

The Scottish Legal Aid Board



Research into public knowledge of legal aid

Legal aid allows people who would not otherwise be able to afford it to have the help of a solicitor, and in some circumstances an advocate, for their legal problems. To receive legal aid, applicants must consult a solicitor who will help them complete an application.

The Scottish Legal Aid Board is responsible for the administration of legal aid in Scotland. It is a non-departmental public body set up under the Legal Aid (Scotland) Act 1986. Board members, including the Chairman, are appointed by Scottish Ministers. Around 300 staff report to its Chief Executive.

Mission Statement

To develop and deliver appropriate access to quality legal assistance for those eligible, in a cost effective manner.

Strategic Objectives

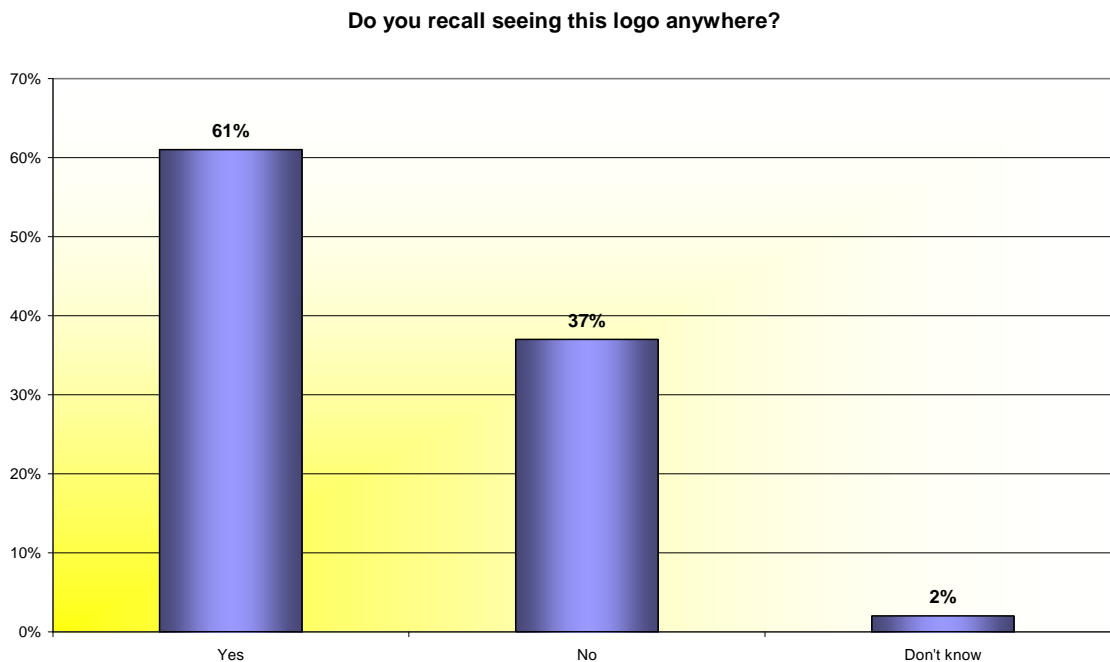
- to achieve consistent, timely and sound decision making at all stages of an application for legal assistance
- to achieve consistent, timely and sound decision making at all stages of assessing and paying accounts
- to ensure effective financial management of the Legal Aid Fund
- to improve the effectiveness of the delivery of our service while achieving a reasonable balance between cost and quality
- to communicate effectively with applicants, opponents, their advisors and other stakeholders in a clear, concise, timely, informative and pro-active manner
- to provide sound advice to Ministers and Parliament on the current operation and development of the provision of legal aid.
- This report presents the views and experiences of civil advice and assistance users, including their overall advice-seeking behaviour, assessment of information provided by solicitor and financial issues.

BACKGROUND

- 1 The purpose of this research was to provide us with baseline information on public knowledge of legal aid, and to contribute to marketing activities.
- 2 The research consisted of four questions within an omnibus survey¹ undertaken by mruk Scotland. The survey was undertaken in February 2005, and a total of 1,006 adults throughout Scotland were interviewed. The questions asked were:
 - *show the legal aid 'symbol' (that is, the logo excluding the wording) and ask: "do you recall seeing this logo anywhere?"*
 - *(to those who answered 'yes' to the question above): "can you tell me what service this logo represents?"*
 - *(to all): "if you needed help with a legal problem, do you think you would be eligible for legal aid?"*
 - *(to all): "who would you go to if you wanted more information on Legal Aid?"*

KEY FINDINGS

- When shown the legal aid 'symbol' (the logo excluding the wording) 61% of respondents (614 people) recalled having seen it before.

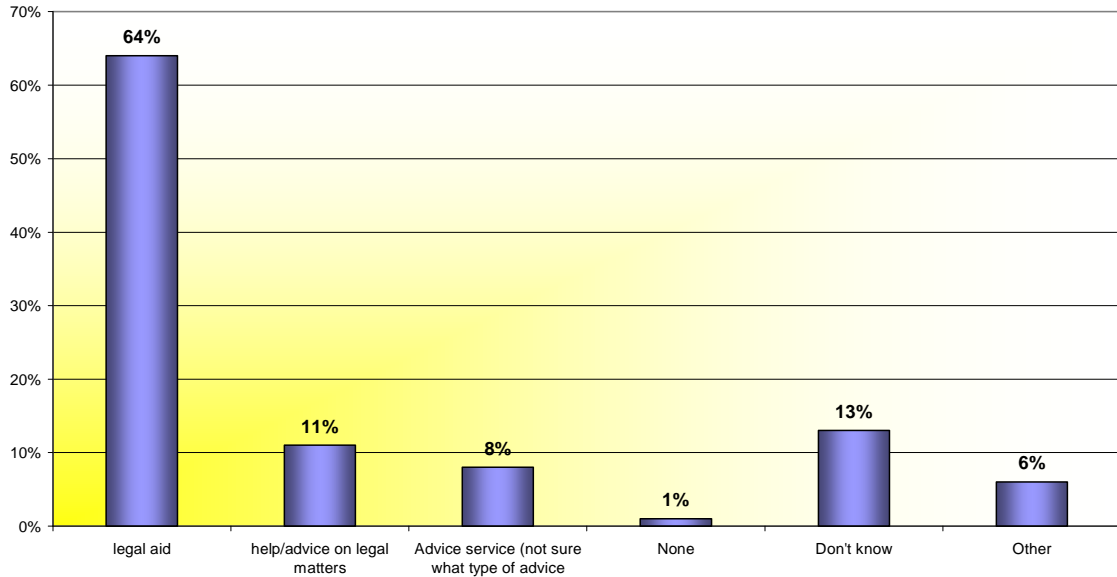


¹ A survey undertaken regularly by a market research company, in which a number of customer organisations will each have 2 or 3 questions included.

- Of the 614 who recalled having seen the logo 64% knew it represented legal aid.

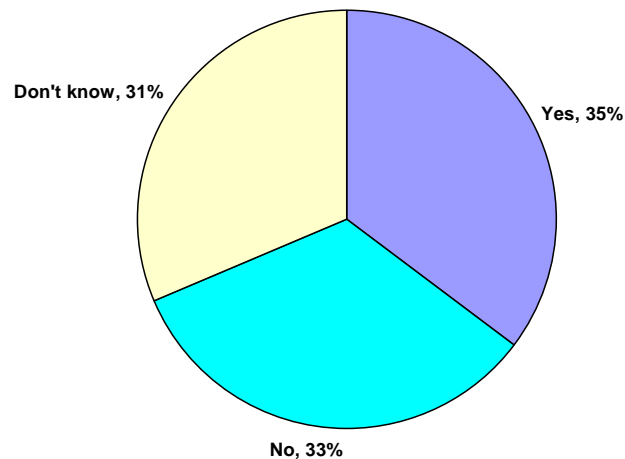
Can you tell me what service this logo represents?

(NB this was only asked to the 614 people who answered 'yes' to question 1):



- 35% of respondents thought they would be eligible for legal aid, 33% thought they would not be and 31% did not know.

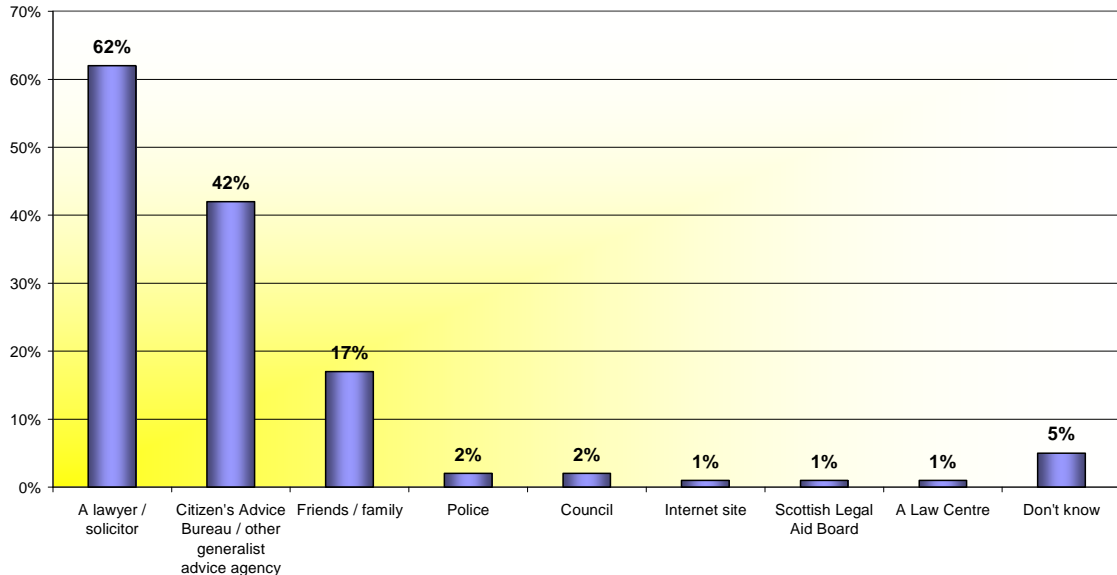
If you needed help with a legal problem do you think you would be eligible for legal aid?



- A lawyer or solicitor would be the most popular source of information on legal aid (62% mentioned this option).

Who would you go to if you wanted more information on legal aid?

(NB: answers with less than 1% are not included)



FINDINGS

- 3 When shown the legal aid 'symbol' 61% of respondents (614 people) recalled having seen it before. Of these 614, 64% knew it represented legal aid, with a further 11% knowing it was related to some sort of help or advice on legal matters. An additional 7% knew it was related to an advice service, but were unsure which sort. Other responses included: Citizens Advice Bureau (14 people), counselling (4 people) and disability (3 people), whilst seven people thought it denoted a picnic area.
- 4 35% of respondents thought they would be eligible for legal aid, 33% thought they would not be and 31% did not know. In fact, previous research undertaken on behalf of the Scottish Legal Aid Board² shows that in 1998/9 55% of households were eligible for legal aid (just over half of these would be required to pay a contribution).
- 5 If they wanted more information on legal aid a lawyer or solicitor would be the most popular source, with 62% mentioning this option. This ties in with the Paths to Justice Scotland³ findings, which showed that a solicitor was the most popular single source of information for anyone seeking to resolve a justiciable problem. The proportion mentioning a solicitor in this work was lower (29%), but this could be related to the specificity of our question in relation to legal aid. The second most popular source of information was a Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) or similar 'generalist' advice agency, this was mentioned by 42%. The only other significant response, 'friends or family', was mentioned by 17% of respondents. The totals add to more than 100% since respondents were allowed to give more than one response.

² 'Eligibility for legal aid', Professor Brian Main, University of Edinburgh Management School and David Hume Institute, 2001.

³ 'Paths to Justice Scotland: what people in Scotland do and think about going to law', Hazel Genn & Alan Paterson with the National Centre for Social Research, 2001, p 102.

By employment

- 6 Those not in employment were slightly less likely to recall having seen the logo (59%) than either those in employment (62%) or housewives (64%).
- 7 53% of those not in employment thought they would be eligible for legal aid, with only 20% of those in employment considering that they would be eligible.
- 8 Housewives would be only slightly less likely to consider going to a CAB for advice on legal aid than they were to consider going to a lawyer (55% compared with 58%). There was only a slight difference between those employed (63%) and not employed (61%) in likelihood of approaching a lawyer for advice.

By housing tenure

- 9 There was no difference between home owners and renters in terms of recall of the legal aid symbol (61%). Amongst those who had seen the symbol before, owners were slightly more likely to say that it represented legal aid (66% compared with 61%). A further 12% of owners knew it was related to help/advice on legal matters, compared to 9% of renters.
- 10 54% of those in rented accommodation thought they would be eligible for legal aid, whereas only 20% of owners thought they would be.

By age group

- 11 Amongst those of working age, older people were more likely to recall having seen the logo. However, of those who did recall seeing the logo, those aged '25-34' were most likely to know that it represented legal aid. Respondents aged 65 plus were most likely to think themselves eligible for legal aid (48%). Those aged 55-64 were least likely to consider themselves eligible (27%).
- 12 Likelihood of going to a lawyer appeared to fall into three distinct age groupings. It increased from 52% of those aged under 24, to 62% overall for those aged 25 – 54, and increased again to an average of 67% for those aged over 55. Those aged 45 – 54 were most likely to consider going to the Scottish Legal Aid Board, at 3%.

By socio-economic grouping

- 13 Socio-economic grouping is based on the 'Standard Occupational Classification 1990', which is used to categorise people by current occupation or most recent occupation. This gives 6 categories, ranging from A (professional) to E (unskilled). Although this is only a broad brush classification it can highlight differences between those in different areas of work, and therefore likely to have different income levels.
- 14 C2s and ABs were most likely to recall having seen the legal aid symbol (65% and 64% respectively). 58% of DEs recognised it; this group is likely to encompass more of those who would be eligible for legal aid than other socio-economic groupings. C1s were most likely to know that the symbol related to legal aid (71%) with DEs least likely to be aware of this (59%).
- 15 Perhaps unsurprisingly, DEs were far more likely than the other groups to think that they would be eligible for legal aid: 62%, compared with 27% of C2s, 20% of C1s and 16% of ABs. C1s and C2s were more likely than others not to know (38% on average between them). Again this is perhaps unsurprising.
- 16 ABs were s more likely to consider using a lawyer for information on legal aid than other groups (71%). There was little variation between the other groups; for all of them a lawyer would be the most likely source of legal aid information.

By gender

- 17 Men were very slightly more likely than women to recognise the logo and to know that it related to legal aid. They were also more likely to consider that they would be eligible for legal aid (37% compared with 34%).
- 18 Overall there was very little difference between the sexes in their responses to these questions.

By area

- 19 Those in the North were least likely to recall having seen the symbol (55%), 60% of those in the West recalled it and 65% of those in the East.
- 20 Amongst those who recalled seeing the symbol, those in the West were most likely to know that it related to legal aid (69%), with fewer than half (42%) of those in the North being aware of this. Although overall 57% of those in the North area knew either that it related to legal aid or to help/advice in legal matters.