summary criminal legal assistance reforms. The changes are for criminal cases under advice and assistance/ABWOR applications, increases and accounts. This update outlines the changes to the service, the introduction of new Client Mandate Forms for use from 30 June and details of guidance and online learning.

There are no changes to the Legal Aid Online service for civil and children's advice and assistance cases.

Any criminal advice and assistance granted prior to 30 June also remains unchanged. Legal Aid Online will know to display the relevant forms to you based on the grant date.

2. Guidance on the changes made for criminal cases

To help you prepare for the changes, we have issued a number of mailings and run seminars on the reforms. To use the new Legal Aid Online service for criminal cases, you should be familiar with the changes made by the reforms. You are strongly advised to read our guidance - *Summary criminal legal assistance reform - your guide to the changes*, which was issued to all criminal solicitors in Mailing 2. All of our reform mailings and guidance is available on our website at: www.slub.org.uk/profession/summarycriminal

We have also updated our eLearning service, and you can follow the relevant sections within the learning pack prior to using our online service for criminal advice and assistance /ABWOR.

3. The main changes to Legal Aid Online for applications and increases

Legal Aid Online will offer an easier way to make applications and increases than using the new paper forms. Here is a summary of the main changes which will be made from 30 June 2008.

Online applications

- only questions relevant to the type of application will be displayed
- the initial authorised expenditure limit will be automatically allocated based on the application type and other information supplied.
- the new lower limit contributions will be updated.

Increases

- you can use the online increase to:
 - apply to the Board for an increase in authorised expenditure
 - advise the Board that ABWOR is now being provided following an initial grant of advice and assistance
 - seek Board approval for a grant of ABWOR.
- only questions relevant to the type of increase will be displayed
- Legal Aid Online will automatically update the initial authorised expenditure where relevant
- new templates can be selected if available to the case type. In most cases these will receive an almost immediate grant notification.
- new work proposed items have been introduced for non-template increases.
- you can now update financial eligibility verification if this has changes since the application was processed.

4. Advice and assistance online accounts

We expect to introduce the changes to our Legal Aid Online accounts service for the reformed criminal advice and assistance / ABWOR later in July. We will update you by email when this is available.

You can continue to create advice and assistance accounts online for civil and children's cases, as well as criminal cases where the grant was made prior to 30 June 2008.

When available, the new criminal accounts service will include the following changes:

- criminal advice and assistance fee rates have been increased by 10% and the new fee will be automatically calculated in the relevant cases
- ABWOR fixed fee will automatically be allocated if relevant to the case and you will have the option of adding other fixed fees or additional work items to this. A standard fixed fee account will be processed and you will receive an instant passed for payment notification.
- the synopsis questions will have been updated and the system will only ask you questions relevant to the case type.
- you will be able to update financial eligibility verification if this has changed since the application was processed.

5. New Legal Aid Online client mandate forms - in use from 30 June 2008

We are introducing new client mandate forms as a result of the changes to the criminal advice and assistance/ABWOR application form. There will now be two mandate forms:

- **AA/LAO/CRIM** -criminal advice and assistance/ABWOR client mandate form
- **AA/LAO/CIV** - for civil and children's cases. This form is a renamed version of the current mandate form.

The first page of the new criminal mandate form enables you to collect most application information on the one page. It is similar to the current mandate, but updated to reflect the criminal reforms, including a new client declaration. The further two pages of the mandate form then enable you to collect the information for ABWOR applications.

For criminal cases, you must use the new form from 30 June 2008.

Attached to this letter are copies of the two new forms. The new forms are also now available on our website in Microsoft Word or pdf format -you can find them in the Legal Aid Online section of our website www.slab.org.uk. You can use the Word version of the form to pre-print it with your name.

When to use the Client Mandate Form

In our eLearning pack, please see the **Creating an Application - Essential Steps** section, to find out more information on when and how to use the Mandate.

We recommend that you use the Client Mandate Form where you are making an advice and assistance/ABWOR application using Legal Aid Online and are seeing a:

- repeat client or
- new client out of the office where their circumstances are straightforward - such as they receive a passport benefit.

In other situations you should use the printed advice and assistance application form to ensure you collect all the required information.

Remember that you are responsible for completing the application form and that you should ensure you get all the information required from your client. Therefore even if you are using the new Client Mandate Form, you may wish to refer to the printed advice and assistance form to ensure you collect all necessary information.

6. Online eLearning and contacts for Legal Aid Online queries

We have updated the Legal Aid Online eLearning pack with all the changes relevant to the criminal advice and assistance/ABWOR application and increase. You can find it on our website at: <http://www.slub.org.uk/profession/legalaidonline/learn.htm>

Please do not hesitate to contact the Legal Aid Online Marketing team if you require any assistance with the changes to our Legal Aid Online service:

- Pat O'Connor - Legal Aid Online Marketing Officer on 0131 240 1892
- Diane Ireland - Legal Aid Online Marketing Manager on 0131 240 2013

(For queries about the reforms, you should refer to our guidance or contact the relevant Board department).