



NORTHERN IRELAND

**COURT
SERVICE**

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Dear Consultee

A PROPOSAL TO REVISE THE MEANS TEST FOR CRIMINAL LEGAL AID IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The Northern Ireland Court Service today published the above document for a 8 week period of public consultation. The document is available on the Court Service website at www.courtsni.gov.uk.

This consultation document seeks views on a proposal to set a prescribed financial eligibility limit for criminal legal aid. At this stage we are inviting views on the principle of introducing a prescribed financial eligibility test to inform Ministerial decisions. If Ministers decide to introduce a prescribed means test for criminal legal aid in Northern Ireland, primary legislation would be required to introduce this, and a further more detailed consultation would follow on the framework of the new test.

This consultation is being conducted for a period of 8 weeks, rather than to the usual 12 weeks. This is to facilitate possible early decisions after devolution by a new Justice Minister whether or not to include provisions giving effect to the proposals in any early Assembly legislation, should it be decided that a Bill will be introduced before Summer Recess. Any further consultation e.g. to implement a new test, will run for at least a 12 week period.

The full details of the policy proposals are contained in the consultation paper, which you are encouraged to read.

Copies of the consultation document are also available from the Courts Service's Communications Group at Laganside House (contact details below) and can be made available in other accessible formats on request.

The closing date for receipt of comments is 23rd April 2010.

If you require any further information please contact:

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Yours faithfully

Director
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