

# IOP Competency Standards for Legal Secretaries

**Introductory Level: May 2010**



INSTITUTE OF  
PARALEGALS

Setting Standards. Promoting Professionalism.

## ABOUT THESE STANDARDS

This document contains the Introductory Level IOP Competency Standards for Legal Secretaries. There are also Intermediate and Advanced Levels

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

This Introductory Level is relevant to secretaries at the beginning of their careers. More senior secretaries should use the Intermediate or Advanced Levels.

For more information on these Legal Secretarial Standards and the other IOP Competency Standards please visit [www.LegalStandards.org](http://www.LegalStandards.org).

### 1. Who Do the IOP Standards Cover?

The IOP Competency 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.

To avoid confusion, the wording in this document assumes that legal secretaries work in a law firm. However the Standards are actually relevant to all legal secretaries doing compatible legal work in other kinds of organisation too, because the focus is 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. Who is 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 responsibilities and the authority that comes with it 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 IOP Competency Standards for Legal Assistants. If most of your work is legal work (i.e. legal practice) then you should be using the IOP Competency Standards for Paralegals (and be looking to follow the Route to Qualification career path for professional paralegals – see [www.theIOP.org](http://www.theIOP.org)).

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

### 3. Possible additional standards

Before using these Standards please check whether your employer has additional internal standards that you also need to comply with.

### 4. The function of these IOP Competency Standards

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

These Introductory Level IOP Standards list the things that the legal profession expects from a *competent* legal secretary at the outset of his/her professional career.

### 5. Is this the most up-to-date edition?

The legal secretarial role is changing rapidly. Therefore these IOP Standards will be subject to change. This is the **May 2010 edition**.

Please check [www.LegalStandards.org](http://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 IOP Competency 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 ([www.sra.org.uk](http://www.sra.org.uk))*.

The SRA professional conduct requirements are still relevant to you even if you do not work for a solicitor, because the SRA requirements are quite general and constitute best practice and, where appropriate, judicial expectation.

## 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, **but not to:**

- Independently modify or re-interpret instructions without prior approval;
- Independently analyse instructions or outcomes and then act upon that analysis;
- Take any further steps without prior approval.

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. L1-CR8 on page 8. This means that it is in use – either in the Intermediate or Advanced Levels - but is not relevant to you working on the Introductory 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 £ each year, Hong Kong membership costs HK\$3 each year and International membership costs GBP £ .

*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 £ a year, Hong Kong membership costs HK\$ each year and International membership costs GBP £ .

*Paralegal status*: is open to anyone who has done a significant amount of legal work, regardless of job title, for at least years, or at least years if they have passed an approved course or for at least year 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. *Paralegals* are allowed to use the letters *j .Inst.Pa* after their name. UK membership costs £ a year, Hong Kong membership costs HK\$1, each year and International membership costs GBP £ .

*7 status*: is open to anyone who is (or meets the criteria to be) a *Paralegal* and who, in addition, has successfully completed a Mandatory Course (see [www.paralegaldistancelearning.co.uk/UWE2](http://www.paralegaldistancelearning.co.uk/UWE2)). *7 @h* are Fellows of the Institute and so allowed to use the letters *F.Inst.Pa* after their name. UK membership costs £1 a year, Hong Kong membership costs HK\$ , each year and International membership costs GBP £ .

To join/for more information please call (+44) (0) 20 7 , email [membership@theiop.org](mailto:membership@theiop.org) or visit our website at: [www.theIOP.org](http://www.theIOP.org).

To receive our free monthly e-journal, *The Paralegal*, please visit [www.TheParalegal.org](http://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](http://www.LegalStandards.org) or email [office@theiop.org](mailto:office@theiop.org) or call (+44) (0) 20 7 .

#### 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](http://www.LegalStandards.org).

*End of introductory notes*

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## APPLICATION OF LEGAL EXPERTISE

You work in a legal environment and much of your work is legally oriented. You are expected to have a basic understanding of the relevant legal procedures that you are involved with.

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

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- L1-AL1 Complete and submit any standard searches relevant to your practice area
- L1-AL2 Complete and file any official forms relevant to your practice area
- L1-AL3 Write simple standard letters and emails in your organisation's house style
- L1-AL4 Help to complete legal documents
- L1-AL5 Produce simple formal documents in the appropriate format
- L1-AL6 Demonstrate an understanding of the basic terminology and transactions 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 Introductory Level IOP Competency Standards for Legal Secretaries require you to be able to do:

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- L1-BA1 Understand the structure of your organisation and how it derives its income/funding
- L1-BA2 Understand the structure of your department/team
- L1-BA3 Have a basic understanding of the type of business/other activity done by the clients for whom your line manager(s) works
- L1-BA4 Understand the relationship between the work you do and its cost to your organisation and the benefit derived from it
- L1-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 three 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. As a representative of your organisation who may have direct contact with clients, acting as a representative and ensuring that you project a positive image.

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

---

- L1-CR1 Respond to enquiries from potential clients courteously and professionally and deal with them as appropriate
- L1-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
- L1-CR3 Ensure database/records are accurate and complete during and at the end of matters for which you are responsible
- L1-CR4 Operate in accordance with your organisation's policies and/or procedures relating to client care
- L1-CR5 Tell the appropriate person upon receipt of any client feedback
- L1-CR6 React to clients in a manner appropriate to their situation on that particular occasion
- L1-CR7 Notify the appropriate person if you become aware of any particular client requirements beyond the usual
- L1-CR8 [Blank]
- L1-CR9 [Blank]

*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 Introductory Level IOP Competency Standards for Legal Secretaries require you to be able to do:

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L1-C1 Use plain English in all communications and adhere to your organisation's house-style

L1-C2 Be courteous and professional in your dealings with others

L1-C3 Obtain the necessary information to deal with enquiries, requests, instructions etc

L1-C4 Make a file note of telephone conversations if appropriate

L1-C5 Present information in a clear, logical and structured manner using plain English

L1-C6 Prepare bills, including narratives, in conjunction with the relevant line manager

L1-C7 Comply with your organisation's internal procedures for:

- Cheque requisition
- Expenses requisition
- Leave/holiday
- Sickness/absence
- Stationery requisition
- Training application

L1-C8 [Blank]

L1-C9 [Blank]

*End*

## EQUIPMENT USE

The equipment in an office is often so sophisticated that it cannot be taken for granted that you know how to use it.

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

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L1-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

L1-E2 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
- Take calls
- Transfer calls
- Use group pick-up

L1-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
- Understand memory function

L1-E4 Perform the following tasks using a document scanner:

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

L1-E5 Perform the following tasks on a microfiche system:

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

L1-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 knowledge of the commonly used features of the software packages used in your practice area.

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

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- L1-IT1 Use the main features of the software packages used in your practice area
- L1-IT2 Use your organisation's word processing software to create letters and the basic documents relevant to your practice area
- L1-IT3 Send, receive, forward and file emails
- L1-IT4 Attach documents to emails, open and save attachments received
- L1-IT5 Operate your organisation's policy on the filing of emails
- L1-IT6 [Blank]

*End*

## MANAGING INFORMATION

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

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

---

- L1-M1 Operate diary systems including making appointments
- L1-M2 Help to maintain a central diary system where used
- L1-M3 Open files
- L1-M4 Maintain files; keep them up to date, tidy and in chronological or other appropriate order
- L1-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
- L1-M6 Retrieve and return files from/to the archives
- L1-M7 Use your organisation's document management system
- L1-M8 Present information in a useful and structured format that the recipient can easily understand and use and which responds to their question(s)
- L1-M9 Tell the recipient, where appropriate, the source(s) of the information provided and any concerns about the reliability of your findings
- L1-M10 Access your organisation's client database, if any
- L1-M11 [Blank]
- L1-M12 [Blank]

*End*

## MANAGING OTHERS

You are not normally expected to manage a team of staff at your level of seniority and therefore there are no Introductory Level IOP Competency Standards for Legal Secretaries covering Managing Others.

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L1-MO1 [Blank]

L1-MO2 [Blank]

L1-MO3 [Blank]

L1-MO4 [Blank]

L1-MO5 [Blank]

L1-MO6 [Blank]

L1-MO7 [Blank]

L1-MO8 [Blank]

L1-MO9 [Blank]

L1-MO10 [Blank]

L1-MO11 [Blank]

L1-MO12 [Blank]

L1-MO13 [Blank]

*End*

## PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

As a secretary in an organisation/department providing legal services, you are subject to compliance obligations imposed by law, regulatory bodies and your organisation.

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

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- L1-PC1 Keep the affairs of clients and former clients confidential
- L1-PC2 Keep your organisation's business confidential
- L1-PC3 Report any concerns regarding breach of confidentiality to the appropriate person
- L1-PC4 If relevant, undertake client conflict checks using your organisation's procedures
- L1-PC5 Act at all times in a non-discriminatory manner and comply with your organisation's equality and diversity policies
- L1-PC6 Comply with anti money laundering requirements where applicable
- L1-PC7 Ensure the safe-keeping of documents, evidence and assets entrusted to your organisation that are your responsibility
- L1-PC8 Comply with your organisation's procedures for the safe-keeping of documents
- L1-PC9 Comply with the Solicitors' Accounts Rules where relevant
- L1-PC10 Be aware of and comply with your organisation's security procedures relating to office safety and to destruction of documents
- L1-PC11 Ask for guidance when uncertain of a procedure and be aware of the limits of your authority
- L1-PC12 Act in a professional manner at all times
- L1-PC13 [Blank]

*End*

## SECRETARIAL SKILLS

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

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

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- L1-S1 Respond promptly to telephone calls
- L1-S2 Handle any payments made and received in a timely manner
- L1-S3 Manage and file correspondence in a timely manner, including emails as appropriate
- L1-S4 Check basic details are correct on paperwork
- L1-S5 Write grammatically and use punctuation correctly
- L1-S6 Spell accurately
- L1-S7 Spell and use correctly legal terms commonly used in your practice area
- L1-S8 Audio type at a minimum speed of 60 wpm
- L1-S9 Copy type
- L1-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)
- L1-S11 Work effectively with your organisation's support services
- L1-S12 Prepare documents in your organisation's house-style
- L1-S13 Report the unexpected absence of relevant lawyer(s)/fee-earners(s) to the appropriate person and ask for instructions
- L1-S14 [Blank]

L1-S15 [Blank]

L1-S16 [Blank]

*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 Introductory Level IOP Competency Standards for Legal Secretaries require you to be able to do:

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- L1-SA1 Periodically ask for constructive feedback about your performance, consider issues identified and have a follow-up discussion about how to improve your performance with the appropriate person
- L1-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
- L1-SA3 Keep a record of your progress and achievement in meeting these Standards
- L1-SA4 Take responsibility for your own development and follow up proposals for your training and development where appropriate
- L1-SA5 [Blank]

*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 Introductory Level IOP Competency Standards for Legal Secretaries require you to be able to do:

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- L1-WO1 Treat your work colleagues with respect
- L1-WO2 Appreciate your own role and responsibilities and recognise those of others
- L1-WO3 Have commitment to your job and your organisation
- L1-WO4 Share your knowledge and skills with less experienced colleagues including new joiners
- L1-WO5 Read staff communications from your organisation and support new initiatives
- L1-WO6 Promote good team relations
- L1-WO7 When instructed, handle incoming correspondence, emails and telephone calls when colleagues are absent
- L1-WO8 [Blank]

*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 Introductory Level IOP Competency Standards for Legal Secretaries require you to be able to do:

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- L1-WM1 Plan and prioritise your work through use of a diary and 'to-do' list, updating as necessary
- L1-WM2 Meet deadlines or give a warning as soon as reasonably possible that a deadline is causing difficulty and provide an updated time estimate
- L1-WM3 Produce quality work on time
- L1-WM4 Demonstrate a positive and constructive attitude
- L1-WM5 Send photocopying and other similar tasks to the appropriate department and track progress
- L1-WM6 [Blank]
- L1-WM7 [Blank]
- L1-WM8 [Blank]

*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.

