

Dear Practitioner

The Registration Scheme

The Commission intends, under Article 36 of the Access to Justice (NI) Order 2003, to introduce regulations to establish a registration scheme. The scheme will require all practitioners to register with the Commission to continue to be eligible to provide Civil Legal Services and Criminal Defence Services. The Commission will also introduce a code of practice which will detail the quality standards which the Commission expects its service providers to achieve in the provision of publicly funded legal services.

In due course, the Commission will undertake a full consultation, Equality Impact Assessment and a Regulatory Impact Assessment in relation to the proposals for the statutory scheme. In the meantime, the Commission will introduce a preliminary scheme to start to work through the details of the statutory scheme.

What is the Preliminary Scheme?

The preliminary scheme is a voluntary scheme and has been designed to enable the Commission to collate information and to work with the Law Society and the profession in the development of the statutory scheme and the code of practice.

Why should I join the Scheme?

One of the advantages of joining the scheme is that it provides an opportunity for you to work with the Commission to ensure your firm is aware of, and is in a position to meet, the quality standards when the statutory scheme is implemented. The Commission will provide assistance to those firms who join the preliminary scheme to improve quality and reduce the level of intrusion under the statutory scheme. In addition, the details of firms who decide to join the preliminary scheme will appear on the directory on the Commission's website.

Are there any requirements for joining the Scheme?

As this is a voluntary scheme, the only requirement for joining is a valid Practising Certificate issued by the Law Society.

How do I join the Scheme?

All you need to do to join the scheme is complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it to the Commission. The details provided will be held by the Commission on a database and will be transferred automatically onto the IT system which will support the statutory scheme. This will facilitate a seamless transition to the statutory scheme and prevent duplication.

The completed questionnaire can be returned to the Commission by post to:

The Partnerships Team
Northern Ireland Services Commission
2nd Floor, Waterfront Plaza,
8 Laganbank Road, Mays Meadow,
Belfast BT1 3BN

DX 2930 NR, Belfast 5

or by e-mail to: registrationscheme@nilsc.org.uk. An electronic version of the questionnaire can be accessed on the MEMBERS area of the Commission's website @ nilcs.org.uk. The questionnaire is located in the "view general correspondence" section of the Members area.

If you have any queries or would like more information on the operation of any aspect of the preliminary scheme please contact Noleen Smylie by e-mail to noleensmylie@nilsc.org.uk or by telephone at 02890 408909.

Yours sincerely

Paul Andrews
Chief Executive