



Business Plan 2024-25

The Scottish Legal Aid Board

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Information about the Scottish Legal Aid Board is available on our website:
www.slab.org.uk/corporate-information

Chief Executive's Introduction

This report sets out our Business Plan for 2024-25 and our second year of activity under our [Corporate Plan 2023-26](#).

The four corporate objectives in the plan fall into two complementary but distinct pairs. The first objective focuses on ensuring high quality administration of the current legal aid system. This focus on high quality is mirrored in our delivery of our client legal services and targeted funding programmes.

A reformed legal aid system could deliver better outcomes, in a range of different ways. However, our emphasis on the quality of our core delivery functions remains under the current legislative arrangements and aims to make the most of what the current system offers.

The second pair of objectives are focused in the main on the future. We are investing in our staff to assist in shaping tomorrow's legal aid system. By developing our leaders and managers and embedding workforce planning, we will be better placed not only to manage the budgetary challenges ahead but also to have the right people, with the right skills, to confidently and expertly shape and deliver the significant change to our functions that reform could bring.



Colin Lancaster
Chief Executive

Our organisation

The Scottish Legal Aid Board was set up in 1987 to manage legal aid in Scotland.

As a Non-Departmental Public Body of the Scottish Government, our main purpose is to manage and improve publicly funded legal assistance, and to advise Scottish Ministers on its strategic development for the benefit of society.

The Scottish Government is responsible for the overall direction of legal aid policy.

We employ around 380 staff. We are structured around four Directorates with just over 160 of our staff involved in the assessment of legal aid applications and the payment of solicitor and advocate accounts.

Our financial settlement

The Legal Aid Fund

Unlike most other expenditure in the public sector, expenditure on the Legal Aid Fund which covers the cost of legal aid grants, is uncapped. This means that any cases that meet the statutory tests will be funded by Scottish Government. However, the primary purpose of this uncapped expenditure is to ensure that applicants for legal aid are not prevented from accessing assistance due to a lack of funds. For budgeting purposes, the Scottish Government sets a budgeting provision, with any shortfall between the budget provision and actual expenditure to be made available through a transfer of funds at the end of the financial year.

This budget funds the provision of legal aid in Scotland. It also funds our network of SLAB employed solicitors, including the Civil Legal Assistance Office and the Public Defence Solicitors' Office networks, and a range of grant-funded services.

Scottish Government Budget Provision	2024-25
Legal Aid Fund	£141.3 m

Administrative Funding

This budget covers the staffing, administration, and capital costs of SLAB. It also covers costs relating to various matters including researching and analysing the operation of legal aid, as well as the trends and impact on the wider justice system. This budget is fixed. The Scottish Government's core budget in 2024-25 has been set at £15.1 million.

Our priority activity in 2024-25

Our business plan activity supports our corporate objectives.

We have provided a high-level overview of the activity that helps us work towards our objectives.

Strategic Objective 1: Our timely, clear and consistent decisions on legal aid applications and accounts deliver a positive customer experience.

Agree and implement a Customer Insight Strategy	
Drivers	Aims to understand how to gain a better understanding of what customers want and expect from their interactions with us and the issues they face when doing so. The aim is that this will result in evidence that enables us to better target changes to our procedures and inform the way that we set and measure indicators of performance.
Who will benefit?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers • Our staff
Activity	Engagement with staff across SLAB, drafting of strategy, launch of strategy.
Measures of success	Strategy and delivery plan agreed, future policy, procedures and performance management draw on insight obtained through the strategy.
Owner	Director of Operations
Delivery	2024-25

Upgrade certain legal aid applications in line with our Development Roadmap	
Drivers	REACT is the tool we are now using to build our systems to act as the user interface between our operational staff and our legal aid application and accounts data. Our aim is to move all applications and accounts across from current systems.
Who will benefit?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers • Our staff
Activity	User stories, system development and roll out.
Measures of success	Staff and customer feedback, speed and accuracy of administration, improved security.
Owner	Director of Corporate Services
Delivery	2026

Review of financial eligibility assessment in civil legal assistance	
Drivers	Our work on financial assessment has highlighted some significant changes that could be made to the way in which standard income and capital allowances are managed in the assessment of financial eligibility. These aspects have been decoupled from the scope of the GALA project and will be discussed with the Scottish Government. Dependent on these discussions, policy options can then be developed further.
Who will benefit?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers • Our staff
Activity	Advice provided to Scottish Government
Measures of success	Advice enables Ministers to take informed decisions
Owner	Director of Strategic Development
Delivery	2024-25

Preparation for full implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024	
Drivers	The Act will fully commence in July 2024 and will bring with it new duties for SLAB to ensure that it is meeting UNCRC requirements. This will require us to review a range of our policies and procedures.
Who will benefit?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers
Activity	Child impact assessments implemented; child friendly complaints procedure produced.
Measures of success	Compliance with statutory duties
Owner	Director of Strategic Development
Duration	2024-25

Develop and implement a Vulnerable Customer Policy	
Drivers	Some of our customers will be vulnerable and we want to make necessary adjustments for them. We will agree and publish a Vulnerable Customer Policy that sets out how we will deal with our customers who identify as vulnerable.
Who will benefit?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers
Activity	Draft and publish policy and EQIA.
Measures of success	Future policy, procedures and performance management draw on insight obtained through the policy.
Owner	Director of Operations
Duration	2024-25

Strategic Objective 2: Our client legal services and targeted funding deliver high quality and accessible information, advice and representation

Review delivery models for our legal services to respond to contextual changes	
Drivers	We will initially focus on a review of the Solicitor Contact Line. This will involve a demand and supply gap analysis to inform the future strategy for this service.
Who will benefit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff • Justice partners • Customers
Activity	Policy and service development
Measures	Cost effective and sustainable service delivery, maximised resource utilisation, mitigation of potential risks to staff health, safety and wellbeing.
Owner	Director of Client Legal Services
Delivery	2024-25

Strategic Objective 3: We support our people to develop the skills and ways of working needed to deliver our mission, both now and in the future.

Review of staff performance management	
Drivers	We will review our approach to performance with the development of a Managing Performance Policy and review of our performance framework to support our staff to deliver our corporate objectives.
Who will benefit?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff • Organisation
Activity	Staff consultation, policy development, guidance for staff and managers.
Measures of success	More effective performance management.
Owner	Director of Corporate Services
Delivery	2024-25

Reforms to the SLAB pension scheme	
Drivers	Public sector pension reform is legislated for in the Public Services Pension Reform Act 2013. Our pension scheme has not yet been reformed in line with this and we have submitted a business case to the Scottish Government for how this could happen. Dependent on SG decisions, we will consult with the Union and staff with the aim of reforming the scheme.
Who will benefit?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff • Organisation
Activity	Staff engagement, options appraisal.
Measures of success	Revised pension scheme launched following staff consultation.
Owner	Director of Corporate Services and Accounts
Delivery	2024-25

Implementation of a leadership programme	
Drivers	We will continue the roll out of our Leadership and Management Development Training Programme. This will ensure that our employees have the skill set needed to address external challenges and seize the opportunities that come with them.
Who will benefit?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers • Staff • Organisation.
Activity	Delivery of the programme.
Measures of success	Staff feedback, performance reviews.
Owner	Director of Corporate Services and Accounts
Delivery	2024-25

Trauma informed organisation	
Drivers	Our customers and staff may have experience of trauma. We will research and make recommendations on the development and organisation implications of becoming a trauma informed organisation
Who will benefit?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation • Staff • Customers
Activity	Research and analysis
Measures of success	Our Board is enabled to take a decision.
Owner	Director of Corporate Services.
Duration	2024-25

Strategic Objective 4: Our advice to Ministers supports their decision-making on the future of legal aid and SLAB.

Implementation of a workforce plan	
Drivers	A workforce planning methodology will allow to have a workforce of the right size and with the right skills to enable us to deliver our corporate objectives. The methodology for workforce planning has been agreed. 2024-25 will see us develop the workforce plan, prior to rolling out across Directorates in future years.
Who will benefit?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers • Staff • Organisation • Scottish Government • Justice partners
Activity	Policy development, consultation.
Measures of success	Implementation of a workforce plan.
Owner	Director of Corporate Services and Accounts
Duration	2024-25

Legal aid reform	
Drivers	The Scottish Government aims to reform legal aid following the independent review of legal aid and subsequent consultation. This has the potential to change the current system of legal aid, and SLAB's role, significantly. We will assist the Scottish Government with policy development and give advice on preferred options for reform dependent on resourcing.
Who will benefit?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers • Organisation • Customers • Scottish Government • Justice partners.
Activity	Policy development, advice provision.
Measures of success	Evidence of our influence on the work and alignment with our own objectives.
Owner	Director of Strategic Development
Duration	Ongoing



Development of a data analytics strategy	
Drivers	We will develop and launch a data analytics strategy. This will consider how our data tools, structures, storage, and analysis can better contribute to our corporate objectives.
Who will benefit?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Customers• Staff• Organisation.
Activity	Drafting and launch of strategy.
Measures	Launch of strategy, delivery of specific strategy objectives.
Owner	Director of Strategic Development
Duration	2024-25

Performance indicators

To assess performance in applications we use the following key indicators:

- Time to take the first decision (First decision average duration)
- The percent of applications we can grant first time (First decision % granted)
- The level of rework that is required (% First decision with subsequent further work).

The equivalent indicators in accounts are:

- Time to pay an initial account (Average calendar days to bank)
- The percent of accounts we pay in full (% paid in full)
- The level of negotiation that is required (Ratio of negotiations to initial assessments).

We also measure the accuracy of the decisions we take and the accounts we assess, as well as monitor solicitor satisfaction through a series of micro-surveys.

Our reporting on the indicators we use can be found in the SOPOR (SLAB Operational Performance Overview Report). The SOPOR is published quarterly [here](#) after it is reported to the Board.