Submission from Hugh McLean for the Legal Profession and Legal Aid (Scotland) Bill

I am Hugh McLean CChem, FRSC, and having lived for over 30 years in rural areas I am well aware of how fragile rural communities are. Changes that may have one level of impact in urban areas can have a different and significantly detrimental impact in rural areas.

In reading about this Bill I can understand the concerns of the Executive in relation to the general question of self regulation of professions, but am more concerned about the implications of this Bill, were it to be enacted as drafted.

I believe that the effect of increasing the level of compensation and the increased cost on members of the legal profession in funding the proposed Commission is likely to lead to a reduction in the number of solicitors practising in rural Scotland. I can see that the type of work carried on by such solicitors at present is often in areas where there is a high risk of complaints being made. I can understand that solicitors will therefore need to carefully consider the type of work they do and whether it would be worthwhile remaining in practice in such areas. For a rural economy to be strong requires the maximisation of the number of “high quality” professional level jobs so that the total number of jobs can then be maximised. Without the high quality jobs the rural economy becomes stagnated and dependent on low cost work and the whole economy of rural communities suffers. Thus measures that are likely to result in a reduction of professionals prepared to come set up and work in rural areas has to be avoided.

Additionally as a professional living and working in a rural area I am aware of the amount of work undertaken by solicitors in charitable and voluntary organisations, many of which are the mainstay of the community, which would be lost if there were to be a reduction in the number of solicitors practising in rural communities.

In finalising this Bill I hope due consideration of all aspects will be taken into account.