

4 September 09

## **COURT SERVICE CONSULTS ON FEE SCHEMES PROPOSAL**

A consultation on the introduction of new fee schemes for solicitors and advocates representing legally aided defendants at the Crown Court was launched today by the Northern Ireland Court Service.

The consultation document proposes the introduction of graduated fee schemes to remunerate solicitors and advocates representing defendants in all cases other than those certified as 'very high cost', for which separate provisions exist.

Based on those currently operating in England and Wales, the proposed schemes would remunerate solicitors and advocates on a like-for-like basis with their counterparts in that jurisdiction, whilst ensuring that access to justice is maintained.

The proposal is part of a range of reforms aimed at reducing the overall cost of criminal legal aid in Northern Ireland. Over the last number of years expenditure has continued to grow at an unsustainable level and the introduction of graduated fees is one of a number of measures proposed to reduce costs and bring greater control and predictability to legal aid expenditure.

### Notes to Editors

1. The proposed graduated fee schemes are based on schemes that have been in operation in England and Wales for some time with relevant adjustments to reflect the Northern Ireland context.
2. Solicitors and advocates are currently remunerated under the Legal Aid for Crown Court Proceedings (Costs) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2005 through standard, fixed and time-based fees.
3. A consultation report will be posted on the Court Service website after the consultation period has ended and will include comments received during the exercise.
4. Copies of the consultation document can be obtained from the Court Service website at [www.courtsni.gov.uk](http://www.courtsni.gov.uk) from Monday 7 September 09 or by writing to:

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