



Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Act 1997

1997 CHAPTER 48

PART V

CRIMINAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Powers of investigation

53 Power of investigation of Scottish Legal Aid Board.

After section 35 of the 1986 Act there shall be inserted the following sections—

“35A Power of Board to require information.

- (1) The Board may, for the purpose of determining whether—
 - (a) a solicitor or any employee of him or of his firm may be committing a criminal offence in connection with criminal legal assistance; or
 - (b) a solicitor may be seeking, in relation to criminal legal assistance, to recover from the Fund money to which he is not entitled, as, for example, by performing unnecessary work; or
 - (c) a registered firm or solicitor is or may not be complying with the code, require any solicitor or firm to produce such information and documents relating wholly or partly to the provision of criminal legal assistance as it may specify, at such time and place as it may specify.
- (2) If it appears to the Board that there is good reason to do so, it may authorise any of its officers to require any solicitor or firm to produce forthwith any such information or documents as are mentioned in subsection (1) above.
- (3) An officer of the Board acting under subsection (2) above shall, if requested to do so, produce evidence of his authorisation by the Board.

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- (4) The power under this section to require production of information and documents includes power—
- (a) to require any person, who is a present or past partner or employee of any such solicitor or firm and who appears to the Board or one of its officers to have any information or documents, to produce them;
 - (b) if any documents are produced—
 - (i) to take copies of them or extracts from them; and
 - (ii) to require the person producing them, or any other person who is a present or past partner or employee of the solicitor or firm in question, to provide an explanation of them;
 - (c) if any document or information is held other than in legible form, to require the production of a copy of it in legible form; and
 - (d) if documents are not produced, to require the person who was required to produce them to state, to the best of his knowledge and belief, where they are.
- (5) Where any person claims a lien over any documents required to be produced under this section the production is without prejudice to the lien.
- (6) Any person who is required under this section to produce information or documents shall, notwithstanding any duty of confidentiality, comply with that requirement; and if he fails to comply he shall be guilty of an offence and liable—
- (a) on conviction on indictment, to a fine; and
 - (b) on summary conviction, to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum.
- (7) Where a person is charged with an offence under subsection (6) above in respect of a requirement to produce documents, it shall be a defence for him to prove that they were not in his possession or under his control and that it was not reasonably practicable for him to comply with the requirement.
- (8) No information or documents obtained by the Board by virtue of this section or section 35B of this Act shall be used by it or by any of its employees for any purpose other than the purposes mentioned in subsection (1) above.
- (9) Section 34 of this Act applies in relation to a contravention of subsection (8) above as it applies in relation to a contravention of subsection (1) of that section.

Power of entry

35B Power of Board to enter premises and investigate.

- (1) Where a sheriff is satisfied, by evidence on oath given on behalf of the Board by a person authorised by the Board for that purpose, that there are reasonable grounds for believing that—
- (a) a solicitor or any employee of him or his firm may be committing a criminal offence in connection with criminal legal assistance; or
 - (b) a solicitor may be seeking, in relation to criminal legal assistance, to recover from the Fund money to which he is not entitled, as, for example, by performing unnecessary work; or

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- (c) a registered firm or solicitor may not be complying with the code; or
- (d) there are on any premises documents the production of which has been required under section 35A of this Act and which have not been produced in accordance with that requirement,

he may issue a warrant under this section to a person authorised for that purpose by the Board.

- (2) A person holding a warrant under this section may—
- (a) search the premises named in the warrant;
 - (b) take possession of any documents which appear to him to relate, wholly or partly, to any criminal legal assistance provided in or from those premises;
 - (c) take copies of any such documents;
 - (d) take any other steps which appear to him to be necessary for preserving those documents or preventing their destruction or interference with them; and
 - (e) require any person named in the warrant to provide an explanation of the documents or to state where they may be found.
- (3) The duty to produce documents and to provide explanations applies notwithstanding any duty of confidentiality, but where any person claims a lien over any documents the production is without prejudice to that lien.
- (4) A warrant under this section shall continue in force for the period of one month from the date when it is issued.
- (5) The Board may retain any documents which it has obtained under this section for—
- (a) a period of not more than 12 months; or
 - (b) where, within that period, proceedings to which the documents are relevant are commenced by the Board, the Law Society or a prosecutor, until the conclusion of those proceedings.
- (6) Any person who intentionally obstructs the execution of a warrant issued under this section or who fails without reasonable excuse to comply with any requirement imposed in accordance with subsection (2)(e) above shall be guilty of an offence, and liable—
- (a) on conviction on indictment, to a fine; and
 - (b) on summary conviction, to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum.

Suspension of payments to solicitor

35C Suspension of payments to solicitor.

- (1) Where it appears to the Board that any solicitor has, in connection with the provision of criminal legal assistance, acted in such a way as to justify action being taken against him by the Law Society or the Scottish Solicitors' Discipline Tribunal it shall refer the matter to either of those bodies so that they can consider whether to take action under section 31(3) of this Act.

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- (2) Where it appears to the Board that any solicitor may have been guilty of a criminal offence it shall refer the matter to the police or the procurator fiscal, so that they can consider whether any criminal offence may have been committed.
- (3) Where the Board refers a matter to any of the bodies mentioned in subsections (1) or (2) above, it may disclose to that body any information or documents which it has obtained from the solicitor concerned under this Act.
- (4) Where the Board has referred a matter to any of the bodies mentioned in subsections (1) or (2) above it may—
 - (a) suspend the solicitor concerned from providing criminal legal assistance; and
 - (b) withhold payment of any fees due to him in respect of such work, pending the outcome of the investigation by the body or bodies to which the matter has been referred.
- (5) A solicitor who is suspended from providing criminal legal assistance under subsection (4)(a) above shall, in accordance with arrangements approved by the Board, transfer—
 - (a) any work currently being undertaken by him for any client by way of criminal legal assistance; and
 - (b) notwithstanding any lien to which he might otherwise be entitled, any documents connected with any such work,
 to a solicitor (or, where registration is in force, a registered solicitor).”

54 Regulations in relation to criminal legal assistance.

After section 41 of the 1986 Act there shall be inserted the following section—

“41A Regulations in relation to criminal legal assistance.

- (1) The Secretary of State may by regulations made under this section provide that any reference in, under or by virtue of this Act to “criminal legal assistance” shall relate, for any of the purposes of this Act, to such class or classes of criminal legal assistance as he thinks appropriate.
- (2) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1) above, the power conferred by that subsection may be exercised by reference to—
 - (a) the class or classes of person who are to receive criminal legal assistance;
 - (b) the class or classes of case in respect of which such assistance is to be given;
 - (c) the nature of the work;
 - (d) the place or places where the assistance is to be provided;
 - (e) the period for which it is to be provided,
 or to any combination of the foregoing; and different provision may be made under that subsection for different purposes, or in relation to different areas or different periods.”

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