

IOP Competency Standards for Legal Secretaries

Intermediate Level: May 2010



INSTITUTE OF
PARALEGALS

Setting Standards. Promoting Professionalism.

ABOUT THESE STANDARDS

This document contains the IOP Intermediate Level Competency Standards for Legal Secretaries.

These Standards have been developed by the Institute of Paralegals with the assistance of numerous law firms, legal regulators, government departments and others.

This Intermediate Level is relevant to secretaries established in their careers, but who are not yet senior secretaries. Senior secretaries can use the Advanced Level Standards and secretaries at the beginning of their careers can use the Introductory Level Standards.

For more information on Legal Secretarial and other IOP Competency Standards visit www.LegalStandards.org.

1. Who should use these Standards?

These Standards are designed for all legal secretaries, regardless of their job title, practice area or type of employer (solicitors' firm; paralegal law firm; local government; in-house legal department etc).

They are not jurisdiction specific, so can be used in any country/by anyone wanting to work to an international benchmark.

Purely for the sake of convenience, the wording used in this document assumes that you are a secretary working in a solicitors' firm. However the Standards are still relevant to most legal secretaries doing compatible legal work in other types of organisation because they focus on the core skills, abilities and knowledge required of all legal secretaries, rather than on the expertise needed to work in a particular practice-area or for a particular type of employer.

2. Am I recognised as a legal secretary for the purposes of these Standards?

There is no consistent use of job titles for legal secretaries. Numerous different job titles are used, and even when the same job title is used, the underlying job, its responsibility/authority may be completely different.

We consider you to be a legal secretary if the majority of your work is secretarial in nature, as opposed to either non-secretarial clerical/administrative work or legal work (i.e. legal practice). If you mostly do clerical/administrative work of a non-secretarial nature then you should use the Standards for Legal Assistants and if most of your work is legal work (i.e. legal practice) then you should be using the Standards for Paralegals (and be looking to follow the Route to Qualification career path for professional paralegals).

These Standards are designed for use by legal secretaries who wish to work to professional levels of competence and excellence.

3. Possible additional Standards

Please speak to your line/HR manager before using these Standards as there may be additional internal standards that your organisation also needs you to comply with.

4. The purpose of these Standards

The main purpose of these Standards is to provide clear and consistent performance benchmarks to aid with the recruitment, training, appraisal and career development of legal secretaries.

In a nutshell, these Intermediate Level Standards list the things that the legal profession expects from a *competent, experienced* legal secretary already established in his/her professional career, but still with a long way to go.

5. Are you using the most up-to-date edition?

The legal secretarial role is changing rapidly. Therefore these Standards will be updated as required, so please ensure you have the latest edition.

This is the May 2010 edition.

Please check www.LegalStandards.org to see if it is the most up-to-date edition. Also visit that site if you wish to sign up for the automatic update service and/or view the other series of free Standards available.

6. Professional conduct obligations

These Standards incorporate the core professional conduct obligations imposed upon individual legal secretaries working in solicitors' firms, *and have been vetted by the Solicitors Regulation Authority.*

The conduct requirements remain relevant for legal secretaries who don't work in solicitors' firms because they constitute best practice and reflect professional practice and expectations.

NOTES TO INDIVIDUALS USING THESE STANDARDS

7. General

Please follow your organisation's guidance on how these Standards are to be used.

When following these Standards we have assumed that you:

- Will know of any relevant internal procedures that your organisation has;
- Will interpret and apply these Standards only to the extent of your job remit and authority. These Standards by themselves never oblige you to take on responsibility for ensuring someone else has done their job.
- Appreciate that you are expected to apply these Standards courteously, promptly, professionally and competently.

Legal Secretaries at your level of seniority are expected to demonstrate common sense, and to:

- Understand the intended outcomes of allocated tasks;
- Raise queries or concerns where instructions are unclear;
- Raise queries or concerns where the desired outcome is unachievable or potentially problematic.

You and your line manager should interpret these Standards, and your compliance with them, in light of the above expectations.

8. Blanks

You will see that some individual Standards just say “[Blank]” e.g. L2-IT6 on page 11. This means that it is in use – either in the Introductory or Advanced Levels - but is not relevant to you working on the Intermediate Level. However we have left it in to enable easy comparison between the three levels.

9. Membership of the Institute of Paralegals

The Institute created these Standards (with assistance from the profession) because it is committed to assisting legal secretaries and paralegals to receive better recognition for their respective expertise. If you want to have your experience recognised then you should join the Institute. Membership is open to all legal secretaries, regardless of job title. There are four potential membership grades open to you as a legal secretary: all put you on the Route to Qualification career path:

Affiliate membership is open to all legal secretaries without any regular practice experience. UK membership costs £39 each year, Hong Kong membership costs HK\$349 each year and International membership costs GBP £29.

Associate Membership is open to anyone doing a significant amount of legal work, regardless of job title. The legal work can be paid or voluntary, full-time or part-time. UK Associate membership costs £79 a year, Hong Kong membership costs HK\$749 each year and International membership costs GBP £49.

Qualified Paralegal status: is open to anyone who has done a significant amount of legal work, regardless of job title, for at least six years, or at least four years if they have passed an approved course or for at least three years if they have passed the Legal Practice Course/Hong Kong PCLL or local equivalent. As with Associate membership, the legal work can be paid or voluntary, full-time or part-time. Qualified Paralegals are allowed to use the letters *Q.Inst.Pa* after their name. UK membership costs £119 a year, Hong Kong membership costs HK\$1,099 each year and International membership costs GBP £89.

Fellow Membership status: is open to anyone who is (or meets the criteria to be) a Qualified Paralegal and who, in addition, has successfully completed a Mandatory Course (see www.paralegaldistancelearning.co.uk/UWE2). Fellow IOP members are Fellows of the Institute and so allowed to use the letters *F.Inst.Pa* after their name. UK membership costs £139 a year, Hong Kong membership costs HK\$1,299 each year and International membership costs GBP £99

To join/for more information please call (+44) (0) 20 7587 3917 email membership@theiop.org or visit our website at: www.theIOP.org.

To receive our free monthly e-journal please visit www.TheParalegal.org

10. For more information on these Standards

Please speak with your HR or line manager in the first instance. Otherwise please visit the Institute’s Standards web-site at www.LegalStandards.org or email office@theiop.org or call +44 (0) 20 7587 3917

11. Qualifications connected to these Standards

Were you aware that you can obtain a recognised legal secretarial qualification if you can show to your employer’s satisfaction that you meet at least 95% of these Standards and submit an assignment?

The qualifications are nationally recognised and cost:

For UK based candidates: £150 each
For Hong Kong based candidates: HK\$1,800
For all other countries: GBP£190

A separate legal qualification is linked to each of the three levels of these Standards:

The Introductory Level leads to the LPQ Introductory Certificate in Legal Secretarial Practice

The Intermediate Level leads to the LPQ Intermediate Certificate in Legal Secretarial Practice

The Advanced Level leads to the LPQ Advanced Certificate in Legal Secretarial Practice

LPQs are qualifications, not courses and can only be applied for with employer support. For more information please visit www.LegalStandards.org.

End of introductory notes

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APPLICATION OF LEGAL EXPERTISE

At your level of seniority you should be acting partially as a general assistant, able to handle basic procedural steps.

This is what the Intermediate Level IOP Competency Standards for Legal Secretaries require you to be able to do:

- L2-AL1 Complete and submit any standard searches relevant to your practice area
- L2-AL2 Complete and file any official forms relevant to your practice area
- L2-AL3 Write standard letters and emails in your organisation's house style
- L2-AL4 Help to complete legal documents
- L2-AL5 Produce formal documents in the appropriate format
- L2-AL6 Demonstrate an understanding of the basic legal processes and procedures for your practice area

End

BUSINESS AWARENESS

As a legal secretary you need to have a basic appreciation of the commercial nature (if any) of your organisation.

This is what the Intermediate Level IOP Competency Standards for Legal Secretaries require you to be able to do:

- L2-BA1 Understand the structure of your organisation and how it derives its income/funding
- L2-BA2 Understand the structure of your department/team
- L2-BA3 Understand the type of business/other activity done by the clients for whom your line manager(s) works
- L2-BA4 Understand the relationship between the work you do and its cost to your organisation and the benefit derived from it
- L2-BA5 Understand how your organisation charges for the legal work it does (if relevant)

End

CLIENT RELATIONS

At your level of seniority, client relations are about four things:

- A. The way you treat potential and existing clients and the attitude you display when dealing with them;
- B. Your knowledge of your organisation's systems relating to client data and how to handle clients;
- C. Taking responsibility for alerting the appropriate line manager regarding difficulties with client care you encounter;
- D. As a representative of your organisation who has direct contact with clients, acting as a representative and ensuring you project a positive image.

This is what the Intermediate Level IOP Competency Standards for Legal Secretaries require you to be able to do:

- L2-CR1 Respond to enquiries from potential clients courteously and professionally and deal with them as appropriate
- L2-CR2 Act in a professional and courteous manner when dealing with clients, potential clients and third parties and always project a positive image of your organisation
- L2-CR3 Ensure database/records are accurate and complete during and at the end of matters for which you are responsible
- L2-CR4 Operate in accordance with your organisation's policies and/or procedures relating to client care
- L2-CR5 Tell the appropriate person upon receipt of any client feedback
- L2-CR6 React to clients in a manner appropriate to their situation on that particular occasion
- L2-CR7 Notify the appropriate person if you become aware of any particular client requirements (beyond the usual)
- L2-CR8 Liaise with clients and inform them of the progress of the matter with the relevant line manager's approval
- L2-CR9 Ask for feedback from the appropriate person(s) on your client care performance and implement suggested improvements

End

COMMUNICATION

The ability to communicate clearly, concisely and accurately is one of the most important skills within a legal environment.

This is what the Intermediate Level IOP Competency Standards for Legal Secretaries require you to be able to do:

- L2-C1 Use plain English in all communications and adhere to your organisation's house-style
- L2-C2 Be courteous and professional in your dealings with others
- L2-C3 Obtain necessary information to deal with enquiries, requests, instructions etc
- L2-C4 Identify, give and receive appropriate information during telephone conversations and make a file note if appropriate
- L2-C5 Present information in a clear, logical and structured manner using plain English
- L2-C6 Prepare bills, including narratives, in conjunction with the relevant line manager
- L2-C7 Comply with your organisation's internal procedures for:
 - Cheque requisition
 - Expenses requisition
 - Leave/holiday
 - Sickness/absence
 - Stationery requisition
 - Training application
- L2-C8 Prepare client engagement letters (if relevant) in conjunction with the relevant line manager
- L2-C9 Prepare short reports and memoranda in your organisation's house-style, using precedents as appropriate

End

EQUIPMENT USE

Office equipment is now often so sophisticated that it cannot be taken for granted that you know how to use it.

This is what the Intermediate Level IOP Competency Standards for Legal Secretaries require you to be able to do:

L2-E1 Perform the following tasks on the photocopier:

- Change image size
- Change paper
- Charge to account if applicable
- Clear paper jams
- Print double-sided
- Print on transparencies
- Print single sided
- Replace toner
- Sort pages
- Staple documents

L2-E 2 Perform the following tasks on your organisation's telephone system:

- Charge to account if applicable
- Make calls
- Personalise the permanent greeting on your phone extension
- Pick up voice messages
- Place calls on hold
- Set a temporary greeting on your phone extension
- Set up conference calls
- Take calls
- Transfer calls
- Use group pick-up

L2-E3 Perform the following tasks on a fax machine:

- Charge to account if applicable
- Check that the whole fax has been sent
- Fix paper jams
- Log ingoing and outgoing faxes
- Replace paper
- Send faxes

L2-E4 Perform the following tasks using the document scanner:

- File documents
- Index documents
- Retrieve documents
- Scan in documents

L2-E5 Perform the following tasks on the microfiche system:

- Index documents
- Put documents on microfiche
- Retrieve documents
- Store documents

L2-E6 Perform the following tasks on the printer:

- Print documents
- Print double-sided
- Print envelopes
- Print labels
- Print transparencies

End

IT SKILLS

You will be expected to have in-depth knowledge of the features of the software packages used in your practice area.

This is what the Intermediate Level IOP Competency Standards for Legal Secretaries require you to be able to do:

- L2-IT1 Use the main features of the software packages used in your practice area
- L2-IT2 Use your organisation's word processing software to create letters and the main documents relevant to your practice area
- L2-IT3 Create, send, receive, forward and file emails
- L2-IT4 Attach documents to emails, open and save attachments received
- L2-IT5 Operate your organisation's policy on the filing of emails
- L2-IT6 [Blank]

End

MANAGING INFORMATION

The management and administration of information is at the heart of the secretarial role.

This is what the Intermediate Level IOP Competency Standards for Legal Secretaries require you to be able to do:

- L2-M1 Operate diary systems including making appointments
- L2-M2 Help to maintain a central diary system where used
- L2-M3 Open files
- L2-M4 Maintain files; keep them up to date, tidy and in chronological or other appropriate order
- L2-M5 Close and archive files ensuring that they are labelled properly and that all documents and evidence are dealt with appropriately according to their document type - e.g. clients' documents, signed documents
- L2-M6 Retrieve and return files from/to the archives
- L2-M7 Use your organisation's document management system
- L2-M8 Present information in a useful and structured format that the recipient can easily understand and use and which responds to their question(s)
- L2-M9 Tell the recipient, where appropriate, the source(s) of the information provided and any concerns about the reliability of your findings
- L2-M10 Maintain or assist in maintaining your organisation's client database, if any
- L2-M11 Keep up to date the relevant lawyer's client contact database, if appropriate
- L2-M12 Inform the appropriate person of any problems encountered with internal systems

End

MANAGING OTHERS

At your level you may be responsible for managing another member of staff. If so, it is important that you have the skills to do this effectively.

This is what the Intermediate Level IOP Competency Standards for Legal Secretaries require you to be able to do:

- L2-MO1 Actively manage your assistant(s)

- L2-MO2 Be an effective intermediary between the lawyers and your assistant(s)

- L2-MO3 Delegate work effectively and support colleagues in other teams when required

- L2-MO4 Set objectives for your assistant(s) and update as necessary

- L2-MO5 Give feedback on performance to your assistant(s)

- L2-MO6 Support your assistant(s) to achieve objectives and give recognition when met

- L2-MO7 Resolve problems effectively

- L2-MO8 Identify and discuss any skills needs your assistant(s) has/have and discuss with the appropriate person(s)

- L2-MO9 Provide training, coaching and guidance where required

- L2-MO10 Periodically review the client care performance of your assistant(s) and, where appropriate, suggest any changes

- L2-MO11 Be aware of and apply the HR policies relevant to you as a line manager

- L2-MO12 Identify situations when you need to seek guidance from more senior staff on HR and people management issues

- L2-MO13 [Blank]

End

PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Everyone working in a legal environment is subject to requirements imposed by the law and possibly by legal regulatory bodies. Your organisation may also require you to follow certain procedures for risk management reasons. Secretaries at your level have a number of obligations with which you need to comply.

This is what the Intermediate Level IOP Competency Standards for Legal Secretaries require you to be able to do:

- L2-PC1 Keep the affairs of clients and former clients confidential
- L2-PC2 Keep your organisation's business confidential
- L2-PC3 Report any concerns regarding breach of confidentiality to the appropriate person
- L2-PC4 Undertake client conflict checks using your organisation's procedures
- L2-PC5 Act at all times in a non-discriminatory manner and comply with your organisation's equality and diversity policies
- L2-PC6 Comply with anti money laundering requirements where applicable
- L2-PC7 Take steps to ensure the safe-keeping of documents, evidence and assets entrusted to your organisation that are your responsibility
- L2-PC8 Comply with your organisation's procedures for the safe-keeping of documents
- L2-PC9 Comply with the Solicitors' Accounts Rules, where relevant
- L2-PC10 Be aware of and comply with your organisation's security procedures relating to office safety and to the destruction of documents
- L2-PC11 Ask for guidance when uncertain of a procedure and be aware of the limits of your authority
- L2-PC12 Act in a professional manner at all times
- L2-PC13 Make sure that your assistant(s) is/are aware of their conduct and compliance obligations

End

SECRETARIAL SKILLS

Underpinning a legal secretary's specialist skills set is a solid foundation of secretarial skills.

This is what the Intermediate Level IOP Competency Standards for Legal Secretaries require you to be able to do:

- L2-S1 Respond promptly to telephone calls
- L2-S2 Handle any payments made and received in a timely manner
- L2-S3 Manage and file correspondence in a timely manner, including emails as appropriate
- L2-S4 Check basic details are correct on paperwork
- L2-S5 Write grammatically and use punctuation correctly
- L2-S6 Spell accurately
- L2-S7 Spell, and use correctly, legal terms commonly used in your practice area
- L2-S8 Audio type at a minimum speed of 60 wpm
- L2-S9 Copy type
- L2-S10 Take responsibility for ensuring your work is of a high standard and completed within agreed timescales (to include proof reading your own work and checking enclosures)
- L2-S11 Work effectively with your organisation's support services
- L2-S12 Prepare documents in your organisation's house-style
- L2-S13 Report the unexpected absence of any relevant lawyer(s)/fee-earner(s) to the appropriate person having first reviewed their diary and to do list
- L2-S14 Compile complex document bundles

L2-S15 Ensure that documents and document bundles are professionally presented and fit for purpose

L2-S16 Organise meetings on request and make all the ancillary arrangements

End

SELF AWARENESS AND DEVELOPMENT

As a professional, you will be expected to have given some thought to your job, the skills you need for it, and how you can best develop those skills.

This is what the Intermediate Level IOP Competency Standards for Legal Secretaries require you to be able to do:

- L2-SA1 Periodically ask for constructive feedback about your performance, consider issues identified and take steps to improve your performance
- L2-SA2 Identify the training and development you need to do your job more effectively and to further develop you personally, and raise these during your appraisals or at other times upon request
- L2-SA3 Keep a record of your progress and achievement in meeting these standards
- L2-SA4 Take responsibility for your own development and follow up proposals for your training and development where appropriate
- L2-SA5 Speak to the relevant lawyer/fee-earner to learn more about the client and/or sector and/or process at the end of interesting or notable matters

End

WORKING WITH OTHERS

Good communication, including the timely exchange of information, is essential for the proper functioning of your organisation. You are under a positive obligation to work and interact with all your colleagues in a professional and courteous manner.

This is what the Intermediate Level IOP Competency Standards for Legal Secretaries require you to be able to do:

- L2-WO1 Treat your work colleagues with respect
- L2-WO2 Appreciate your own role and responsibilities and recognise those of others
- L2-WO3 Have commitment to your job and your organisation
- L2-WO4 Share your knowledge and skills with less experienced colleagues including new joiners
- L2-WO5 Read staff communications from your organisation and support new initiatives
- L2-WO6 Deal constructively with conflict within the team
- L2-WO7 Manage incoming correspondence, emails and telephone calls when colleagues are absent
- L2-WO8 Help colleagues in your own team and in other teams to manage workloads and meet deadlines

End

WORKLOAD MANAGEMENT

In a work environment that is often hectic, frequently pressured and always changing, the ability to be well-organised and to manage your workload is essential.

This is what the Intermediate Level IOP Competency Standards for Legal Secretaries require you to be able to do:

- L2-WM1 Plan and prioritise your work through use of a diary and 'to-do' list, checking with the relevant lawyers, updating as necessary
- L2-WM2 Meet deadlines or give a warning as soon as reasonably possible that a deadline is causing difficulty and provide updated time estimate
- L2-WM3 Produce quality work on time
- L2-WM4 Demonstrate a positive and constructive attitude
- L2-WM5 [Blank]
- L2-WM6 Where appropriate, delegate work effectively
- L2-WM7 Speak to relevant lawyers about actual and pending workload if problems arise
- L2-WM8 Consider options before presenting problems to colleagues

End

NOTES
(NOT PART OF THE STANDARDS)

A. Assistance in creating these Standards

The following organisations are either (a) on/were on the IOP Working Party that helped finalise these Standards, or (b) requested a watching brief. Their assistance is much appreciated:

1. Berrymans Lace Mawer	37. Legal Services Board
2. Birmingham City University Law School	38. Legal Services Commission
3. Blackburn College	39. Legal Services Ombudsman
4. Bond Pearce LLP	40. Manches LLP
5. Buckles Solicitors LLP	41. Mayo Wynne Baxter LLP
6. Charles Russell	42. Mills Reeve
7. Central College Glasgow	43. Ministry of Defence
8. Cobbetts	44. Ministry of Justice
9. Compliance Recruitment Solutions	45. Morgan Cole
10. Council for Administration	46. Munday's LLP
11. Crown Prosecution Service	47. Nick Peterken, solicitors
12. Dawsons	48. Norton Rose
13. Denton Wilde Sapte	49. New York City Paralegal Association
14. Dickinson Dees LLP	50. Pinsent Masons
15. Edwards Angell & Palmer Dodge LLP	51. Platinum Training Solutions
16. Eversheds	52. Police National Legal Database
17. Farrer & Co.	53. Potter Farrelly & Associates
18. Field Fisher Waterhouse LLP	54. Reed Smith
19. Finers Stephens Innocent LLP	55. Resolution
20. Fox Williams LLP	56. Shakespeare Putsman LLP
21. Gide Loyrette Nouel	57. S J Berwin LLP
22. Halliwells	58. Scottish Paralegal Association
23. Harvey Ingram LLP	59. University of Lincoln Law School
24. HBJ Gateley Waring LLP	60. Shearman & Sterling
25. Herbert Smith LLP	61. Shepherd Evans
26. HR in Law	62. Simmons & Simmons
27. Jacobs Solicitors	63. Skills for Justice
28. Keoghs LLP	64. Solicitors Regulatory Authority
29. Land Registry	65. Taylor & Emmet
30. Law Society of England & Wales	66. Taylor Vinters
31. Law Society of Scotland	67. Thompsons
32. Law South	68. Thomson Snell & Passmore
33. LawNet	69. TLT solicitors
34. Legal & Contract Services Limited	70. University of Lincoln
35. Legal Education & Training Group	71. University of Westminster
36. Legal Secretaries of DC	72. Weightmans
	73. Wragge & Co.

B. Updating these Standards

These Standards are reviewed and updated as necessary to ensure that they reflect current practice. If your organisation wishes to become a member of the IOP Working Party, or to have a watching brief, please contact us.

C. Contacting the Institute

Institute of Paralegals

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End