

This note is for the information of all users of the Court of Session and High Court of Justiciary

SUPREME COURTS BUSINESS PLAN FOR 2006/07

As you may know, at this time of year a business plan is prepared to support the effective administration of the Court of Session and High Court of Justiciary in the current business year (to end March 2007). The purpose of this plan is to set out the most important things that the Scottish Court Service (SCS) needs to do at a local level to provide effective support to the judiciary and a high standard of service to court users.

The purpose of this note is to let you know what the current plan includes. The priorities that we have identified take account of the views of the judiciary and feedback from users and partner organisations with which the SCS works.

Depute Clerks

Increasing the numbers and breadth of competence of the depute clerks is the top priority. The need for this has been made very clear by the judges and court users. Accordingly, efforts having been made to fill vacancies within the organisation and recognising the value of a fresh perspective, our first objective is to conduct an external recruitment exercise that will increase the number of first instance depute clerks, and to design and deliver a comprehensive induction and training programme that will bring recruits up to an agreed standard of performance within agreed timescales.

This activity is already underway and a team has been established to begin preparing the comprehensive training materials that we will need. The aim at the moment is that 6 new recruits should arrive before the end of 2006.

Improving our work systems

We have been doing some groundwork aimed at improving some of our work systems. One area that we have identified that we should tackle is the existing system for dealing with motions. We have focused on motions because the methodology we are using is not one that we have applied before and we would like to test it in a relatively confined area of work to see how effective it is. In saying that, motions are of course a very large part of the work of the Court of Session in terms of volume (around 16,000 per annum) and court time (around 20%) and any changes that would improve our efficiency in the processing of motions could have significant benefits.

This systems improvement work is what we refer to as our QUIP (quality improvement) project.

Our second objective is therefore to implement improved systems for the processing of motions in the Court of Session. We will also be scoping out further work that we can do in future using this methodology.

Working with others

Our third objective is to improve our partnership working with the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS). The 'Bonomy' reforms of the High Court have succeeded in bringing more certainty to the criminal process at court to the benefit of all of those concerned including witnesses and jurors, but one issue has been the number of

long trials that hit us all at once in the early part of 2006. We need to be better placed to plan for this type of scenario in future so that any impact on the court programme is more manageable. Good communication and planning links are therefore essential and we are looking at how best to achieve this in the increasingly complex environment in which the High Court has to operate. Current indications are that we are going to have more long and complex trials regularly in the High Court in future and we need to be able to respond to this.

In addition to these particular objectives, the day to day organisation and administration of the clerking services, the offices of court and the court programme will also, of course, continue to have our best attention.

If you have any questions in relation to this notice or would like a current copy of our business plan please contact us on supreme.courts@scotcourts.gov.uk.