**All Settled? A study of legally binding separation agreements
and private ordering in family law in Scotland**

00.00.00

Dear

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study into the use of written agreements in the context of family relationships. This research is being carried out by researchers from the University of Glasgow and from the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships at the University of Edinburgh. The purpose of this study is to improve understanding of why people make agreements, whether they are content with how the agreements were made, what type of legal advice they received and what has happened since they reached agreement.

The research team have looked at 600 agreements that separating couples made in 2010. These legally binding “Minutes of Agreement” are public documents which are stored in the National Archives of Scotland and include the names and addresses of the people who entered into them. We obtained your contact details from one of these agreements. That is our only source of information about you and we have not contacted, and will not contact, the other party to your agreement.

We would like to interview by telephone (at a date and time of your choice) and hope you will agree. There is a great deal we cannot learn from the Minutes of Agreement themselves such as what influences people to agree what they do, and how fair they think the agreement is. We are asking you to return the enclosed reply slip in the postage paid envelope, stating that you agree to be interviewed as well as providing us with either your phone number or email address. One of the three researchers listed at the bottom of this letter will then contact you to tell you more about the study and, if you agree, will arrange a time for the telephone interview. We hope you may also agree to the audio recording of the interview as this will ensure we are able to record your opinions accurately.

All answers to interview questions will be used anonymously. This means that the names of the people who take part in our research will never be used. What we find out from the people who take part will be made into a report and, if you agree to take part, we will be pleased to send you a copy of the summary of the research report.

On the back of this letter we have answers to some of the questions you may have. The enclosed leaflet also tells you more about this study. For further information you may also email the lead researcher Jane Mair at jane.mair@glasgow.ac.uk or you can read about the project at: <http://www.crfr.ac.uk/researchprojects/rp_allsettled.html>

We do hope you will help us with this interesting and important research. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Yours faithfully

 

Jane Mair Fran Wasoff Kirsteen Mackay

 **How did you get my address?** Minutes of Agreement usually include the names and addresses of people entering into them and we got your contact details from one of those agreements. That is the only source of our information about you and we have spoken to no one else about your individual Minute of Agreement. We have not, and will not, contact the other person you entered into your agreement with.

 **Do I have to take part?** Your involvement in our study is entirely voluntary. We hope that you will want to take part as it is important to learn from the experiences of people like yourself who have entered into agreements. However you do not have to take part if you do not want to. You can also change your mind at any time, even if you agree to take part at this point.

 **Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?** We will not contact anyone else about your involvement in this study, regardless of whether you decide to take part or not. As part of our study, we will also be interviewing some solicitors about their experience of Minutes of Agreement but we *will not* discuss the individual content of your Minute of Agreement with your solicitor.

 **What will happen to the results of the Research Study?** The information we obtain from the Minutes of Agreement and from interviews will all be anonymised. It will then be analysed as part of our research project. The information will be presented in a final report on our project and will also be used as the basis for future academic publications and for teaching. Any information or quotations included in these publications will be anonymous. If you agree to contribute to the study, we will send you a free copy of the summary of our research report.

 **Who is organising & funding the research?** The research is being carried out by researchers from the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh. Jane Mair is a senior lecturer in family law in the School of Law, University of Glasgow. Fran Wasoff is Emeritus Professor of Family Policies and is an experienced researcher from the centre for Research on Families and Relationships, University of Edinburgh. Kirsteen Mackay is employed as a research assistant by the University of Glasgow and tutors family law in the School of Law, University of Edinburgh. This research is being funded by the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council).

 **Who has reviewed the study?** The proposed research was reviewed by the ESRC before they agreed to fund it as well as being reviewed by the Ethics Committee of the University of Glasgow. All the reviewers were satisfied with the nature of our research.

 **Who can I contact if I have concerns about the research?** If you wish further information about this study, please contact Jane Mair, School of Law, University of Glasgow at jane.mair@glasgow.ac.uk. In addition if you have any concerns about the conduct of the research project you can contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Professor John McKernan at John.McKernan@glasgow.ac.uk

