

Editorial News

Making Europe Work for People

An EU-wide initiative to help people take advantage of their rights in the single market was launched in the UK on 20 January. The main themes of the Citizens First programme are living, working, studying training and research, buying goods and services, travelling and equal opportunities in the EU. A separate guide has been published on each area and they are available from local Citizens Advice Bureaux or can be ordered on freephone 0800 581591. They can also be accessed on the Internet at <http://citizens.eu.int>. Copies will be available in all 3,800 central and branch libraries with belong to the Network of European Relays and other outlets.

Action Programme on Civil Protection

The Commission has proposed an action programme (3 million ECU) to strengthen EU cooperation in the field of civil protection. The programme, which is proposed would run for two years and support training, exchanges of experts, simulation exercises and action to improve public information and awareness.

New Judicial Training Centre

A new conference and training centre for the Judicial Studies Board (JSB) was formally opened on 14 January by the Lord Chancellor. This is located at Millbank Tower in London and has seating for 100 people and five syndicate rooms.

The JSB was established in 1979 to determine principles on which judicial studies should be planned, to approve the proposed forms of the study programmes and to observe them in operation. The responsibilities of the Board were originally confined to full-time and part-time members of the Crown Court Judiciary, but in October 1985 the role was expanded to cover the training of full-time and part-time judiciary of the county courts, of stipendiary and lay magistrates, and of judicial chairman and members of tribunals. In June 1996 a Memorandum of Understanding giving formal recognition to the Board's autonomous status was agreed with the then Lord Chancellor.

The JSB carries out its work through five committees responsible for judicial studies in criminal, civil, and family jurisdictions, magistrates and tribunal training, and equality of treatment before courts or tribunals.

In his speech opening the new centre, the Lord Chancellor addressed the judicial training which will be required for implementing the civil justice reforms he announced last year. He said:

"The JSB has already started work – successfully – on equipping judges who sit in civil matters with

the case management skills they will need to meet the objectives of the reforms which were originally conceived by Lord Woolf. It is now planning for substantial training at the turn of next year before the new arrangements come into force."

The Lord Chancellor also said that the JSB is planning training for judges, magistrates and tribunals to prepare them for the cultural change which will come about as a result of incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights into our domestic law.

Conference on Software Patents in Europe

The legal protection of some of Europe's most innovative industries moves up the agenda with a one-day conference on Software Patents in Europe to be held at the Queen Elizabeth Conference Centre in London on 23 March. This is being organised by the UK Patent Office with support from the European Commission.

The primary questions the conference will address are whether the European patent system fully supports software development and what, if any, measures should be taken to optimise the contribution that software patents could make to innovation and the competitiveness of European industry.

Under current legislation, software in itself is excluded from the patent system. The view has been expressed, however, that software is not inherently different from any other manufactured product and that where a product or process is new, it should be patentable. In the US, where software-related patents are easier to obtain, software developers frequently file for and obtain patent protection. On the other hand, it has been predicted that the sheer volume of prior art could render the extension of the patent system to software-related innovation unworkable.

These and other issues will be addressed by the conference. For further information, please contact Jeff Watson at the Patent Office, 01633 813650.