

## Head 94 — LEGAL AID DEPARTMENT

**Controlling officer:** the Director of Legal Aid will account for expenditure under this Head.

**Estimate 2016–17** ..... **\$1,007.7m**

**Establishment ceiling 2016–17** (notional annual mid-point salary value) representing an estimated 528 non-directorate posts as at 31 March 2016 and as at 31 March 2017..... **\$225.8m**

In addition, there will be an estimated 15 directorate posts as at 31 March 2016 and as at 31 March 2017.

### Controlling Officer's Report

#### Programmes

**Programme (1) Processing of Legal Aid Applications**      These programmes contribute to Policy Area 20: Legal Aid (Secretary for Home Affairs).  
**Programme (2) Litigation Services**  
**Programme (3) Support Services**  
**Programme (4) Official Solicitor's Office**

#### Detail

##### Programme (1): Processing of Legal Aid Applications

	2014–15 (Actual)	2015–16 (Original)	2015–16 (Revised)	<b>2016–17 (Estimate)</b>
Financial provision (\$m)	99.6	100.5	103.4 (+2.9%)	<b>103.7</b> (+0.3%)
				(or +3.2% on 2015–16 Original)

#### Aim

- 2 The aim is to ensure that legal aid service is provided only to eligible applicants.

#### Brief Description

3 The Application and Processing Division and the Crime Section and Insolvency Unit of the Litigation Division of the Department assess applicants' eligibility for legal aid and the financial contribution required of them towards the relevant legal costs.

- 4 To qualify for legal aid, an applicant has to pass both the means test and the merits test.

5 Although an applicant's financial resources may exceed the prescribed financial eligibility limit, the Director of Legal Aid (the Director) may grant legal aid if a breach of the Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance (Cap. 383) or an inconsistency with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is an issue, or in a criminal case if the Director is satisfied that it is desirable in the interests of justice to do so.

6 For civil cases, unsuccessful applicants may appeal against the Director's refusal to grant legal aid on grounds of means or merits. For criminal cases, unsuccessful applicants may appeal against the Director's refusal to grant legal aid where appeals to the Court of Final Appeal are involved. Legal aid may also be granted to an accused or appellant by a Judge in certain circumstances even though such has been refused by the Director.

- 7 The Department generally met the aim of the programme in 2015.
- 8 The key performance measures in respect of processing legal aid applications are:

#### Targets

	Target	2014 (Actual)	2015 (Actual)	<b>2016 (Plan)</b>
<i>Civil legal aid</i> applications processed within three months from the date of application (%) .....	85	83	86	<b>85</b>

## Head 94 — LEGAL AID DEPARTMENT

	Target	2014 (Actual)	2015 (Actual)	2016 (Plan)
<i>Criminal legal aid</i>				
Appeals against sentence				
applications processed within two months from the date of application (%) .....	90	96	98	<b>90</b>
Appeals against conviction				
applications processed within three months from the date of application (%) .....	90	92	96	<b>90</b>
Court of First Instance of the High Court/District Court				
applications processed within ten working days from the date of application (%) .....	90	94	93	<b>90</b>
Committal proceedings				
applications processed within eight working days from the date of application (%) .....	90	92	93	<b>90</b>

### *Indicators*

	2014 (Actual)	2015 (Actual)	2016 (Estimate)
<i>Civil</i>			
enquiries received.....	38 208	37 153	<b>37 200</b>
applications received#.....	16 288	15 165	<b>15 200</b>
applications processed.....	16 286	15 255	<b>15 200</b>
applications pending decision as at end of year .....	2 584	2 494	<b>2 490</b>
legal aid certificates granted.....	7 526	7 058	<b>7 060</b>
applications refused			
on means .....	912	814	<b>810</b>
on merits.....	5 583	5 227	<b>5 230</b>
appeals against the Director's decisions			
appeals heard.....	809	705	<b>705</b>
appeals allowed.....	32	38	<b>40</b>
<i>Criminal</i>			
applications received.....	3 717	3 630	<b>3 630</b>
applications processed.....	3 688	3 599	<b>3 630</b>
applications pending decision as at end of year .....	175	206	<b>205</b>
legal aid certificates granted.....	2 690	2 521	<b>2 520</b>
applications refused			
on means .....	38	47	<b>45</b>
on merits.....	823	921	<b>920</b>

# The number of applications received in 2014 and 2015 included 14 and five applications respectively from applicants who were subject to an Order made pursuant to Regulation 11 of the Legal Aid Regulations (Cap. 91A).

### *Matters Requiring Special Attention in 2016–17*

- 9 During 2016–17, the Department will continue to monitor:
- the number of legal aid applications and the processing time,
  - the effectiveness of the means-testing processes, and
  - the use of mediation in legally-aided cases.

## Head 94 — LEGAL AID DEPARTMENT

### Programme (2): Litigation Services

	2014–15 (Actual)	2015–16 (Original)	2015–16 (Revised)	<b>2016–17 (Estimate)</b>
Financial provision (\$m)	695.4	691.3	695.1 (+0.5%)	<b>845.7</b> (+21.7%)
				(or +22.3% on 2015–16 Original)

#### *Aim*

**10** The aim is to discharge the Department's statutory duties relating to assignment and conduct of legal aid cases.

#### *Brief Description*

##### *Assigning out and monitoring of cases*

**11** The Application and Processing Division and the Crime Section of the Litigation Division of the Department systematically monitor cases assigned to private practitioners.

##### *In-house litigation*

**12** The Litigation Division conducts litigation on behalf of legally-aided persons. The work involves:

##### Civil litigation

- Personal injury and miscellaneous—taking proceedings for legally-aided persons in respect of claims for common law damages for personal injuries and death, and compensation under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance (Cap. 282), claims for seamen's wages, and claims for damages due to professional negligence;
- Matrimonial—taking or defending proceedings for legally-aided persons in respect of separation, dissolution or annulment of marriage or ancillary and other relief and wardship; and
- Insolvency—taking winding-up and bankruptcy proceedings for legally-aided persons to recover employment entitlements and judgment debts.

##### Criminal litigation

- representing legally-aided persons in committal proceedings in the Magistrates' Court, plea day proceedings in the District Court, and listing and bail applications in the Court of First Instance; and
- acting as instructing solicitors for legally-aided persons in Court of First Instance (Fixture/Running List) cases, as well as in appeals before the Court of First Instance, the Court of Appeal and the Court of Final Appeal.

**13** The Department generally met the aim of the programme in 2015.

**14** The key performance measures in respect of assignment and conduct of legal aid cases are:

#### *Indicators*

	2014 (Actual)	2015 (Actual)	<b>2016 (Estimate)</b>
<i>Assigning out and monitoring of cases</i>			
<i>Civil</i>			
new cases assigned.....	5 987	5 638	<b>5 710</b>
cases concluded.....	5 823	5 745	<b>5 710</b>
active cases as at end of year .....	16 734	16 627	<b>16 625</b>
<i>Criminal</i>			
new cases assigned.....	2 033	1 787	<b>1 820</b>
cases concluded.....	1 866	1 812	<b>1 820</b>
active cases as at end of year .....	821	796	<b>795</b>
<i>In-house litigation</i>			
<i>Civil</i>			
<i>Personal injury and miscellaneous</i>			
new cases assigned.....	200	205	<b>200</b>
cases concluded.....	169	162	<b>180</b>
active cases as at end of year .....	276	319	<b>340</b>
<i>Matrimonial</i>			
new cases assigned.....	1 096	1 070	<b>1 100</b>
cases concluded.....	952	1 056	<b>1 100</b>
active cases as at end of year .....	1 282	1 296	<b>1 295</b>

## Head 94 — LEGAL AID DEPARTMENT

	2014 (Actual)	2015 (Actual)	2016 (Estimate)
Insolvency			
new cases assigned.....	61	53	<b>50</b>
cases concluded.....	70	51	<b>50</b>
active cases as at end of year			
pending issue of winding-up and bankruptcy			
order.....	16	17	<b>15</b>
pending realisation of assets .....	181	182	<b>185</b>
Criminal			
new cases assigned.....	692	710	<b>700</b>
cases concluded.....	671	675	<b>700</b>
active cases as at end of year .....	167	202	<b>200</b>
<i>Damages/costs recovered from all civil cases</i>			
amount of damages recovered (\$'000).....	1,174,756	1,242,174	<b>N.A.</b>
amount of costs recovered (\$'000).....	255,906	266,161	<b>N.A.</b>

### ***Matters Requiring Special Attention in 2016–17***

**15** During 2016–17, the Department will:

- continue to monitor the progress and expenditure of legal aid cases,
- continue to monitor the performance of assigned private practitioners and progress of assigned-out cases,
- continue to monitor the cost effectiveness of litigation services, and
- implement the revised criminal legal aid fees.

### **Programme (3): Support Services**

	2014–15 (Actual)	2015–16 (Original)	2015–16 (Revised)	2016–17 (Estimate)
Financial provision (\$m)	37.4	40.0	42.0 (+5.0%)	<b>42.4</b> (+1.0%)
				(or +6.0% on 2015–16 Original)

### ***Aim***

**16** The aims are to provide effective support services for processing applications and conducting legal aid cases and for increasing public understanding and awareness of legal aid services, and to review or make recommendations on legal aid policy to meet areas of perceived needs.

### ***Brief Description***

**17** Support services include:

- Insolvency—dealing with cases to be referred to the Protection of Wages on Insolvency Fund Board for ex-gratia payments without the need for bankruptcy and winding-up proceedings;
- Costing—assessing costs, preparing bills of costs and attending taxation hearings;
- Enforcement—taking action to enforce unsatisfied judgments and orders; and
- Public education—organising or participating in activities to enhance the public’s knowledge and awareness of legal aid services provided by the Department.

**18** The Department assesses and makes payments to assigned solicitors and counsel, and effects payment of damages recovered to clients.

**19** In the area of policy and legislation, constant effort is made to improve the practical working of the legal aid scheme; to increase the Department’s efficiency and productivity; to make recommendations on any change in legal aid legislation; and to comment on other legislation which may have an impact on the provision of legal aid services.

**20** It is not possible to specify quantitative measures and indicators for work on policy and legislation, as performance in such areas must be judged in qualitative terms.

**21** The Department generally met the aims of the programme in 2015.

## Head 94 — LEGAL AID DEPARTMENT

22 The key performance measures in respect of support services are:

### *Targets*

	Target	2014 (Actual)	2015 (Actual)	2016 (Plan)
<i>Payment of damages or compensation to aided persons</i>				
<i>Interim payment</i>				
payments processed within one month (%) .....	95	99	99	95
<i>Final payment</i>				
payments processed within six weeks (%) .....	95	99	99	95
<i>Payment to lawyers/experts/other parties</i>				
<i>Advance payment</i>				
payments processed within six weeks (%) .....	95	99	99	95
<i>Balance payment</i>				
payments processed within six weeks (%) .....	95	99	99	95

### *Indicators*

	2014 (Actual)	2015 (Actual)	2016 (Estimate)
<i>Insolvency</i>			
cases for ex-gratia payment from Protection of Wages on Insolvency Fund .....	304	326	330
<i>Costing</i>			
taxation - court attendance .....	225	206	210
preparation of bills and objections .....	267	339	340
assessments made .....	8 754	9 036	9 040
<i>Enforcement</i>			
cases assigned .....	311	261	260
enforcement action taken .....	345	342	340
active cases as at end of year .....	429	348	270
amount of debts and costs recovered (\$'000) .....	10,123	11,232	N.A.

### *Matters Requiring Special Attention in 2016–17*

23 During 2016–17, the Department will continue to:

- promote public awareness and understanding of legal aid services,
- provide support to the Legal Aid Services Council and implement recommendations of the Council to improve the quality and efficiency of legal aid services, and
- monitor the performance pledge on payments related to legal aid cases.

### **Programme (4): Official Solicitor's Office**

	2014–15 (Actual)	2015–16 (Original)	2015–16 (Revised)	2016–17 (Estimate)
Financial provision (\$m)	16.7	13.3	15.0 (+12.8%)	15.9 (+6.0%)
				(or +19.5% on 2015–16 Original)

### *Aim*

24 The aim is to provide representation to persons under a legal disability and to discharge the Official Solicitor's duties as prescribed by the Official Solicitor Ordinance (Cap. 416) (OSO) and other enactments.

## Head 94 — LEGAL AID DEPARTMENT

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### *Brief Description*

25 Under the OSO, the Director is appointed the Official Solicitor.

26 The Official Solicitor plays an important role in safeguarding the rights of those under a legal disability (i.e. mentally incapacitated persons and minors). He is also the Official Trustee pursuant to the Trustee Ordinance (Cap. 29) and may also act as the Judicial Trustee if appointed by the Court.

27 Cases falling within the scope of the Official Solicitor's duties include wardship, adoptions, contempt cases, divorce and family cases, committee cases, Judicial and Official Trustee cases and grants of administration. A large proportion of the cases involving the work of the Official Solicitor includes the representation of persons under a legal disability, representation of deceased persons' estates in litigation and the management of a number of trust funds. Where so directed by the Court, the Official Solicitor undertakes investigations and reports on matters such as complex custody and/or access issues.

28 The Official Solicitor is also asked by other government departments to provide advice on matters such as custody, adoption and representation of children and comment on legislation which may have an impact on the provision of services by the Official Solicitor's Office.

29 The Department generally met the aim of the programme in 2015.

30 The key performance measures in respect of the Official Solicitor's Office are:

#### *Indicators*

	2014 (Actual)	2015 (Actual)	<b>2016 (Estimate)</b>
new cases received .....	250	273	<b>270</b>
cases concluded .....	195	230	<b>230</b>
active cases as at end of year.....	476	519	<b>560</b>

### *Matters Requiring Special Attention in 2016–17*

31 During 2016–17, the Official Solicitor's Office will continue to:

- enhance the efficiency and quality of its services; and
- promote understanding of the work of the Official Solicitor's Office by strengthening communication with other government departments, non-governmental organisations and legal practitioners.

## Head 94 — LEGAL AID DEPARTMENT

### ANALYSIS OF FINANCIAL PROVISION

	2014–15 (Actual) (\$m)	2015–16 (Original) (\$m)	2015–16 (Revised) (\$m)	2016–17 (Estimate) (\$m)
<b>Programme</b>				
(1) Processing of Legal Aid Applications...	99.6	100.5	103.4	<b>103.7</b>
(2) Litigation Services .....	695.4	691.3	695.1	<b>845.7</b>
(3) Support Services.....	37.4	40.0	42.0	<b>42.4</b>
(4) Official Solicitor’s Office .....	16.7	13.3	15.0	<b>15.9</b>
	849.1	845.1	855.5 (+1.2%)	<b>1,007.7</b> <b>(+17.8%)</b>
				<b>(or +19.2% on 2015–16 Original)</b>

#### Analysis of Financial and Staffing Provision

##### Programme (1)

Provision for 2016–17 is \$0.3 million (0.3%) higher than the revised estimate for 2015–16. This is mainly due to the increase in operating expenses.

##### Programme (2)

Provision for 2016–17 is \$150.6 million (21.7%) higher than the revised estimate for 2015–16. This is mainly due to the increased provision for legal aid costs.

##### Programme (3)

Provision for 2016–17 is \$0.4 million (1.0%) higher than the revised estimate for 2015–16. This is mainly due to salary increments for staff and the increase in operating expenses, partly offset by decreased cash flow requirement for a capital item.

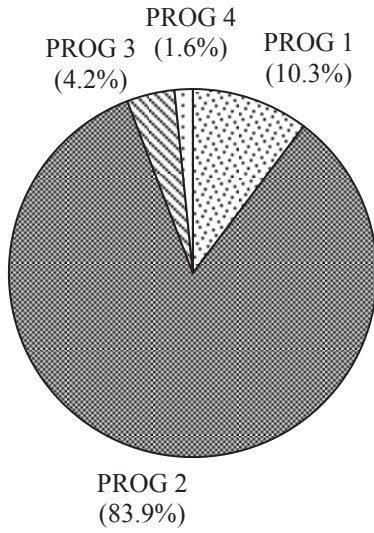
##### Programme (4)

Provision for 2016–17 is \$0.9 million (6.0%) higher than the revised estimate for 2015–16. This is mainly due to salary increments for staff.

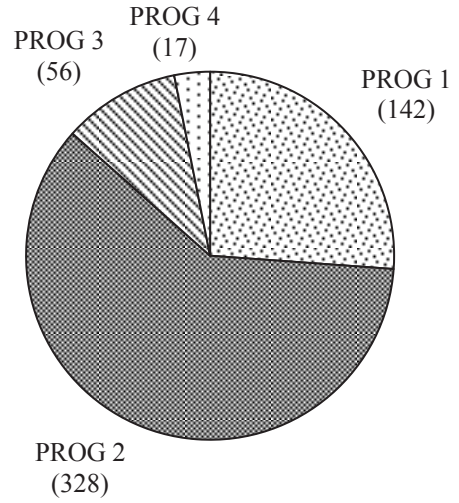
**Head 94 — LEGAL AID DEPARTMENT**

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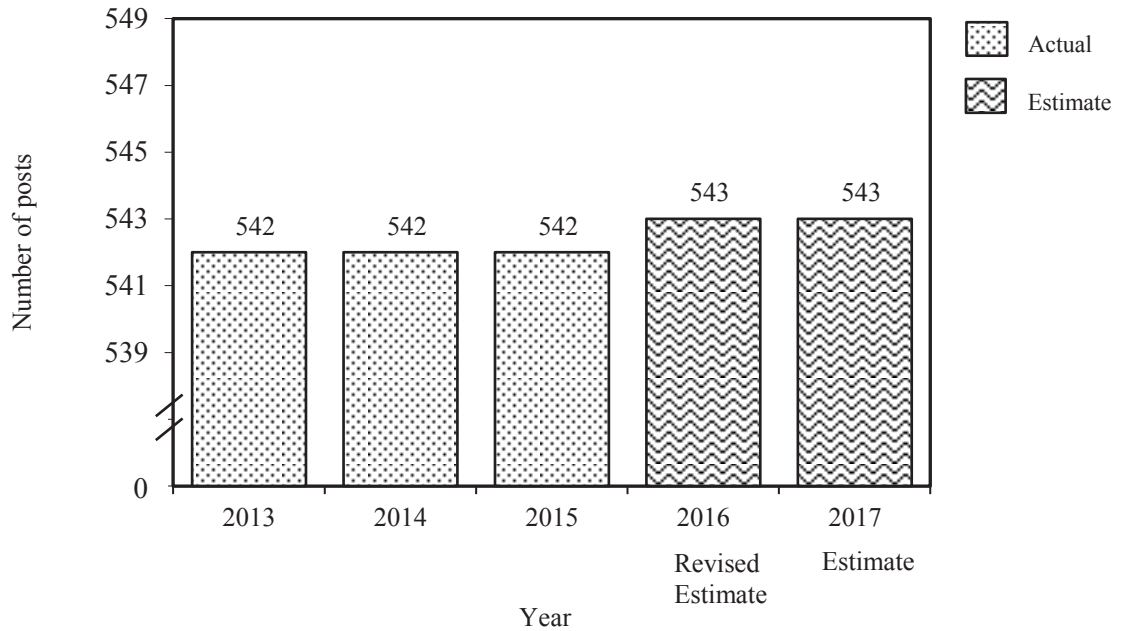
*Allocation of provision to programmes (2016-17)*



*Staff by programme (as at 31 March 2017)*



*Changes in the size of the establishment (as at 31 March)*





**Head 94 — LEGAL AID DEPARTMENT**

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Sub-head (Code)	Actual expenditure 2014-15	Approved estimate 2015-16	Revised estimate 2015-16	<b>Estimate 2016-17</b>	
	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	<b>\$'000</b>	
<b>Operating Account</b>					
Recurrent					
000	Operational expenses .....	282,075	284,324	294,689	<b>295,369</b>
208	Legal aid costs.....	567,007	560,024	560,024	<b>712,024</b>
	Total, Recurrent.....	849,082	844,348	854,713	<b>1,007,393</b>
	Total, Operating Account .....	849,082	844,348	854,713	<b>1,007,393</b>
<b>Capital Account</b>					
Plant, Equipment and Works					
661	Minor plant, vehicles and equipment (block vote).....	—	800	800	<b>263</b>
	Total, Plant, Equipment and Works.....	—	800	800	<b>263</b>
	Total, Capital Account.....	—	800	800	<b>263</b>
	Total Expenditure .....	849,082	845,148	855,513	<b>1,007,656</b>

## Head 94 — LEGAL AID DEPARTMENT

### Details of Expenditure by Subhead

The estimate of the amount required in 2016–17 for the salaries and expenses of the Legal Aid Department is \$1,007,656,000. This represents an increase of \$152,143,000 over the revised estimate for 2015–16 and \$158,574,000 over the actual expenditure in 2014–15.

#### *Operating Account*

##### Recurrent

**2** Provision of \$295,369,000 under *Subhead 000 Operational expenses* is for the salaries, allowances and other operating expenses of the Legal Aid Department.

**3** The establishment as at 31 March 2016 will be 543 permanent posts. No change in establishment is expected in 2016–17. Subject to certain conditions, the controlling officer may under delegated power create or delete non-directorate posts during 2016–17, but the notional annual mid-point salary value of all such posts must not exceed \$225,756,000.

**4** An analysis of the financial provision under *Subhead 000 Operational expenses* is as follows:

	2014–15 (Actual) (\$'000)	2015–16 (Original) (\$'000)	2015–16 (Revised) (\$'000)	2016–17 (Estimate) (\$'000)
Personal Emoluments				
- Salaries.....	258,010	258,050	266,659	265,892
- Allowances.....	1,559	1,543	3,009	2,289
Personnel Related Expenses				
- Mandatory Provident Fund contribution.....	755	753	803	869
- Civil Service Provident Fund contribution.....	5,800	7,223	7,518	9,125
Departmental Expenses				
- General departmental expenses .....	15,951	16,755	16,700	17,194
	282,075	284,324	294,689	295,369

**5** Provision of \$712,024,000 under *Subhead 208 Legal aid costs* is for expenses related to legal aid and Official Solicitor cases. The increase of \$152,000,000 (27.1%) over the revised estimate for 2015–16 is to cater for the anticipated increase in legal aid costs for both civil and criminal cases.

#### *Capital Account*

##### Plant, Equipment and Works

**6** Provision of \$263,000 under *Subhead 661 Minor plant, vehicles and equipment (block vote)* represents a decrease of \$537,000 (67.1%) against the revised estimate for 2015–16. This is mainly due to decreased requirement for replacement of equipment.