Correspondence from Law Society of Scotland

I write in response to your correspondence of the 3 October 2014 and in relation the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committees request for further information on the Society’s introduction of the new Smartcard scheme.

The Society’s Smartcard, which is similar in size to a standard credit card and stores the member’s information on a microchip, is currently being rolled out to the membership, and we hope to complete the roll-out by November 2015. The Smartcard will replace the current form of practising certificate, and thereafter all solicitors holding a practising certificate issued by the Society will hold a Smartcard. Since the commencement of roll-out, in early September 2014, the Society has issued 800 Smartcards.

The Smartcard provides a number of benefits and functions, it provides:-

- A new photographic ID for practising solicitors – allowing secure access to courts and prisons and helping reassure the public they are consulting a trusted adviser.

- An electronic ID - allowing real-time confirmation of credentials, which will evolve across a range of new and planned services throughout the justice system in Scotland and Europe, as the Smartcard is also Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) compliant.

- A secure digital signature - allowing practising solicitors to sign documents and contracts entirely electronically and to receive signatures from others knowing they come from a trusted professional system. The lowest quality of a digital signature could simply be a name at the end of an email or an image of a person’s written signature added to an electronic document. The Smartcard will provide Scottish solicitors with a qualified secure digital signature, the
EU digital signature with the highest form of security and 'self-proving' in Scotland. This form of digital signature guarantees the integrity of the text, as well as the authentication. Along with the Smartcard, all members are also being issued with card readers to facilitate digital signatures.