



To manage the courts, support the judiciary and provide a high quality and professional service to all users of the courts.





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WITH
ELEVEN
HUNDRED
OF DECADES
HIS PLACED YEARS
THINGS IN THE
CHURCH, ON
NOVEMBER
18C



foreword

by the Chairperson of the Board

This is the fifth Annual Report of the Courts Service which, in reviewing its strategies and activities for the year 2004, demonstrates the exceptional progress which has been made in modernising the administration and functioning of the Courts system over the relatively short time span since its establishment.

In addition to the Four Courts complex, which is the primary seat of the administration of justice in Ireland, the Courts Service also exercises administrative responsibility for some 180 courthouses and court venues throughout the country. More important there are some 1,030 staff of the Courts Service daily engaged in providing a vast array of services and administrative support to the judiciary, the public and other court users.

The constant evolution in our social and economic environments has resulted in continuous growth in the range and nature of the services which the Courts Service is required to provide. For similar reasons not only has the volume of cases coming before the courts augmented greatly but their range, diversity and complexity continues to increase. These developments have required the

Courts Service to adopt effective and innovative strategies to meet the resulting demands on it. It is in this context that the Annual Report reviews the functioning of the Courts Service during the year 2004 and in particular identifies the strategies which were adopted to meet both the existing and new demands on its role and functions. As the Report discloses, a great deal of success has been achieved with these strategies and it would be remiss of me not to identify the reason for those successes as being the willingness of the staff of the Courts Service, at all levels, not only to accept and implement, on a day-to-day basis, new ideas and new practices but also to initiate much of those innovations from within the Courts Service itself.

The following are just some of the matters which are indicative of developments during that year:

- Innovations in the areas of Information Technology featured strongly in 2004. A Criminal Case Management System was installed and became operational across the country. This involved 41 separate offices. We now have an integrated electronic record in respect of 95% of all criminal cases nationwide – these cases being tracked during their full lifecycle. This new system involved the introduction of a major business change programme and the training of 300 staff. It was completed within 6 months.
- New court buildings around the country have been the most public manifestation of the dynamic nature of the



Foreword

Courts Service in the past five years. Last year two major refurbishments were completed in Castlebar and Ennis – both are now modern and accommodating friendly places in which to conduct legal business. They take their place amongst an increasingly impressive stock of top class court buildings.

- The area of Court Funds was afforded a high priority throughout the year. Having appointed fund managers in 2003 we transferred 70% of the total funds into investment vehicles established to meet the specific requirements of the beneficiaries of Court Funds. At the end of the year €515 million of these monies had been invested in the new investment vehicles.
- In relation to Customer Service, 2004 was a productive year. In July we hosted a Customer Service Forum and conducted a survey of those who use our court offices. In August we published our Customer Service Charter – a statement of the standards of service court users can expect when dealing with the Courts Service. In this spirit of

striving to meet court users needs we have also appointed Customer Service Liaison Officers.

- Administrative changes and improved physical facilities also impacted greatly on the work of the courts. The provision of a new County Registrar's court in Dublin enabled the equivalent of an extra sitting day per week to become a reality for the Circuit Court. This has also allowed for time for District Court Appeals.
- Our mandate to provide information to the public saw an expansion of the catalogue of leaflets and brochures available. Explanatory leaflets were produced in relation to the Small Claims procedure, the Probate office, and the office of the General Solicitor for minors and wards of court. The numbers of publications in Irish were increased and included our Annual Report, Freedom of Information manual, Customer Charter and guides to individual courthouses. Visits to our website www.courts.ie continued to increase with almost 600,000 hits during the year. The Service also

catered for 4,303 pupils and 291 teachers from 148 schools and colleges in tours of the Four Courts during 2004.

- During 2004 a major examination of the procedures which apply to the collection of statistics in all courts was undertaken. The exercises ensured that appropriate measurement criteria had been identified to (a) capture all business conducted by the relevant offices and (b) accurately reflect case volumes and case disposal. The implementation of the fruits of this examination, combined with an electronic reporting facility, in the next 12 months will facilitate better management of resources and time as well as improving the quality of information available generally on the functioning of the courts system.

I refer to the above examples as highlighting the range of the work and the services provided by the Service and as an introduction to the array of progress charted throughout this Report.

The role of administering justice in our courts is conferred on judges appointed under the Constitution.



Foreword

The judiciary have introduced and adopted in recent times continuous improvements and changes in practice and procedures, and in particular case management techniques, to meet the increasing demands being made on the courts as well as to permit the more efficient hearing and disposal of cases. These innovations have been achieved in tandem and cooperation with the Courts Service. I am aware my colleagues in the judiciary greatly appreciate the tremendous support which the work of the Courts Service has provided to the administration of justice.

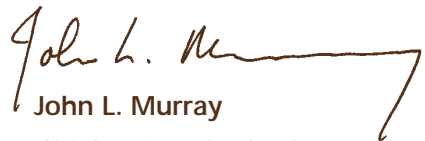
The Courts Service can now respond to demands for improved services quickly, anticipate such demands for the future and creatively refurbish not only our buildings but also our approach to meeting new challenges which constantly change. Our task is also aided by the wider legal community. The legal professions, other justice agencies and the other state and voluntary agencies with whom we interact have created a sense of partnership in advising and aiding the Courts Service.

I wish to thank the Board of the Service, my judicial colleagues, our C.E.O. Mr P.J. Fitzpatrick and his staff, and as well as members of the legal community for their work and support in the past year.

I would also like to acknowledge the continued support of the Government in particular the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the staff of his Department. Knowing that the support and resources exist which are necessary for our work to succeed makes it possible to plan confidently for the future. In this regard we acknowledge also the assistance also given by the Minister for Finance and his Department in furthering our plans for a 22 courtroom Criminal Court Complex for Dublin.

This Report does more than just chart our ongoing efforts and chronicling our progress. It contains much detail by way of statistics relating to the courts. These statistics show that our courts are busier than ever and face an ever increasing diversity of work. The same statistics will be of great assistance to those who study our legal system and those who report on it to the public.

The extent of the work and the skills which have to be deployed in order to produce an Annual Report as all embracing as this one cannot be overstated. On behalf of the Board I would like to thank all those involved in the compilation and presentation of this Report.



John L. Murray

*Chief Justice of Ireland
and Chairperson of the
Courts Service Board*





introduction

by the Chief Executive Officer

This is the fifth occasion on which I have had the pleasure to introduce the Annual Report of the Courts Service.

The Service operates within a legislative framework which contains the statutory mandates: to manage the courts, support the judiciary, provide information to the public, provide, manage and maintain court buildings and provide facilities for court users. Within that framework our work is multi layered, diverse, challenging and rewarding.

In 2004 the courts and court offices dealt with 770,000 matters in areas as diverse as changing a name by deed poll, processing the probate of a will and hearing criminal, civil and family law cases.

The Supreme Court received 531 new appeals last year - a 50% increase since 2001. The Court of Criminal Appeal has seen a reduction in new cases of just over 10% during the same period but disposed of 23% more cases.

In the High Court there continues to be an increase in activity. Pre-hearing work increased to almost 91,000, up from 71,000 in 2000 – an increase of 28%. The High Court delivered 400 written judgments last year, an increase of 24% on the previous year and up from 215 in 2001, an increase of 86%. During the same period

there has been an increase of 37% in the number of judicial review cases (excluding asylum cases) initiated which now totals 1,205. Asylum judicial review cases totalled 1,381 last year.

In the Central Criminal Court, where the High Court exercises its criminal jurisdiction, there has been a significant reduction in the number of new rape and murder cases received from 123 in 2001 to 68 in 2004. There was a marked increase in the number of cases disposed of in the same period - with an 84% increase in the number of murder cases dealt with.

While there have been some reductions in the number of matters coming before the Circuit and District Courts, the complexity of cases and the length of trial times has increased. For example, the number of cases which went to trial by jury in the Circuit Criminal Courts increased to 355 from 319 in 2003. The Circuit Court dealt with a total of 52,258 matters, a reduction of some 10.5%.

There was a 7% reduction in the number of criminal matters coming before the District Courts in 2004.

However the court remains extremely busy and dealt with a total of 550,000 matters during the year handing down almost 18,000 prison sentences, 90,000 fines and 2,000 community service orders.

The Service continued to work with and support the judiciary to reduce waiting lists and waiting times, provide additional court sittings and improve research and library facilities. We continued to provide administrative support to the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board, the Judicial Studies Institute and the Court Rules Making Committees.

Our reform and modernisation programme continued throughout the year. In addition to some of the more visible projects such as court buildings, our award nominated website and other information technology programmes, we made considerable progress in modernising and improving the practices, procedures and processes within court offices to make them more accessible and user friendly. Our staff are the vital link between court users and the organisation. During 2004 they participated in a wide and diverse



Introduction

range of training programmes including technical skills training for court going registrars, training for staff working in court administration offices, performance management training, information technology training, creation of training manuals and on the job training and coaching.

We continued to develop a culture of participation and staff involvement through the performance management system, individual office business plans, project groups and many other fora. Our partnership structures have contributed very significantly to our modernisation/change programme and have contributed to the development of a much valued employee involvement/participation culture.

The successful rollout of the Criminal Case Management System allowed for summons applications to be accepted electronically from An Garda Síochána on a pilot basis for the Dublin Metropolitan Region, Cork City and the Louth/Meath Division. A new central processing unit was set up to receive and issue summons applications electronically. The extension of the pilot sites nationwide will remove much of the manual work associated with summons administration for local court offices and free up staff to concentrate on the core business

of supporting the courts. Penalty point convictions are now notified electronically to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and local Government.

Our building programme continued at pace during 2004. The vast majority of county town courthouses and many others have now been refurbished. I would like to acknowledge and thank the Chairman of the Office of Public Works and his staff for their ongoing assistance with our building programme.

Most people rely on the media for reports of trials and other events involving the courts. Our specialised media information/liaison service dealt with thousands of media queries during the year. In this way we continue to assist the media to accurately report the work of the courts. I am particularly grateful to the journalists who regularly cover our courts for their impartial and accurate reporting.

We continue to work very closely with many other agencies within the wider justice community including the Bar Council of Ireland, the Incorporated Law Society of Ireland, An Garda Síochána, the Probation and Welfare Service, the Prison Service, the Chief Prosecution Solicitor's Office and support groups for victims.

I am very grateful to the Chief Justice and Chairperson of the Board, The Hon. Mr. Justice John L. Murray, to each member of the Board, the Presidents of each of our Courts and the judiciary generally for their continued support and guidance during another very busy year.

The staff of the Service again demonstrated that their openness to and willingness to embrace change is second to none. To each and every one I extend my sincere appreciation and gratitude. I am also very grateful to the trade unions that represent our staff for their continued support.

I would particularly like to thank the Secretary General and staff of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, and the Secretary General and staff of the Department of Finance for their wholehearted continuous support for our work.

The support of everybody ensured that 2004 was another year of marked improvements and developments.

P.J. Fitzpatrick

Chief Executive Officer

Chapter 1

Governance



Governance

The Courts Service Board

consists of a Chairperson and 16 members. Its functions are to consider and determine policy in relation to the Service and to oversee the implementation of that policy by the Chief Executive Officer.

The Chief Executive Officer is the Accounting Officer for the Service and has responsibility for the management and control of the staff as well as the day-to-day administration of the business of the Service.

The functions of the Service do not include the administration of justice nor has the Service any function in relation to judicial decisions. Judges are, under the Constitution, independent in the exercise of their judicial functions. However, this does not preclude members of the judiciary from acting in an administrative capacity in respect of matters relating to the work of the Service. Many participate as members of the Board, Committees of the Board, steering groups, project teams and other fora.

An overview of the Courts Service in 2004

- Staff of 1030
- Budget of €97million
- Manages funds of €880m in a trustee capacity
- Takes in fines and fees of €49m
- Staff located in 42 District Court offices and 25 Circuit Court offices outside Dublin and at 8 locations in Dublin
- Staff ratio of 60:40 Dublin to country
- 5 Regional Offices

Functions of the Courts Service

- To manage the courts
- To provide support services for judges
- To provide information on the courts system to the public
- To provide, manage and maintain court buildings
- To provide facilities for users of the courts



Governance

The Board of the Courts Service

as of 31st December 2004



The Hon. Mr. Justice **John L. Murray**, Chairperson*, Chief Justice of Ireland



The Hon. Mr. Justice **Joseph Finnegan**
President of the High Court



The Hon. Mrs. Justice **Susan Denham**, Judge of the Supreme Court
Elected by the Ordinary Judges of the Supreme Court



The Hon. Mrs. Justice **Catherine McGuinness**, Judge of the Supreme Court
Nominated by the Chief Justice in respect of her experience or expertise in a specific area of court business



The Hon. Mr. Justice **John Quirke**, Judge of the High Court
Elected by the ordinary judges of the High Court



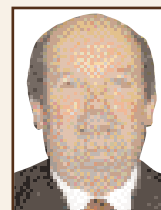
The Hon. Mr. Justice **Esmond Smyth**
President of the Circuit Court



His Honour Judge **Patrick Moran**, Judge of the Circuit Court
Elected by the ordinary judges of the Circuit Court



His Honour Judge **Peter Smithwick**
President of the District Court



Judge **Flann Brennan**, Judge of the District Court**
Elected by the ordinary judges of the District Court



Mr. **P.J. Fitzpatrick**, Chief Executive Officer



Mr. **Hugh Mohan**, Chairman of the Bar Council***
Nominated by the Chairman of the Council of the Bar of Ireland



Mr. **Gerard F. Griffin**, Solicitor
Nominated by the President of the Law Society of Ireland



Ms. **Brenda Amond**, Carlow Circuit Court Office
Elected by the staff of the Service



Mr. **Caoimhin Ó hUiginn**, Assistant Secretary, Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform****
An officer of the Minister nominated by the Minister



Ms. **Olive Braiden**
Nominated by the Minister to represent consumers of the services provided by the courts



Ms. **Paula Carey**
Nominated by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions



Mr. **Gerry McCaughey**, Chief Executive, Century Homes
Nominated by the Minister for relevant knowledge and experience in commerce, finance or administration

* replaced The Hon. Mrs. Justice Susan Denham, Judge of the Supreme Court, August 2004
** replaced Judge David Anderson, Judge of the District Court, June 2004
*** replaced Mr. Conor Maguire, August 2004
**** replaced Mr. Michael Mellett, January 2004

Governance

Committees of the Board

The Board may establish and authorise committees or the Chief Executive Officer to perform some of its functions. During 2004, the following committees dealt with a range of issues:

FINANCE COMMITTEE

The Hon. Mr. Justice John L. Murray, Chief Justice, Chairperson

The Hon. Mr. Justice Joseph Finnegan

The Hon. Mr. Justice Esmond Smyth

Judge Cormac Dunne, *Judge of the District Court*

Mr. Caoimhín Ó hUiginn

Mr. Gerry McCaughey

Mr. P.J. Fitzpatrick

REMUNERATION COMMITTEE

The Hon. Mr. Justice John L. Murray, Chief Justice, Chairperson

The Hon. Mr. Justice Joseph Finnegan

The Hon. Mr. Justice Esmond Smyth

Judge Cormac Dunne

Mr. Caoimhín Ó hUiginn

Mr. Gerry McCaughey

Mr. P.J. Fitzpatrick

**AUDIT COMMITTEE**

The Hon. Mr. Justice Joseph Finnegan, Chairperson

His Honour Judge Seán O'Leary, *Judge of the Circuit Court*

Mr. Gerry McCaughey

Mr. Tom O'Higgins, Chartered Accountant, *external member*

Mr. Jim Farrell, former Director of the National Treasury Management Agency, *external member*

JUDICIAL SUPPORT COMMITTEE

The Hon. Mr. Justice John L. Murray, Chief Justice, Chairperson

The Hon. Mr. Justice Nicholas Kearns, *Judge of the Supreme Court*

His Honour Judge Desmond Hogan, *Judge of the Circuit Court*

Judge Seán McBride, *Judge of the District Court*

Mr. Brendan Ryan, *Director of Corporate Services, Courts Service*

Governance

BUILDING COMMITTEE

The Hon. Mr. Justice John Quirke,
Chairperson

The Hon. Mr. Justice Iarfhlaith
O'Neill, *Judge of the High Court*

His Honour Judge Patrick Moran

His Honour Judge Michael White,
Judge of the Circuit Court

Judge Catherine Murphy, *Judge of
the District Court*

Mr. Tony Hunt B.L. (nominee of
Mr. Hugh Mohan S.C.)

Mr. Gerard F. Griffin

Mr. Gerry McCaughey

Ms. Olive Braiden

Mr. Shay Kirk, *Principal Officer,
Courts Service*

Mr. P.J. Fitzpatrick

FAMILY LAW COURT DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

The Hon. Mrs. Justice Catherine
McGuinness, Chairperson

Her Honour Judge Jacqueline
Linnane, *Judge of the Circuit Court*

Judge Gerard Haughton, *Judge of
the District Court*

Ms. Olive Braiden

Mr. David Bergin, *solicitor*

Ms. Brenda Amond

Ms. Catherine Forde, *barrister*

Ms. Nuala McLoughlin, *Chief
Registrar and Director of
Operations, Supreme & High Court*

Mr. Diarmaid MacDiarmada,
*Director of Operations, Circuit &
District Court*

DISTRICT COURT COMMITTEE

His Honour Judge Peter
Smithwick, Chairperson

Judge Mary Devins, *Judge of the
District Court*

Mr. Gerard F. Griffin

Ms. Paula Carey

Mr. Diarmaid MacDiarmada

STEERING COMMITTEE TO PLAN FOR AND TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ON SENTENCING

The Hon. Mrs. Justice Susan
Denham, Chairperson, *Judge of
the Supreme Court*

The Hon. Mr. Justice Kevin
O'Higgins, *Judge of the High
Court*

The Hon. Mr. Justice Esmond
Smyth, *President of the Circuit
Court*

Judge Miriam Malone, *Judge of
the District Court*

Professor Thomas O'Malley, *Senior
Lecturer in Law, National University
of Ireland*

Governance

Organisational Structure



P.J. Fitzpatrick,
Chief Executive
Officer



Nuala McLoughlin,
Chief Registrar,
Director of
Operations,
Supreme & High
Court



**Diarmaid
MacDiarmada,**
Director of
Operations, Circuit &
District Court



Sean Quigley,
Director of Finance



Brendan Ryan,
Director of
Corporate Services



Noel Rubotham,
Director of Reform &
Development



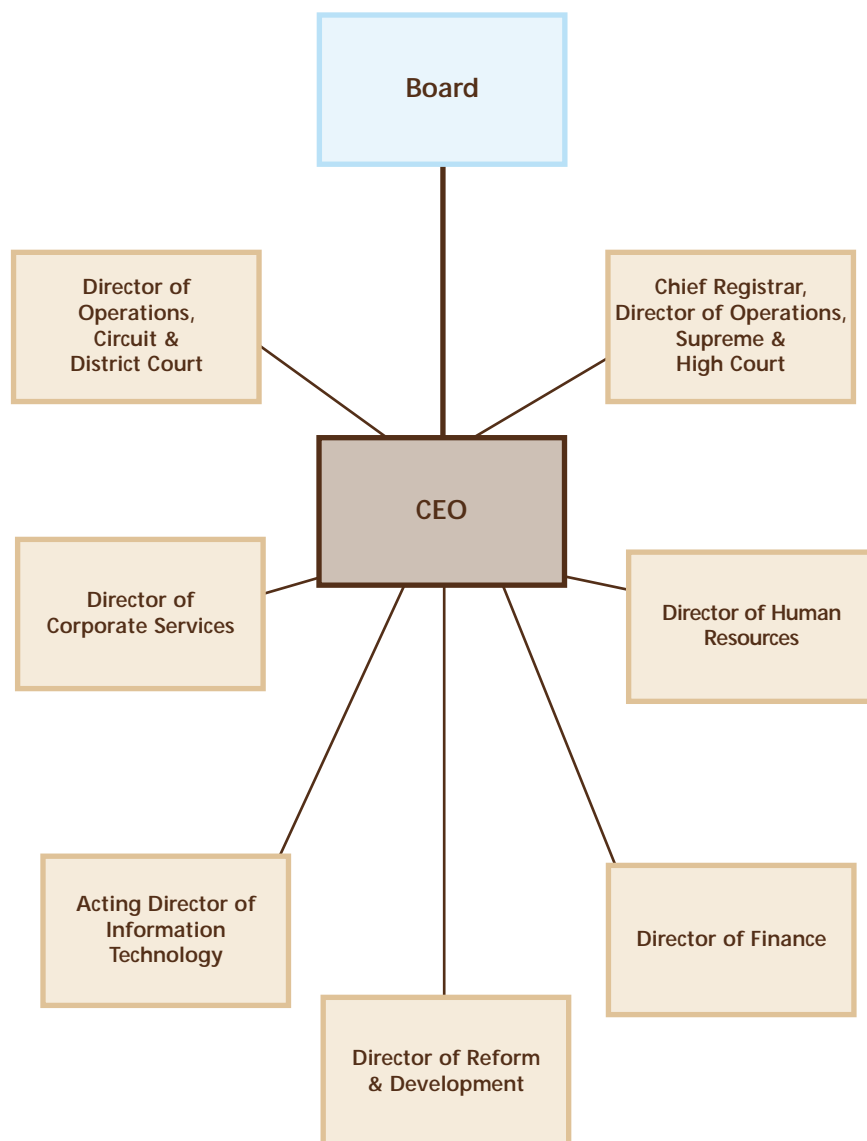
John Glennon,
Director of Human
Resources



John Coyle,
Acting Director of
Information
Technology

ORGANISATIONAL /
MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE*The Senior Management Team*

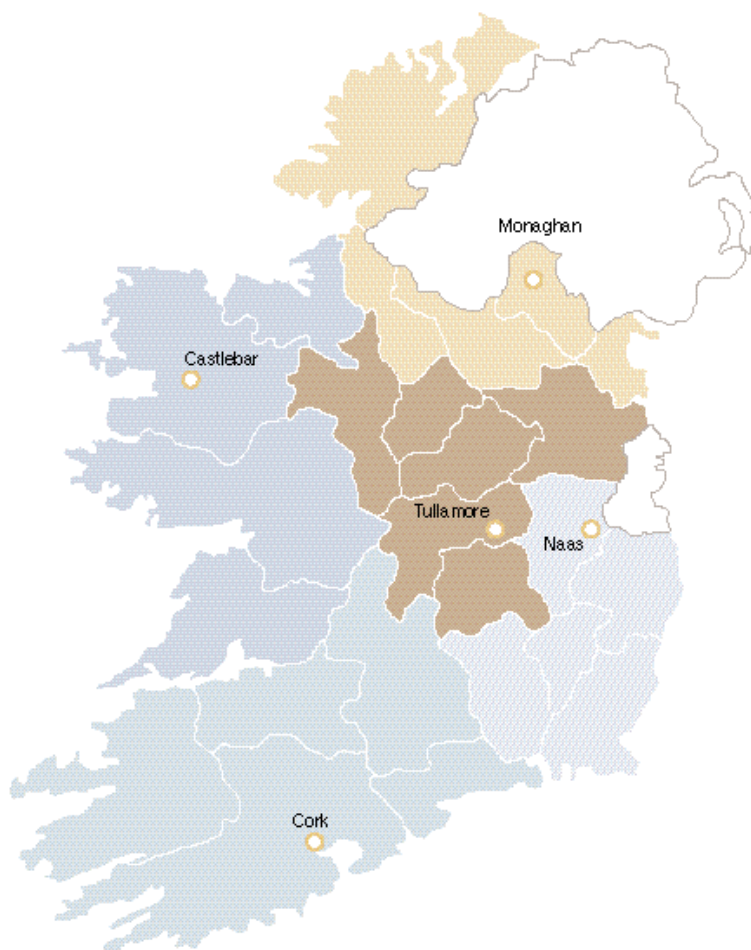
The Senior Management Team comprises the Chief Executive Officer and seven Directors: Chief Registrar and Director of Operations for the Supreme & High Court, Director of Operations for the Circuit & District Courts, Director of Finance, Director of Corporate Services, Director of Reform & Development, Director of Human Resources and Acting Director of Information Technology.



Governance

REGIONAL OFFICES

The number of regional offices was reduced from seven to five during 2004. They are located in Monaghan, Naas, Tullamore, Cork and Castlebar. A substantial amount of work traditionally carried out in the headquarters of the Service has been devolved to the regional offices. This includes many day-to-day operational functions from the Circuit and District Court Operations Directorate together with maintenance, caretaking and other arrangements for court buildings and many day-to-day human resource and finance functions. This will allow the head office Directorates concentrate on the major strategic objectives for the Service during the years immediately ahead.



NORTHERN REGION



Olive Caulfield
Regional
Manager

Office location
Monaghan,
Co. Monaghan

Counties in region
Monaghan, Cavan,
Leitrim, Donegal,
Louth

EASTERN REGION



Gerry Nugent
Regional
Manager

Office location
Naas, Co. Kildare

Counties in region
Kildare, Wicklow,
Carlow, Kilkenny,
Wexford

MIDLAND REGION



Christopher Lehane
Regional
Manager

Office location
Tullamore, Co. Offaly

Counties in region
Laois, Longford,
Offaly, Roscommon,
Westmeath, Meath

SOUTHERN REGION



Eamonn Kiely
Regional
Manager

Office location
Cork City

Counties in region
Cork, Kerry, Limerick,
Waterford, Tipperary

WESTERN REGION

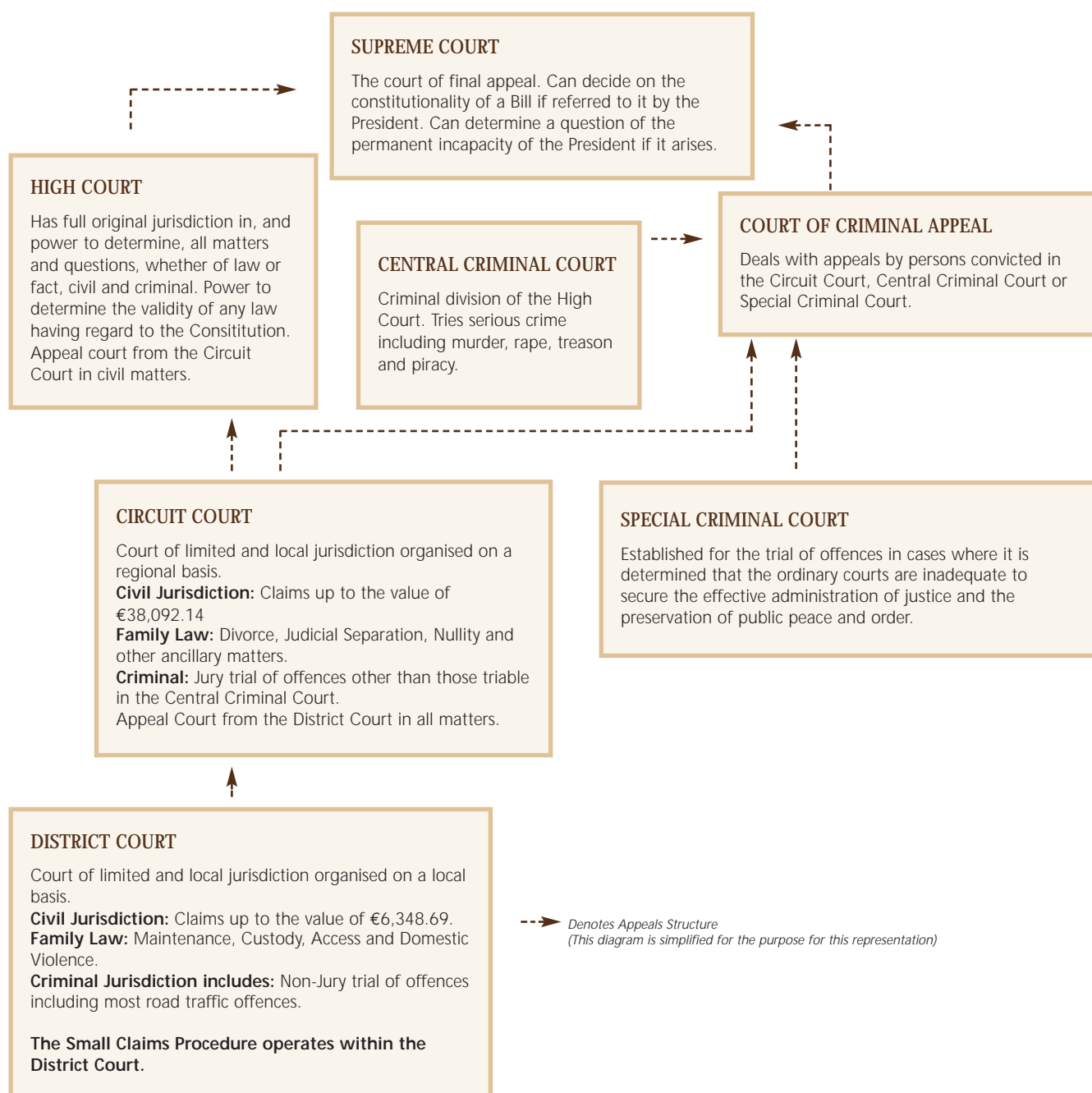


Brendan J. McDonald
Regional
Manager

Office location
Castlebar, Co. Mayo

Counties in region
Galway, Mayo, Sligo,
Clare

Structure of the Courts



Governance

APPROACH TO GOVERNANCE

The functions of the Service are contained in the Courts Service Act, 1998. While the Act contains accountability and governance mechanisms, the Service itself has also been proactive in putting additional governance arrangements in place. These underpin best practice in the management of the organisation and the delivery of its services so as to meet the expectations of court users while at the same time ensuring accountability for the expenditure of public funds. The Service places a major emphasis on the development of a range of governance measures based on a number of well established principles. These include focusing on the purpose of the Service; clarifying roles and responsibilities; promoting improved customer service; managing risk; engaging users and making accountability real.

A number of committees (see page 14) have been established by the Board to facilitate good corporate governance and accountability. There is now a well established strategic and annual business planning process. Managers are required to account to the Senior Management Team for the implementation of their annual business plans. The

Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) has also been successfully implemented and is a very effective tool in managing performance.

In furthering improved governance the following specific measures have been put in place in recent years:

➤ *Audit Committee*

An audit committee has been established by the Board. The committee is chaired by the President of the High Court and includes two suitably qualified external accountants. (See page 14)

➤ *Internal Audit Function*

Following the recommendations contained in the independent external review of internal audit completed in 2003, the Service upgraded the function in 2004 by appointing a professionally qualified accountant and allocated additional resources to the Internal Audit Unit.

The key internal controls procedures include:

- Organisational structure with formally defined lines of responsibility and delegated authority
- The annual budgetary process and annual financial statements are approved by the Board. Actual results comparing budgets and forecasts are monitored by the Senior Management Team and the Finance Committee on a regular basis
- A risk management programme is being put in place for each section whereby managers review and monitor, on an ongoing basis, the controls in place, both financial and non financial, to manage the risks facing the Service
- The Audit Committee reviews the internal audit, compliance and risk management programme.

➤ *Risk Management*

In accordance with best practice in the area of corporate governance, plans for establishing a risk management framework were well advanced at the end of 2004. A risk management committee was established during the year and work commenced on the development of a risk management framework and policy. Risk management will become an integral part of the business planning process during the course of 2005.

Governance

➤ *Statement of Internal Financial Controls*

The Chief Executive Officer, as Accounting Officer, prepares a statement of internal financial controls to accompany the annual financial statements. This statement addresses the internal control environment in the Service with particular regard to the financial control environment, the framework of administration procedures, management reporting and internal audit.

These initiatives are consistent with best practice in the area of corporate governance and also comply with the recommendations contained in the Report on the Accountability of Secretaries General and Accounting Officers (*the Mullarkey Report*).

Extract from statement of internal financial controls:

Financial Control Environment

I confirm that a control environment containing the following elements is in place:

- Financial responsibility has been assigned at management level with corresponding accountability
- Reporting arrangements have been established at all levels where responsibility for financial management has been assigned
- Formal procedures have been established for reporting significant control failures and ensuring appropriate corrective action
- There is an audit committee to advise me in discharging my responsibility for the internal financial control system
- I confirm that, in accordance with the Report's recommendations, an evaluation of internal financial controls has been completed and that the need for ongoing review of internal financial controls is recognised within the Service.

Administrative Controls and Management Reporting

I confirm that a framework of administrative procedures and regular management reporting is in place including segregation of duties and a system of delegation and accountability and, in particular that:

- There is an appropriate budgeting system with an annual budget which is kept under review by senior management
- There are regular reviews by senior management of periodic and annual financial reports which indicate financial performance against forecast
- A risk management system has been initiated within the Service
- There are systems aimed at ensuring the security of the ICT systems
- There are appropriate capital investment control guidelines and formal project management disciplines

Internal Audit

I confirm that we have an internal audit function with appropriate trained personnel, which operates in accordance with a written charter which I have approved. Its work is informed by analysis of the financial risks to which we are exposed and its annual internal audit plans, approved by me, are based on this analysis. These plans aim to cover the key controls on a rolling basis over a reasonable period. The internal audit programme is reviewed periodically by me and the Audit Committee. I have put procedures in place to ensure that the reports of the internal audit function are followed up.

Chapter 2

Environment



Environment

The Service continues to operate in a dynamic and constantly changing legislative, social, political and economic environment. In the past 15 years, Ireland has moved from being a country that suffered high unemployment, slow growth, high inflation, high emigration, heavy taxation and high public debt to become the Celtic Tiger – a developed country with low unemployment, strong growth, low inflation, net immigration, low tax and a small public debt. This changing society places ever increasing demands on public service delivery.

There are many factors both internal and external that affect and often determine the scope of the administrative and support structures provided by the Service for the courts and the judiciary. An analysis of some of these factors provides a backdrop to any report of the activities of the Service. It also emphasises the importance of anticipating and responding effectively to the level of constant change in the environment:

LEGISLATIVE FACTORS

Governments invariably have programmes for new legislation which impact directly on the work of the courts and court offices. Examples include tax law,

company law, corporate enforcement and civil and criminal law. The *Programme for Government* 2002 contained a number of such proposals for legislative change.

LEGISLATION AT NATIONAL LEVEL

A number of statutes enacted in 2004 had an impact on the jurisdiction exercised by the courts, on court procedure, or on the operational areas of the Service:

Civil Liability and Courts Act, 2004

This Act introduced substantive changes in the law relating to personal injuries (e.g. reduction in

limitation periods and approach to assessment of damages) and jurisdictional changes (e.g. alteration of jurisdictional limits in the Circuit Court) and regulates in detail the procedure for the conduct of certain types of personal injuries actions for the High, Circuit and District Courts, creating a new personal injuries summons and requiring assertions in pre-trial documentation to be verified on oath. The Act also made provision for registers of personal injuries actions and of reserved judgments to be maintained by the Service and for the reporting of and disclosure of information concerning family law proceedings.

Environment

Residential Tenancies Act, 2004

This Act established a new regime for the resolution of disputes between landlord and tenant, and included provision for a mechanism for application to the Circuit Court to enforce certain agreements and determinations made within that regime, and for the granting of injunctions.

Road Traffic Act, 2004

This Act introduced a system of fixed charges and penalty points in respect of road traffic offences, and places an obligation on the Service to notify the Minister for Transport of the imposition of convictions and making of orders in relation to such offences.

EUROPEAN LEGISLATION

The concept of a "European judicial area" has developed within the European Union as a result of Treaty amendments and legislation at European Union level. Article 65 of the EC Treaty, introduced by the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997, provided for measures in the field of judicial co-operation in civil matters having cross-border implications. In 1999, the European Council endorsed the principle of mutual recognition of judicial decisions as the

cornerstone for the creation of a genuine judicial area, and in November 2000 adopted a programme of measures to implement the principle of mutual recognition of decisions in civil and commercial matters.

As part of the programme, the Council and the European Parliament adopted Regulation No. 805 of 2004 creating a European Enforcement Order for uncontested claims, allowing enforcement in Ireland of judgments given in other member states except Denmark without the need to apply for a declaration of enforceability.

SOCIAL FACTORS

Changing trends in social relationships and family models, an increasing number of support and interest groups, an increasing awareness of rights and greater recourse to litigation are some of the factors which affect the services delivered by the Service.

The population of Ireland continues to grow and the Service must plan for increased demands on services from a population that is likely to increase by half a million over the next 20 years. On current demographic trends, over three quarters of the population growth could take place in, or in



areas adjoining, the greater Dublin area. The most recent census figures (*see Appendix 1*) indicate that the population is at its highest since 1871 at almost 4 million.

This growth in population has been helped over the past decade or so by the end of emigration and the commencement of immigration. The resultant diverse nature of Irish society today means, for example, that there are many people interacting with the court system for whom English is not their first language. This presents many challenges for the Service including an increased demand for translation services and the need to provide information in a range of languages.

POLITICAL FACTORS

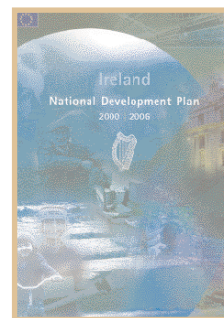
INFRASTRUCTURE

The *National Development Plan* 2000-2006 included a commitment on the part of government to prepare a spatial strategy. The *National Spatial Strategy* launched in 2002 provides a 20 year planning framework for all parts of the country and seeks to enhance the performance of strategically placed cities and towns or "gateways" by creating the conditions necessary

Environment



National Development
Finance Agency



to drive economic growth and contribute to more balanced patterns of development across the country. The Service reviewed its Capital Building Programme (see page 63) following the publication of the *National Spatial Strategy* taking such factors as the government's plan to decentralise staff and future population growth into consideration. The review identified areas including Blanchardstown and Swords in Dublin and North Kildare as locations where substantial court facilities will be required in the future.

A key element of the *National Development Plan* strategy is the significant upgrading of Ireland's physical infrastructure including the transport infrastructure – road, rail and bus. Improvements in these facilities will impact on the growth of population centres which will lead to increased demands for new and improved court facilities.

The establishment of the *National Development Finance Agency* and the possibility of financing capital projects by way of Public Private Partnerships provide opportunities for the Service to provide court facilities with private companies more rapidly, providing better value for money. This requires a business approach for contracting

the design, construction, financing and day-to-day operation of many facilities. This will have a significant impact on the way in which the Service organises its work in the future.

The implementation of the *National Development Plan* has contributed to an increase in the work of the courts in recent years. Issues and disputes relating to such matters as land acquisition and major infrastructural development have increased the number of planning law applications coming before the courts with the resulting need to assign additional judges to deal with applications before the High Court particularly where the relief sought is a judicial review.

SUPPORTING THE MODERNISATION OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE

The Service is an active participant in the government's Public Service Modernisation Programme which seeks to achieve good quality services for the public as customers at all levels, building on the good service that has been a feature of the public service over the years and at the same time deliver value for money for the State. This modernisation programme with its roots in the

Strategic Management Initiative launched in 1996 has among its many aims the fostering of a culture where public servants view the provision of excellent services to the public by making effective use of resources as one of their most important functions.

Delivering Better Government expanded on the framework set out in the *Strategic Management Initiative* and outlined an extensive modernisation process for the Irish public service, built around six key organisational themes. These included greater openness and accountability; quality customer service and the efficient and fair operation of simplified regulations. It was envisaged that individual departments, organisations and agencies would underpin these themes by organisational improvements in human resource management, financial management and enhanced information systems management.

Environment

The transformational change process which the Service has seen over the past 5 years has included a number of important modernisation initiatives which underline its commitment to engage in the wider public service modernisation programme charted by the *Strategic Management Initiative* and *Delivering Better Government*. These initiatives include:

- Many customer service initiatives
- Development of human resource strategies
- Establishment of regional structures and devolution of responsibilities
- Major investment in physical infrastructure
- Considerable investment in information technology
- Major emphasis on information and communication
- Major investment in training and development
- New emphasis on financial systems and funds accounting processes

In addition, the Service continues to meet and surpass the targets contained in *Sustaining Progress*, the current social partnership agreement agreed in 2003. This provides for the continuation of the modernisation programme across the public service. In particular, the Service continues to demonstrate a genuine intention to carry out a range of improvements in areas highlighted in *Sustaining Progress*. These include efforts to achieve maximum value from all expenditure; publication of a Customer Charter and improved human resource practices in relation to a number of issues including recruitment, promotion, training and performance management.

During 2004 the Service continued to meet the requirements of the verification process for achievement in relation to these initiatives by regularly reviewing the action plan prepared to identify specific performance commitments and to ensure compliance with them. In April and September the Service submitted progress reports on the implementation of the commitments made in the action plan to the Justice Sector Verification Group established under *Sustaining Progress*. The *Sustaining Progress* Action Plan

was extended and revised in November 2004 to reflect further initiatives which had commenced in the interim.

ECONOMIC FACTORS

Continued high levels of economic growth have created a favourable climate for the increased capital investment required by the Service to continue to address a range of matters including the implementation of the Information Technology Strategy (*see page 40*) and the Capital Building Programme (*see page 63*).

Strong economic growth has also led to an increased demand for labour, which has caused difficulties for the Service in recruiting and retaining staff particularly staff with experience in information technology, accountancy and fund management. It has been necessary to outsource many of these functions. The challenge for the Service in the future is the more efficient use of labour resources rather than additional resources. For example, the computerised Criminal Case Management System (*see page 40*) with its capacity to process summons and charge sheets from An Garda Síochána electronically, will free up as many as 20 fulltime

Environment

“This launch represents another milestone in the programme of modernisation that has been underway in the courts. This new Commercial Court greatly enhances the commercial and legal infrastructure available to the business community. In today’s international environment a fast and effective system for resolving commercial litigation is a competitive advantage for any country.”

An Taoiseach Mr. Bertie Ahern, T.D.

staff equivalents to concentrate on the core business of the Service.

Other factors include the changing attitudes to work and home life and changes in the arrangements and autonomy for agencies and departments in recruiting, disciplining and removing staff introduced by the Public Service (Recruitment & Appointments) Act, 2004 and the Civil Service Regulations (Amendment) Bill, 2004.

Increased economic activity results in increased litigation. An example of the response of the Service is the provision of a dedicated state of the art technology Commercial Court (*see page 49*). Dedicated judges have been assigned to the Court with cases processed in less than 20 weeks compared with 2 to 3 years. This speedy resolution of disputes is a major factor for foreign inward investment.

CULTURE

The years since the establishment of the Service have seen much change, considerable movement of staff and the need to adapt to new systems and structures. Later in this Report (*see Chapters 3 and 4*) the major contribution made by the staff of the Service to the continued success of the organisation is highlighted. In the

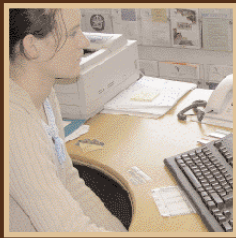
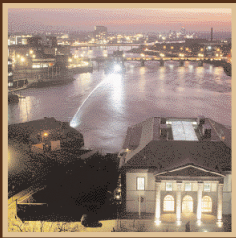


context of the environment in which the Service operates it is vital that a culture is fostered where staff creativity, innovation and initiative is supported, encouraged and rewarded. The creation of a world class service is a goal of the Service. This envisages an internationally acknowledged organisation where access to justice is provided speedily by making the best use of available resources. The Service continues to emphasise the vital role that staff must play if the aim to create a world class service is to be achieved. Efforts continued

during 2004 to build competencies in the right areas and to support staff as they strive to meet their business goals.

Chapter 3

Implementing our Mandates



Mandate 1

Managing the Courts

The core function of the Service continues to be to support the work of the courts in Ireland.

The commitment of the Service to provide such support can be gauged by the improvements in the environment in which the staff, the judiciary and a wide variety of court users operate.

These improvements are evidenced by new information technology systems, improvements in financial management systems, completion of refurbished building projects and enhanced staff training opportunities. They provide a framework upon which the Service can improve efficiency whilst providing support for court staff as they continue to deliver a first class service to the community every day in court offices in Dublin and around the country.

During 2004 there was much evidence of the effort the Service continues to make to improve the management of the courts:

TRAINING

The Service continues to pursue a progressive approach to staff training based on a number of key headings and development principles which are aligned to the key business objectives of the Service going forward. These principles acknowledge that learning underpins the strategy of the Service, the business plans of individual units and the performance and development plans of individual members of staff. They recognise that the Service must continue to build on the learning culture that has been created.

The process of creating an environment in which staff can perform to the best of their abilities continued during 2004 with particular emphasis on the development of training courses tailored to meet the diverse needs of staff:

GENERAL TRAINING PROGRAMME

Programmes specifically targeted at the many grades of the Service were conducted during 2004. They included workshops as part of ongoing modular training programmes for Principal Officers and Assistant Principal Officers, and the commencement of modular training programmes for Higher Executive Officers/Court Clerks, Executive Officers/Junior Court Clerks/Staff Officers; Clerical Officers and Service Officers. The grade training programmes are being used as a benchmark by a number of other government departments and agencies.

A range of specialised programmes and workshops were organised on matters including human resources, legal issues, health and safety, equality and disability, partnership, internal audit and finance. Staff were also facilitated to attend at a number of external seminars. A series of

Mandate 1



“When the history of this period is written the Courts Service will be seen as the jewel in the crown of public administration”

Mr Michael McDowell T.D.
Minister for Justice, Equality & Law Reform

The Courts Service Staff Training Programme – helping staff to make a difference

An example of the commitment of the Service to developing the skills of staff can be seen in the comprehensive nature of the modular programme devised for Higher Executive Officers/Court Clerks. The programme commenced in January 2004 with 5 full programmes completed – 1 in Dublin and 4 in Athlone. The programme consisted of 5 modules:

Module 1

Two sessions of role clarification and customer service

Module 2

Communication skills including influencing

Module 3

Motivation, feedback and teamwork

Module 4

Effectiveness and career development

Module 5

Learning transfer

breakfast talks were a popular new venture during the year.

TECHNICAL TRAINING

The technical nature of the work of court offices and in particular the vital role performed by court registrars was acknowledged in a series of courses targeted at staff of the various court jurisdictions during the year. Much of the training continues, of necessity, to be on-the-job with coaching and mentoring forming a highly valued aspect of the training effort and consultation with experienced colleagues an important component promoted and encouraged by the Service.

Dublin Metropolitan District Court

The Dublin Metropolitan District Court secured the assistance of a retired colleague to provide critical in-house training for court registrars. Training sessions covered court practices and procedures. A manual was provided and the course comprised of discussion and practical exercises. At year end the office was organising a training course on the preparation and checking of copy orders which will be delivered in early 2005.

Dublin Circuit Court

The first formal workshop for registrars of the Dublin Circuit Civil court, held early in the year, was attended by the President of the Circuit Court and the Chief Executive Officer. Particular emphasis was placed on the important function performed by registrars managing court lists. Useful initiatives developed, following suggestions made at the workshop, included the establishment of a Registrars' Helpdesk to provide a dedicated contact person in the Dublin Circuit Civil office available for registrars to contact while in court and the development of an electronic diary to provide a more efficient process for the allocation of court dates.

The Chief Executive Officer, a judge of the Circuit Court and the County Registrar, attended a workshop for staff of the Dublin Circuit Criminal Court which placed an emphasis on streamlining and standardising practices and procedures in respect of the work of the court. The expertise of an experienced member of staff was availed of to better inform less experienced colleagues. The office continued a programme, commenced in 2003, of providing training for registrars of the Criminal Court in the work

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of the Family Law Court and visa versa. This has provided additional experience for the registrars and allows management re-organise courts at short notice when required.

The first workshop for non court going Dublin Circuit Court staff was held in 2004. The Chief Executive Officer joined court registrars who outlined the importance of meaningful interaction between staff attending in court and staff working entirely in the office. Staff from a range of other offices, including the District Court Appeals Office and the Freedom of Information Office, highlighted matters of common interest to the respective offices.

Regional Circuit/District Court staff

Efforts continued during the year to improve the interaction between court offices with a view to obtaining greater staff mobility between jurisdictions. In the Eastern Region, court registrars in the Circuit Court and the District Court in Naas Courthouse were afforded an opportunity to learn about the work of their respective courts. Lateral mobility, organised in Carlow, Kilkenny and Wexford courthouses, resulted in greater organisational efficiencies and cross skilling of staff. In the

Northern Region, lateral mobility between Circuit and District offices improved with cross jurisdictional assistance provided in Cavan, Donegal, Monaghan and Leitrim. Staff mobility arrangements were also put in place in Trim, Longford, Mullingar, Portlaoise, Athlone, Roscommon, Tullamore, Galway and Mayo.

Best practices were shared across offices in the Midlands via individual and group visits to various offices and at meetings of Chief Clerks and court user groups.

High Court Registrars

A seminar for High Court registrars held in early 2004 allowed experienced registrars to share their knowledge and expertise with less experienced colleagues. The seminar programme included descriptions of the work involved in managing the various lists dealt with by the High Court and an outline of how registrars assist the judiciary in court. New registrars without High Court experience were afforded an opportunity to spend time in the Central Office to broaden their knowledge of the detail of High Court procedures as part of regular training sessions organised throughout the year.

Probate Office

The Probate Office reviewed its staff training policy during the year drawing on the expertise of experienced staff and incorporating suggestions from new staff. This new policy sets out the responsibilities of staff, maps out their training programme and indicates clearly the expectations of management regarding their work within the office. It also provides for a documented historical record of all progress made during the training period.

At year end, the Probate Office was preparing for a seminar to be held in January 2005 for probate officers in offices outside Dublin. This will be the first time that all such officers have assembled to discuss probate and areas of mutual concern. County registrars who are probate officers in the fourteen District Probate Registries around the country will be invited to participate in the seminar.

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TRAINING MATERIAL

Training courses for registrars were complemented by a range of training manuals, leaflets and handouts produced in a range of offices across the organisation. Examples include:

Dublin Metropolitan District Court

Leaflets were produced to explain possible outcomes arising from the civil summons and civil enforcement procedure in the District Court and setting out the information required for various tasks associated with the issue of summonses electronically.

Dublin Circuit Court

A manual for court registrars detailing the types of application that can be brought before the Circuit Court and setting out the procedures relevant to each stage of the applications was produced. Additional material included guidelines for staff dealing with applications for judgment in the office. A comprehensive manual for staff dealing with general office matters will be available in 2005.

High Court

A CD-Rom containing training material and precedent information for court registrars was produced. It is intended to update the CD-Rom as additional material becomes available. A manual outlining procedures in the Central Office was made available in electronic format for staff.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY TRAINING*European Computer Driving Licence*

The European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) continues to be very popular with staff. Participants in this comprehensive programme engage in a series of computer courses in matters such as word processing, database creation and spreadsheet techniques. ECDL certification was offered in Dublin with 5 complete programmes held during the year at early morning and evening sessions. A total of 48 staff successfully completed the programme. An ECDL programme in Cork saw 11 staff completing the course. Staff of Castlebar Circuit Court successfully completed an advanced ECDL programme.

Criminal Case Management System - Staff trainers lead the way

The goal of the training programme was to use staff of the Service to provide other staff with the competence and confidence to use the new system correctly and efficiently from the first day of implementation. The programme aimed to provide staff with an understanding of the system by developing and administering a comprehensive training programme in an efficient and cost-effective manner. It had the added benefit of providing the user community with a training programme and procedure documentation that they can use to train both new staff and staff who change jobs after the implementation of the new system. Staff providing the training improved their presentation, coaching, interpersonal and problem solving skills. They also developed a basic understanding of the system from end to end and an appreciation of the businesses supported by the system and their goals.

Criminal Case Management System training

Training for the rollout of the Criminal Case Management System (see page 40) was a major challenge for the Service during the year. The majority of the training was carried out by staff of the Service. A *Train the Trainers* programme was used to inform the training team in advance of training for regional trainers which commenced in January 2004. Training for staff took place in Dublin and Tullamore and followed the implementation plan for court offices. Staff were

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“The Service must constantly strive to develop a world class service and continue to focus on how processes, procedures, rules and customer services can be made more efficient, less costly and more user friendly. We must aim to be the best and build an organisation that is energetic, adaptable and responsive”.

Mr. P.J. Fitzpatrick, Chief Executive Officer

provided with 5 days training with 265 staff from the District Court completing the programme.

General information technology training

Training was provided across a wide variety of areas including introductory courses on the use of e-mail and word processing, a systems analysis course, a desktop publishing course, project planning courses and ongoing training support for staff.

EVALUATING TRAINING PROGRAMMES

The Service participated in a project called *“Creating a Learning Culture”* organised by the National Centre for Partnership and Performance and the University of Limerick. The project allowed the Service to compare the role of training and development in the Service against best practice in 22 other organisations.

MANAGING PERFORMANCE

Allied to the provision of training is the need to effectively manage performance. The Service continued to facilitate the effective management of performance at all levels of the organisation during

the year. The *Strategic Plan 2002-2005* continued to form the basis of the business planning process during 2004. Individual unit business plans for the year translated the high level organisational objectives of the Strategic Plan into operational terms while the Performance Management and Development system (PMDS) identified the individual responsibilities in implementing these objectives. The review of performance undertaken as part of PMDS together with the agreement of role profile forms with all staff underlines the resolve of the Service to ensure that the strategic planning process is not an academic exercise but one that drives the change programme in a meaningful way for all staff.

FACILITATING GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

The Service supported many government initiatives by participating in cross organisational working groups which aim to improve the quality of service provided by the State in a variety of areas:

COMPANY LAW REVIEW GROUP

The Service continued to be represented on the *Company Law Review Group* during 2004. The representative of the Service participated in the work carried out on companies legislation on liquidation as part of the Group's consolidation and reform project.

WORKING GROUP ON THE JURISDICTION OF THE COURTS

The Service also assisted the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform with the implementation of the recommendations of the *Working Group on the Jurisdiction of the Courts*.

CONSOLIDATION OF COURTS LEGISLATION

The Service is participating in a project initiated by the Law Reform Commission in 2004 to consolidate legislation relating to the courts.

REDUCING LEGAL COSTS

The Service is represented on a group established by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform to identify ways of

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“As I look back on my 25 years as a judge I have no hesitation in singling out the establishment and development of the vibrant organisation which is the Courts Service as the most remarkable and successful development in the Irish legal system in that time. Many extraordinary efforts have made this young modern agency the success it is in just five years”

former Chief Justice, Mr. Justice Ronan Keane

reducing legal costs. The remit of the Group includes an examination of the present level of legal fees and costs in civil litigation and a study of systems and methods employed in other jurisdictions.

CRIME STATISTICS

The Service was represented on an expert group established by the Minister for Justice, Equality & Law Reform to examine the methods of collation and presentation of crime statistics by An Garda Síochána and other organisations involved in criminal proceedings. A Report produced by the group in 2004 recommended the establishment of a Central Crime Statistics Unit to assume responsibility for the compilation and publication of crime statistics and the development of enhanced statistics across the criminal justice system.

ASSISTING OTHER GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND OFFICES

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The Service continued to play a role in a number of outside bodies and fora during the year in the training and development area. They included the Central Training and Development Committee, the

Customer Service Network, the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) Network and the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development.

During the year a number of organisations in the health sector, local authority sector and state sponsored bodies were referred to the Service by the Public Service Modernisation Unit of the Department of An Taoiseach for consultation on how to successfully implement a performance management and development system and partnership arrangements.

WARDS OF COURT

In April 2004, staff of the Service hosted a conference of the court offices and public agencies responsible for guardianship, protection and wardship in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

Work commenced during the year on the preparation of the third Strategic Plan for the Service. The Plan, which will cover the period 2005-2008, will involve a meaningful and wide ranging consultation programme. This will

ensure that the views of judges, staff, court users, the public and other government departments are available to the Service in formulating the new strategy. The Service will seek submissions in early 2005 from the public by way of advertisements in newspapers. The consultations will involve a wide range of court users including staff, members of the public and other interest groups. The exercise will take the form of a series of workshops in Dublin and around the country.

SUPPORTING THE PARTNERSHIP PROCESS

The partnership process continues to be a very successful facilitator of change and modernisation in the Service. It provides a legitimate, credible channel for staff from all grades and union representatives to voice their ideas and concerns. The focus of the Service continues to be on action with widespread communication the key to the successful conclusion of a range of issues.

The Central Partnership Committee, comprised of representatives from each of the unions, (including the County Registrars' Association), staff representatives, the Chief Executive (who chairs the

Mandate 1



Committee), management representatives and representatives from the Regional Partnership Committees, continue to drive the partnership process. A range of sub-committees have dealt with specific matters such as internal communications and customer service. Regional partnership committees ensure that the process has a nationwide focus allowing the Service to continue to develop a partnership and team culture extending down to local level. During 2004 the Service continued to foster an inclusive approach to the issues to be dealt with via the partnership process.

TOPICS ADDRESSED BY PARTNERSHIP

- Work-sharing and term-time sharing
- Exceptional Performance Awards
- Internal communication
- Training and development
- Identity cards and security issues
- Staff transfers
- Work experience
- Performance Management and Development System (PMDS)
- Customer Service

- Strategic Plan
- Business Planning
- Relocation issues
- Health and Safety
- "Sustaining Progress"

The benefits of the partnership approach being adopted by the Service can be seen from the positive staff relations that exist, the improved industrial relations environment that has been created, the improvements in the work environment and the increased staff input at every level.

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

During 2004, the Service established a Central Customer Service Forum to engage with customers on both major and minor changes and the day-to-day business of the Service. The first meeting of the Forum held in July 2004 was chaired by the Chief Executive and attended by representatives from a broad spectrum of organisations, ranging from those whose members do business with the courts every day to organisations with a specialised interest in the courts.

The Central Customer Service Forum has a three tier structure:

- a Central Forum comprising high volume wide ranging customers
- up to eight focused user groups for customers of the various court offices in Dublin (in addition to those already established by the Dublin Metropolitan District Court)
- a general meeting for all stakeholders.

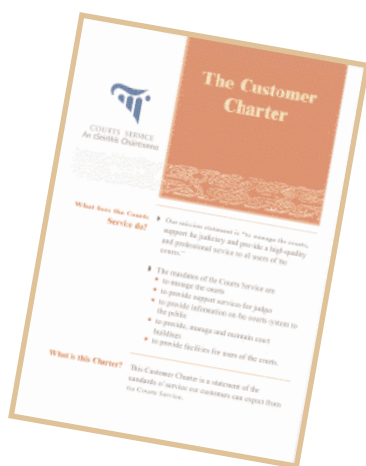
The groups met on three occasions in 2004. Meetings were attended by relevant staff members and representatives of the various legal professions and agencies operating in the justice area.

A general meeting of all stakeholders afforded an opportunity for people and organisations whose level of interaction with the Service is infrequent to communicate with the Service in a structured manner.

The Service consulted with customers on a nationwide basis with focus groups established throughout the country by the Regional Offices. Issues raised were either dealt with locally or referred on to other Directorates or other Regional offices for resolution nationally.

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The Service plans to establish a separate set of user panels in 2005 to provide a forum to help identify the needs of non-professional users of the courts. A survey will also be conducted of persons who have completed jury service to ascertain how best to meet their needs, given the vital role such persons play in the administration of the criminal justice system.



CUSTOMER CHARTER

The Service published a *Customer Charter* in August 2004 as a statement of the standards of service customers can expect in their dealings with staff of the Service. A quality customer survey conducted prior to the completion of the Charter provided an understanding of how the quality of service provided is perceived and highlighted areas where improvements could be made. Questions posed as part of the survey covered a broad range of issues including opening hours, consistency of service, accessibility of information, court office facilities and general satisfaction with service. Forms were made available at all public counters in court offices throughout the country in order to attract responses from a wide range of customers and were sent to solicitors' offices and to a variety of support groups. The results of the survey were considered by the Customer Service Partnership Subcommittee in the final formation of the Customer Charter.

Probate Office – listening to customers

A one page Customer Service Survey was devised by the Probate Office during the year for people applying for probate without a solicitor. The survey, posted to the customer with Grants of Probate, included questions as to the quality of the service provided with suggestions invited as to how the office could improve. Circulation of the survey commenced in November 2004 and by year end in excess of 100 surveys had been sent out with a response rate of approximately 60% achieved.

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**CUSTOMER SERVICE
PARTNERSHIP SUBCOMMITTEE**

In addition to producing the *Customer Charter*, this subcommittee continued to oversee the implementation of the *Customer Service Action Plan*. This involved monitoring developments in a range of areas including health and safety, signage in court buildings and building maintenance. Examples of the success of the work of the subcommittee included the synchronising of the opening times of court offices, the establishment of a formal customer complaints procedure and the development of a staff dress code.

CUSTOMER SERVICE OFFICER

A total of nine formal customer complaints were received and dealt with by the Customer Service Officer during the year. A dedicated e-mail address, qcso@courts.ie was established to enable customers contact the Customer Service Officer. The address was used extensively by members of the public to make general enquiries.

CUSTOMER SERVICE IN ACTION

It would not be possible in this report to detail all of the initiatives undertaken in 2004 to improve the quality of service for customers. Many of the most successful customer service improvements are as a result of changes that are small in operational terms but are targeted for maximum impact. The following examples have been selected to provide a flavour of the efforts that were made in 2004 and as an indication of the determination of the Service to continue to make improvements in 2005:

Office of the Court of Criminal Appeal

The introduction of a dedicated Stenography Unit enabled the Office to allocate a senior member of staff to deal with callers to the public counter. This resulted in an improved service with queries being dealt with promptly and without the need, for the most part, to consult with the registrar in charge of the Office.

Offices of the Supreme Court and High Court

The opening hours for the offices of the Supreme Court and High Court were extended to 10.30

a.m. to 4.30 p.m all year round. This removed the shorter opening hours which had operated during court recesses.

Central Office of the High Court

Access to a range of information about High Court cases, including the date a case is next before the court, the date of the making of a court order, the name of the judge and whether the order is ready for collection, was improved by the provision of an additional public search terminal in the Central Office. E-mail addresses and direct telephone numbers together with a list of the areas of responsibility of each registrar were circulated to solicitors' firms to encourage communication via e-mail.

Circuit Court

Court hearing time in the Dublin Circuit Court increased by five hours per week – the equivalent of an extra day's sitting – as a result of the provision of a new County Registrar's court. The new arrangement also impacted on District Court appeals where an extra hour per day was added to the hearing time.

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Dublin Metropolitan District Court

New Customer Service Liaison Officers played an important role in raising awareness among staff of the importance of the delivery of the highest quality service to the customer - both internal and external - whilst ensuring maximum value for money for the taxpayer.

Other District Courts

Earlier start times were introduced in a further two District Court areas.

Reform and Development

During 2004, a number of reviews of processes and procedures in various court offices were commenced. They included:

- a preliminary analysis of the changes required to statute, rules of court and court practice relating to wardship of incapacitated adults and minors;
- a detailed analysis of the function of the Examiner of the High Court in the area of compulsory liquidations
- a paper in relation to bond requirements in the Probate Office.

CUSTOMER SERVICE TRAINING

The programme of customer service training to support the implementation of the Customer Service Action Plan, with particular focus on front line staff, continued in 2004. The one day programme covers face-to-face communications, telephone techniques and dealing with difficult customers. During the year, 12 programmes were completed with 127 staff attending.

**IMPLEMENTING THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT, 2003**

The Official Languages Act, 2003 aims to put structures in place to ensure that the volume and standard of service provided by public bodies through the medium of Irish can be increased over a period of time. The Service is one

of the public bodies which the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs has designated, under Section 11 of the Act, to prepare a draft scheme for approval. The scheme will specify the services it is proposed to provide exclusively through Irish, exclusively through English, and through both, and the measures to be adopted to ensure that any service not provided through Irish will be so provided. In 2004, the Service published notice of intention to prepare a draft scheme and sought submissions from the public by early January 2005.

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New ticketing system.....customer service in action

The High Court Central Office introduced a numbered queuing system at the end of 2004. The system allows for two queues – an express queue for customers with up to five items and a standard queue for customers with in excess of five items. Staff can see from their keypads how many customers are waiting at any given time and can switch to provide additional service if either queue is backing up. The customer can use the waiting time productively by conducting other business such as using the four public search terminals now available in the office. Prior to the introduction of the ticketing system, the customer was obliged to remain seated to keep his/her place in the queue. The system also provides useful management information regarding waiting and service times and the number of customers dealt with on a daily basis.



Mandate 1

DEVELOPING FAMILY LAW COURT SERVICES

District Court venues with sittings dedicated to family law

District Court number	Venue	
3	Ballina	Monthly
16	Bray	Monthly
15	Carlow	Monthly
3	Castlebar	Monthly*
21	Clonmel	Monthly*
20	Cobh	Monthly
19	Cork	Twice weekly
1	Donegal	Monthly
6	Drogheda	Monthly
	Dublin	Daily
6	Dundalk	Monthly
12	Ennis	Monthly
20	Fermoy	Monthly
7	Galway	Monthly
22	Kilkenny	Monthly
13	Kilmallock	Monthly
1	Letterkenny	Monthly
14	Limerick	Weekly
13	Listowel	Monthly
20	Mallow	Monthly
20	Midleton	Monthly
9	Mullingar	Monthly
16	Naas	Monthly*
10	Navan	Monthly
13	Newcastlewest	Monthly
15	Portlaoise	Monthly
2	Sligo	Monthly
10	Trim	Monthly
9	Tullamore	Monthly
22	Waterford	Monthly
3	Westport	Monthly*
23	Wexford	Monthly*
21	Youghal	Monthly

* In certain venues, while the day is not entirely dedicated to family matters because of volumes, it is arranged so that family lists are heard separately.



Personal Injuries Assessment Board

The Personal Injuries Assessment Board (P.I.A.B.) was given responsibility for all non-contested employer liability cases in June 2004. This was extended to motor accident and public liability cases in July.

There was a major increase in the number of proceedings issued in advance of the introduction of the new procedure in the High Court and Circuit Court Offices. The High Court issued 7,074 plenary summonses in the five day period preceding the introduction of the new procedure compared with 8,074 in the previous six months and a total of 11,245 in 2003. The total number issued to the end of July 2004 was 15,241. In the Circuit Court offices, 30,482 civil bills were issued by the end of July 2004 compared to 41,181 for the entire of 2003. The civil bills for the first seven months of 2004 amounted to almost 75% of the previous years' total.

The Reform and Development Directorate co-ordinated the finalising and approval by the three Rules Committees (see pages 135 to 142 for Annual Reports of the Rules Committees) of the amendments to court rules necessary to facilitate the operation of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board Act, 2003.

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Information Technology – helping to improve service

The Service, like all large organisations, can gain many benefits from information technology systems. Some of these systems are no different from those used in other organisations, such as accounting packages, payroll and asset management. Some are common in other organisations but used in a particular way by the courts, such as websites, video conferencing and digital audio recording. And some are specific to the courts, such as electronic case management and jury selection.

The Service remains committed to co-operating fully with the implementation of eGovernment policy as outlined in *New Connections*, the government's action plan to realise the potential of the Information Society published in 2002.



IMPLEMENTING THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY STRATEGIC PLAN

The 5 year Information Technology Strategy “eCourts” published in 2001 was based on a new and evolving organisation which required a modern technological infrastructure to meet the challenges faced. Since then, there has been a review of the changes in work activities and work practices which must be made if the Service is to achieve its aims and objectives. In addition, technology has continued to develop and the business priorities of the Service have undergone substantial change. During 2004, a fundamental information technology strategy review commenced. This is designed to ensure that the strategy continues to be compatible with the aims and objectives of the Service and to ensure that as an organisation maximum business benefit

continues to be achieved from the investment in technology. The review, which will be completed in mid 2005, will concentrate on the information technology strategies of the Service across all areas of court activity.

PROVIDING NEW INFORMATION SYSTEMS

The programme to provide modern information systems in all areas of court activity continued during 2004:

Criminal Case Management System

This system, which had been operational in only the Dublin and Limerick District Court Offices, was rolled out to District Court offices nationwide involving some 41 separate offices. This exercise represented the single largest implementation of a strategic

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business application in the history of the Irish courts system. The system can track the full life cycle of a criminal or road traffic case and means that an integrated electronic record is now available in respect of 95% of all criminal cases nationwide.

The system will also enable the Service to introduce an automated penalty points system and meet its commitment to government in relation to the implementation of penalty points. It was necessary to ensure compatibility between the Criminal Case Management System and the Department of the Environment and Local Government Driver Licensing System so that details of penalty point convictions could be electronically transferred to the Department for further processing. In addition, as part of a pilot project commenced during the year, details of summons applications from An Garda Síochána are electronically received and details of hearing dates are electronically allocated.

The installation of the Criminal Case Management System represented a major challenge for the Service and included the introduction of a significant business change programme and the training of almost 300 staff. The exercise was completed on time and within a demanding 6 months period.

“The increasing demands made upon our legal system, whether manifested in the volume and level of complexity of proceedings initiated, or in the expectations of the legal profession and litigating public, require that the Service equip itself to discharge its functions by drawing upon the best management practices, availing of the latest technologies”

Mr. Justice John L. Murray, Chief Justice

Civil Case Management System

During the year the Service continued a programme of providing specific systems to a range of offices to facilitate the transaction of civil business. These systems are being provided pending the development of a strategic civil case management system. By year end, most offices in the High Court and Circuit Court had been provided with systems. A new system was developed during the year for the Taxing Masters' Office and further improvements were made to systems already in place in a range of other offices, including the Dublin Circuit Court Family Law Office and systems in Circuit Court offices generally.

Small Claims online

The Small Claims procedure in the District Court is a practical and efficient way for consumers to resolve disputes relating to businesses or services. The *eSmall Claims* project will allow consumers lodge claims with the Small Claims office electronically over the Internet. During the year, Phase 1 of the project was successfully developed and implemented on a pilot basis in Dublin and Cavan District Court offices. Development also commenced on the part of the system which will be visible to the

public. This phase will be implemented in mid 2005.

Integration of Criminal Justice systems

The Service is participating in a project to facilitate the integration of computer systems across the criminal justice sector. In Phase 1 of the overall programme the Service, in association with An Garda Síochána, established a pilot project to facilitate:

- The electronic transfer of summons application data from An Garda Síochána PULSE system to the Criminal Case Management System
- The electronic transfer of court hearing dates from the Criminal Case Management System to PULSE
- The electronic transfer of court outcomes from the Criminal Case Management System to PULSE

At year end, both the Service and An Garda Síochána were advancing details of the information which requires automated transfer between the two systems.

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Benefits to users provided by the Criminal Case Management System:

- Tracks a case from beginning to end
- A case entered on the system by one office does not have to be re-entered again by another office if the case is transferred
- Allows fines to be receipted directly onto the system
- Allows for centralised generation of penalty point conviction notifications
- Allows for electronic transfer of such notifications to the Department of Transport
- Enables the electronic receipt of summons applications from An Garda Síochána and other prosecutors
- Facilitates the centralised generation of more detailed statistics and management information

INCREASING USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

One of the more obvious benefits of the introduction of information technology has been the introduction of computers in the courtroom. In addition to enabling staff process court work more efficiently, they have provided a means of silent communication between courts and between offices and the courts.

USING VIDEO TO IMPROVE SERVICE*Video link*

Considerable use was made of video link facilities during the year. For example, in the Dublin Circuit Criminal Court, the facilities were used in some eighteen trials.

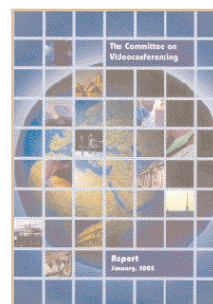
Video viewing

The Service assumed responsibility for the provision of facilities for the viewing of videos during criminal trials in the Dublin Circuit Criminal Court in 2004. The videos contained material on a range of matters including closed circuit television footage and interviews

in Garda stations. The equipment used was of a portable variety and is intended as a temporary measure until permanent equipment is installed in a number of courts.

Videoconferencing

The Minister for Justice, Equality & Law Reform established a committee to consider the potential for videoconferencing in the courtroom. At year end, the committee, chaired by a judge of the Supreme Court, had prepared a report for submission to the Minister. The committee recommended the use of videoconferencing technology in the courts in Ireland and considered that this technology has the potential to improve significantly the efficiency and effectiveness of criminal and civil trials. It further recommended that a pilot project be established whereby videoconferencing technology should be deployed in five courtrooms: two in the High Court in Dublin, one in Cloverhill Courthouse, one in the Circuit Court in Dublin and one in the District Court in Cork. Similar



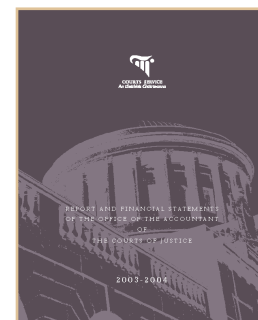
facilities are recommended for four prisons: Limerick, Cork, Cloverhill and Castlereagh.

During 2004, the Service in association with the Prison Service evaluated the requirements associated with the introduction of videoconferencing in the context of the pilot project. In 2005, the Service will consider introducing videoconferencing in civil cases and at a corporate level as part of the pilot project.

DIGITAL AUDIO RECORDING

During 2004 the Service continued to examine the options associated with the introduction of a digital audio recording system in the Central Criminal Court, Special Criminal Court and Circuit Criminal Court. The Service also considered the possible future extension of recording facilities to all courtrooms regardless of jurisdiction. A model for the introduction of a system was selected. It would include outsourcing the implementation of the system and arranging for the delivery of a range of associated services including, where required, the provision of transcripts of trials both overnight and for the purpose of appeals to the Court of Criminal Appeal. At year end, the Service had arranged technical

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assistance to evaluate the impact of the model selected from both a technical and cost perspective and to assist in the preparation of the technical sections of an invitation to tender for the system. Tenders will be invited in mid 2005.

Pending the introduction of a strategic digital audio recording system, a system was installed in the Supreme Court at the end of 2004 initially confined to recording certain judgments and certain court lists.

eCONVEYANCING

This project, sponsored by the Law Reform Commission, is comprised of three elements concerned with administrative, procedural and substantive legal aspects of conveyancing. The Service is concerned specifically with the administrative strand and is represented on the committee by the Head of Information Technology. During the year funding was sought for the continued development of the project from the Information Society Action Fund.

eREGISTERS

This project is related to the *eConveyancing* project. *eConveyancing* will require that certain court registers, for example the Lis Pendens Register and the Probate Register, be available online. During the year, the Service completed an analysis of the various court registers searchable by the public and legal practitioners to facilitate the conversion of those registers from manual to electronic format.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT MANAGEMENT INFORMATION FRAMEWORK

The development of a management information framework is one of the main management reforms envisaged by *Delivering Better Government* and is an integral part of the *Strategic Management Initiative (SMI)*. The view is that existing financial systems do not provide management with relevant, accurate and timely information on performance and trends. New systems are therefore required that will support the wider financial management process for planning resource allocation, management control and budgeting, day-to-day financial reporting and assessing performance.

Significant progress has been made by the Service in recent years in introducing improved financial management systems and methods. The Financial Management System which is the core element of the Management Information Framework has been in operation within the Service since June 2003. This represents the first phase of the Management Information Framework programme. In addition, substantial elements of the budget of the Service have been successfully devolved to Directors, Regional Managers and other managers.

The second phase of the Management Information Framework programme, which will address the establishment of key performance indicators across financial and operational activities, as well as the development of a costing model and improved management reports, will get underway in 2005. In addition to implementing all aspects of the financial management system, significant progress has been made in 2004 on the roll out of the online travel and subsistence service to almost all staff. The infrastructure to roll out other aspects of the financial management system has also been put in place.

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PURCHASING AND PROCUREMENT

A comprehensive review of our procurement activities was completed during the year. A Procurement Officer was appointed to ensure optimal coordination of procurement activity and to ensure compliance with European Union and national procurement regulations throughout the Service. Pilot procurements commenced for services in a number of areas including security, contract cleaning and caretaking, interpretation and translation and postal delivery.

COURT FUNDS**MANAGEMENT AND INVESTMENT**

Since the establishment of the Service, the issues surrounding the management and investment of court funds have been afforded high priority. These are primarily funds held in trust by the courts and managed on behalf of persons who are Wards of Court and Minors. Significant progress continued to be made during 2004 to implement a major modernisation programme in the Office of the Accountant of the Courts of Justice.

The first investment of court funds in the new investment vehicles established to meet the specific requirements of the beneficiaries of court funds was made in December 2003. These funds, which have been approved by the Irish Financial Services Regulatory Authority, were established by Bank of Ireland Asset Management, who, along with State Street Global Advisors, were appointed joint fund managers by the Service in 2003. The transfer of High Court funds into these new unitised funds commenced in mid-December 2003 and at the end of 2004 the value of funds in the new investment strategies was €515m. This represents just under 70% of the total funds managed by the Office of the Accountant of the Courts of Justice. The exercise is scheduled for completion by September 2005.

In total there was €880 million in court funds in 2004, comprising funds in the High Court, Circuit Court and District Court. Funds in the Circuit Court and District Court will be transferred to the new investment strategies when the necessary amendments to the Rules of Court are effected.

INVESTMENT PERFORMANCE

Performance of the new funds since inception in December 2003 has been very good ranging from just under 5% for the Cash Plus Fund to just over 13% for the Growth Fund. The chart *on page 45* represents cumulative performance for the first year of the funds. With inflation running at 2.2% for the same period, all four funds have made gains well in excess of the consumer price index.

ESTABLISHMENT OF COURT FUNDS OFFICE

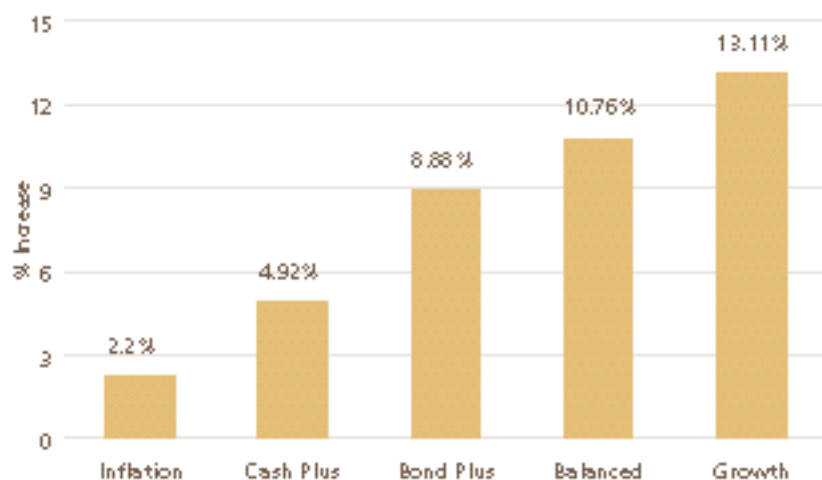
The Service continues to work towards the establishment of a Court Funds Office to be responsible for the centralised management of funds controlled by the various court jurisdictions. A proposal for legislation to facilitate the establishment of the Office, with responsibility for the custody and management of court-controlled funds across all court jurisdictions was produced by the Service during the year. At year end, the Circuit Court Rules Committee was considering draft rules to facilitate the centralised management in the Accountant's Office of particular categories of Circuit Court funds.

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New Investment Strategies

Investment Performance (Net of Fund Management Fees)

December 2003 to December 2004

**IMPROVING COURTS ACCOUNTING PROCESSES AND SERVICES****COURTS ACCOUNTING SYSTEM**

The rollout of Phase 1 of the new courts accounting system involving family law maintenance was successfully completed during the year. By year end the new system was in operation in six District Court offices.

Phase 2 of the project will commence in early 2005. It will develop an accounting system for all accounting processes including fines, fees, bail and the poor box. The system used in Phase 1 will be developed to handle all the financial matters dealt with in District Court offices in relation to these processes. For Phase 2 a central processing centre will be established to undertake many of the tasks currently performed in the local court offices around the country, in many instances using manual systems. This will have a number of advantages including improved customer service that will see a wider range of payment

options, optimal use of technology, better utilisation of resources and significant economies of scale. In addition, the Courts Accounting System will interface with the new Criminal Case Management System. This will eliminate significant duplication of input.

The new Courts Accounting System will also enable a number of eGovernment initiatives to be implemented including the following:

- Payment of fines via the Internet
- Payment of court fees via the Internet
- Payment of family law maintenance electronically into and out of bank accounts including use of standing orders.

COURT STAMP DUTY

The Service reviewed the stamp duty charged on court documents during 2004. This resulted in new stamp duty orders being approved by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Minister for Finance in August 2004 for the Supreme Court, High Court, Circuit Court and District Court. The new orders are the first phase in an ongoing process to review stamp duty to ensure equity and consistency across court jurisdictions having regard to the constitutional right of access to the courts.

Mandate 1

AMENDMENTS TO DISTRICT COURT DISTRICTS AND AREAS

Amendments to District Court districts and areas and variations of sitting days are effected by statutory instrument. In 2004, the Minister for Justice, Equality & Law Reform signed the following statutory instruments amalgamating a number of venues and amending sitting days:

Title	S.I. Number	Purpose of Order	Date Order became effective	District Number
District Court Districts & Areas (Amendment) & Variation of Days & Hours (Kanturk & Mitchelstown) Order, 2004	S.I. 51 of 2004	(a) additional sittings at Kanturk on the 3rd Friday in February, April, June, October, & December at 10.30 a.m. (b) sittings of the District Court at Mitchelstown on the 1st Friday in January, March, May, July, September, & November at 10.30 a.m.	19/2/04	20
District Court Districts & Areas (Amendment) and Variation of Hours (District No. 5) Order, 2004	S.I. 153 of 2004	Sittings in the District Court Areas of Arva, Ballinamore, Ballyconnell/Swanlinbar, Ballyjamesduff, Belturbet, Cavan, Clones, Cootehill, Kingscourt, Mohill, Monaghan, Oldcastle and Virginia to commence at 10.30 a.m.	27/4/04	5
District Court Districts and Areas (Amendment) and Variation of Days and Hours (Rathdowney and Portlaoise) Order, 2004	S.I. 487 of 2004	(a) Amalgamation of the District Electoral Divisions of the District Court Area of Rathdowney into the District Court Area of Portlaoise, and (b) Variation of the days on which the District Court at Portlaoise exercising its summary jurisdiction is held to the first, second third and fourth Friday, second Thursday and the third Tuesday in each month at 10.30 a.m.	16/08/04	15

Mandate 2

Providing support services for the judges

The total number of serving judges in all four court jurisdictions – Supreme Court, High Court, Circuit Court and District Court – as of 31st December 2004 was 127.

The Service continued to provide administrative support to the judiciary during 2004 through the offices of the Judicial Support Unit. It also provided administrative support to the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board, the Judicial Studies Institute and the Judicial Support Committee.

ASSISTING THE JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS ADVISORY BOARD

Advertisements for judicial vacancies were published in national newspapers and legal publications during the year. Events aimed at introducing newly appointed judges to the administrative functions of the Service were organised, with an emphasis on the support available for members of the judiciary.

ASSISTING THE JUDICIAL STUDIES INSTITUTE

The Service continued to work with the judiciary during the year to identify, in a structured manner, the appropriate resources in terms of support, accommodation and funding for training required by the judiciary. Assistance with the organisation of a number of judicial conferences was provided by staff of the Service at various times throughout the year.

SUPPORTING THE RULES COMMITTEES

Rules Committees make rules regulating the practice and procedure of the court in relation to particular court jurisdictions. There is a Superior Court Rules Committee, a Circuit Court Rules Committee and a District Court Rules Committee. The Reports of these Committees are on *pages 135 to 142*.

The Reform and Development Directorate provides liaison between the Rules Committees on individual rules proposals having

<i>JURISDICTION</i>	<i>LEGISLATIVE POSITION</i>	<i>NUMBER SERVING</i>
<i>Supreme Court</i>	<i>8 including the Chief Justice</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>High Court</i>	<i>33 including the President*</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Circuit Court</i>	<i>34 including the President</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>District Court</i>	<i>55 including the President</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>127</i>

* 33 when the President of the Law Reform Commission is a High Court judge as was the case on the 31st December 2004

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significance across the different court jurisdictions pending the establishment of a Rules Committee Support Unit within the Directorate. This new Unit will provide support, including research and drafting resources for the Rules Making Committees and will assist the introduction of consistent terminology, procedures and rules across all courts.

In 2004, the Directorate assessed the implications of the Civil Liability and Courts Act, 2004 for the Rules of the Superior Courts, Circuit Court and District Courts. Draft rules governing applications for the restoration of companies to the Register of Companies in the Companies Office were being prepared at year end. Other assistance provided was the preparation of draft Rules to enable the High Court deal with cases under domestic and European competition legislation.

JUDICIAL SUPPORT UNIT

The Unit continued to provide comprehensive support to the judiciary during the year. In addition to providing support for judges in Ireland, the Unit facilitated visits of foreign delegations from numerous countries including Norway, Thailand, Vietnam, France, China,

the Netherlands, Germany, New Zealand, Northern Ireland and Bosnia Herzegovina.

At year end, work was well advanced on the preparation of a booklet for judges containing information a range of matters including terms of service. The booklet is being prepared in co-operation with the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform, the Department of Finance and the Presidents of each court jurisdiction.

ASSISTING THE JUDICIARY TO REDUCE WAITING TIMES

HIGH COURT

During the months of August and September the High Court had sittings every day in what was a particularly busy year. During this period, staff of the Service assumed some of the duties of the Master of the High Court when they acted as Deputy Master and dealt with a range of matters including adjournments, ex-parte applications and summonses. In addition, staff undertook the task of Duty Registrar on call to service emergency sittings of the High Court.

CIRCUIT COURT

Four days of additional sittings were held in Dublin during August and September to deal with family law and other emergency applications. Sittings were also held at a wide range of venues including Tralee, Wicklow, Galway, Roscommon and Mullingar.

DUBLIN METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COURT

Extra court sittings in August resulted in the hearing of some 15,000 road traffic cases while the criminal courts continued to sit together with some family and children's courts. During September, additional hearings were held over twenty two days in the Four Courts to deal with cases under Section 49 of the Road Traffic Act, 1961 (*drink driving*). In excess of 170 cases were listed with 90 finalised.

Mandate 2

Central Criminal Court

Waiting times were reduced and the number of cases disposed of substantially increased as the court which deals with the country's most serious crimes made a "net gain" on cases.

In 2004, the Central Criminal Court disposed of 61 more cases than it received. The court received 72 cases and dealt with 133. This is the fourth year in a row that the Court has completed more cases than it received. The Court routinely had four judges hearing murder and rape cases. At such times as the President of the High Court was in a position to assign additional judges, the court had up to six judges sitting.

The number of rape cases coming before the Court reduced during 2004. It had risen from 48 cases in 1996 to 130 in both 1998 and 1999. This has fallen back to 40 new cases in 2004 a reduction of 70% from the peak period. The number of murder cases also fell from 39 in 2003 to 28 in 2004. The reduction in waiting time was achieved by a contribution of factors including the continued assignment of four judges on a full time basis by the President of the High Court. During the year the Court continued the practice, commenced in 2003, of sitting outside Dublin. The Court sat in Limerick for 49 days between February and August, in Sligo for 11 days in October and November and in Ennis for 12 days in December.



SUPPORTING INITIATIVES IN RELATION TO CASE MANAGEMENT

SUPREME COURT

The Supreme Court witnessed an increase in the number of cases with 531 appeals lodged and a total of 290 appeals disposed of. In addition a further 432 appeals were disposed of as a result of a case management initiative whereby the Court listed all uncertified appeals lodged since 1984 in which there had been no recent activity to explain the delay in proceeding with the appeal. Any appeal in which there was no appearance before the Court was struck out. Case management directions were issued by the Court in many of the cases. Less than 30 pre-2002 live appeals remained in the list in December 2004. The Supreme Court intends to review 2003 appeals in mid 2005.

COURT OF CRIMINAL APPEAL

The Court operates a case management list. This helps the Court identify and plan for cases where the hearing is estimated to exceed a day. In recent years there were just one or two such cases. The number increased to six in 2004 with further increases anticipated in 2005.

COMMERCIAL COURT

The Commercial Court, more particularly the Commercial List of the High Court, deals with commercial cases involving intellectual property, certain appeals from or judicial review applications in respect of any statutory body and other cases where the amount at issue is usually in excess of €1 million. It offers litigants the opportunity to have their cases dealt with speedily in a forum familiar with

Mandate 2

commercial law practices. The Court commenced business in January 2004 at a specially fitted out courtroom in Bow Street in Dublin. *(See page 71 for details of the technology provided in this courtroom).* A major feature of the administration of proceedings in this Court is the application of strict case management. Deadlines and directions of many types are given with a view to narrowing and identifying the issues and allowing the parties to address them resulting in shorter hearings.

The Service assisted with the preparation of draft Rules of Court and sample case and trial booklets for use in the Commercial Court. Work on the provision of a specific evidence presentation system which will provide facilities such as annotation and highlighting was ongoing at the end of the year with a specific product being evaluated for this purpose.



CIRCUIT COURT

The Service assisted the President of the Circuit Court during the year to introduce new procedures in Dublin regarding the management of civil cases likely to occupy considerable court time (long cases).

A more structured approach to the management of criminal cases in Dublin Circuit Court was introduced.

A limit was imposed on the number of cases for mention, arraignment and sentence daily. New cases returned from the

District Court were limited and heard on a dedicated day. The number of people in custody requiring to be accompanied by members of the Prison Service was kept to a minimum by limiting the number of custody cases listed.

Mandate 2

SUPPORTING THE JUDICIARY IN ITS WORK**IMPROVING LIBRARY AND RESEARCH FACILITIES**

The Judges' Library of the Service continued to provide a comprehensive range of library and research facilities for judges and staff in 2004. Library holdings include reference works, textbooks, periodicals, law reports and unreported judgments, legislation, indexes and digests, Oireachtas debates and official publications, as well as a small non-law section. Information and research queries were dealt with by the library, by e-mail, fax or post, as well as on the premises. The library also managed the provision of publications for judges' offices and court offices. The number and range of subscriptions to electronic databases continued to increase, and almost all are available on the desktops of judges and staff.

Requests during the year for materials not held in the library collection were often satisfied by inter-library loan or by document supply, through formal subscriptions to services such as Trinity College Information Service and the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, and through informal arrangements and networking with other libraries.

Much emphasis continued to be placed on the provision of suitable training to staff of the library, both in-house and through outside events. Library staff were available to provide assistance with the use of electronic services, and with legal information resources as a whole.

TECHNOLOGY IN THE SUPREME COURT

Work commenced on the development of a scheduling and diaring system for judges of the Supreme Court during the year. This system will assist the Supreme Court office to schedule cases for hearing within the Supreme Court and subsequently enable the Chief Justice to schedule judges to hear them. A sample system will be completed by early 2005.

The development of an integrated approach to the electronic filing of documents and the presentation of documents and evidence within the courtroom across all jurisdictions continued to receive attention in 2004. Work is focused in the first instance on the development of an electronic filing system for the Supreme Court. A number of products were being evaluated at the end of the year.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY TRAINING

The Service organised a European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) programme which was successfully completed by a number of judges during the year.

PRELIMINARY HEARING PILOT PROJECT

By way of implementation of a recommendation of the Working Group on the Jurisdiction of the Courts whose Report was presented to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Reform in 2003, a committee chaired by a judge of the High Court was established during the year. The Committee is considering the merits of a Preliminary Hearing Pilot Project and the issues which might appropriately be dealt with by a Preliminary Hearing. The committee considered an issues paper prepared by the Reform and Development Directorate and at year end was in the course of finalising its recommendations.

Mandate 2

IMPROVED METHODS OF COMMUNICATION

In 2004 the practice was introduced in the Supreme Court of notifying High Court judges by e-mail of the outcome of an appeal from their orders on the day of the decision. A copy of the Supreme Court judgment was attached where available.

IMPROVED STENOGRAPHY FACILITIES

The dedicated Stenography Unit previously referred to (*see page 36*) assumed responsibility for the supply to the Court of Criminal Appeal Office of all complete transcripts required for appeal purposes with effect from August 2004. This ensures that the time consuming task of collation of transcripts no longer has to be undertaken by a member of staff of the Court of Criminal Appeal Office.

**MANAGEMENT OF CENTRAL CRIMINAL COURT LIST**

Until 2004, the Circuit Criminal Court office was responsible for the administrative work associated with the Central Criminal Court list. This had particular consequences for the management of the list. In 2004, responsibility for the Central Criminal Court list was transferred from the Circuit Court Criminal Court Office to the High Court Central Office. By the end of the year, this association of High Court registrars with High Court judges when dealing with the work of the Central Criminal Court was yielding benefits in terms of more efficient use of judicial time.

REGISTER OF JUDGMENTS

Work continued during the year on the preparation of a Register of Judgments required under the provisions of the Civil Liability and Courts Act, 2004.

Pilot Drug Treatment Court

– a workable alternative to custodial sentences

The pilot Drug Treatment Court, designed to provide a workable alternative to custodial sentences for certain categories of drug offences, continued its operations in 2004. The main goals of the Court are to reduce the criminal offending pattern of the participants and to reduce their addiction or drug dependency. Interest from abroad in the work of the Court, the first of its kind in Europe, continues to be considerable. Members of the Drug Treatment Team made presentations during the year on the operation of the treatment programme to visitors from several countries including Norway, France and the United Kingdom.

From the outset the Court recognised that a vital component of the drive to

reduce the criminal offending pattern of participants and their addiction or drug dependency was the need to provide educational opportunities. Since the commencement of the pilot Court in 2001, an educational programme organised in co-operation with the Dublin Vocational Education Committee has been located in the Parnell Adult Learning Centre. Persons deemed eligible to participate in the Drug Treatment Programme are assessed in the Centre. Many of those assessed have been found to have low literacy skills requiring extra tutorial support (35%) or special needs (8%).

Classes are provided to Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) level in a range of subjects including English, mathematics, food

and nutrition, work preparation, health and fitness, personal effectiveness, art and information technology. Some participants have attended Colleges of Education while others have been monitored for placement with FÁS.

DRUG TREATMENT COURT – STATISTICS 2004

Participants

Phase 1	16
Phase 2	10
Phase 3	4
Graduated	11
Terminated	49
Total	90

Non-participants

Being assessed	11
Ineligible	62
Total	73



Mandate 3

Provide information on the courts system to the public

The provision of information is an important part of the drive to encourage confidence in the operation of the courts system and to retain the support and respect of the public for the administration of justice.

Explaining how the court system operates takes many forms and the Service continues to avail of every opportunity to make information available on a range of matters. Insofar as is possible, information is published in language that is easy to understand and free of the jargon often associated with legal documents. The development of the Internet has afforded organisations like the Service a way to reach the world in minutes. And yet for all its possibilities and all its potential there remains a large section of the community for whom the Internet does not feature as a communication tool. The Service must therefore continue to pursue a diverse course when considering how best to disseminate information to the wide range and variety of people who are interested in the work of the courts.

ASSISTING THE PUBLIC TO UNDERSTAND THE OPERATION OF THE COURTS SYSTEM

One of the most effective ways to make information on the operation of the courts system available to the public continues to be the publication of leaflets and booklets. During 2004, the Service produced a number of publications which were widely distributed:

GUIDE TO SMALL CLAIMS

The leaflet outlining the procedure to be followed when engaging the Small Claims procedure has been available in English for some time and has proved to be one of the most popular of the publications of the Service. During the year, the leaflet was made available in Irish, Spanish and Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese). It is intended to make the leaflet available in French in early 2005.

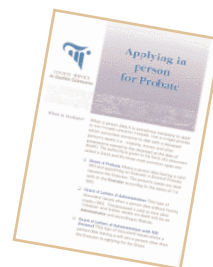
PROBATE

Information for practitioners

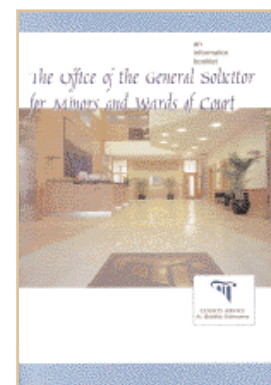
The Probate Office prepared a series of information sheets for practitioners during the year. All material was provided in hard copy and posted to the website, www.courts.ie.

Information for the public

A leaflet titled *Applying in person for Probate* was produced to explain the process that authorises a person to deal with the estate of a deceased person without the need to engage a solicitor. In addition to referring to the Probate Office in Dublin, the leaflet contains contact details for the fourteen District Probate Registries around the country.



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OFFICE OF THE GENERAL SOLICITOR FOR MINORS AND WARDS OF COURT

The General Solicitor can be appointed to act as Committee of a Minor or Ward of Court. This includes managing their affairs e.g. property and other assets. A useful guide, titled, *Office of the General Solicitor for Minors and Wards of Court*, was published detailing the work dealt with in this office and the occasions when the President of the High Court will appoint the General Solicitor to act as Committee.

AS GAELGE

The range of information available in Irish increased during the year. Publications made available included the Annual Report 2003, the Freedom of Information manual, leaflets on Cloverhill, Swords & Balbriggan District Court offices and the Customer Charter. All publications in Irish are available on the website. The popular poster, *Who's Who in the Courtroom*, was updated and re-printed and also made available in Irish.

Organised visits to the Four Courts

Year	2004	2003
Number of schools/colleges	148	132
Number of tours	179	150
Number of students	4303 (plus 291 teachers)	3321 (plus 250 teachers)

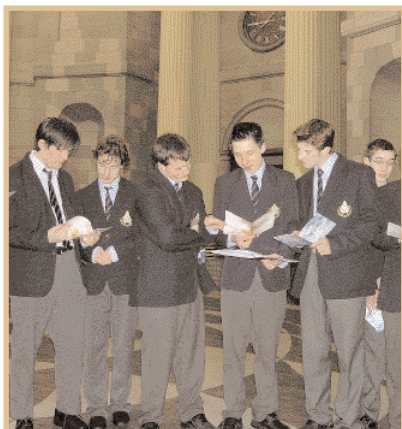
EDUCATING FOR THE FUTURE

SCHOOL TOURS

The Service continued to develop a range of initiatives aimed at educating young citizens on the operation of the court system. The popular school tour programme continued to gather momentum during the year with an increase in the number of venues offering tours around the country. Members of the public can avail of tours in venues including Letterkenny, Monaghan, Sligo, Galway, Naas and Donegal. It is intended to increase this number further in 2005 with the introduction of a tour programme in the newly refurbished courthouse in Cork and at other venues around the country.

The tour programme is supported by a range of published material in the form of leaflets, posters and a section dedicated to schools on the website. (see page 60 below)

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Visitor programme continues to gain popularity

Facilitating access to a real court environment and providing information in a structured format continues to be real winner for the Service especially with second level students. The continuing year-on-year rise in the number of visitors availing of organised tours of the Four Courts as part of the Court Tour Programme illustrates that interest in the operation of our justice system is very high across society. The Programme is an informed, organised and worthwhile initiative which balances with the core business of ensuring that court hearings continue every day. Groups visiting during 2004 were not confined to schools from Ireland but included school and other groups from outside Ireland and various professional groups including nurses and teachers. Every tour includes a descriptive talk on the court system and an opportunity to attend at a court case. The Programme caters for all visitors with information provided during 2004 in a range of languages including sign language, Irish and French.



LAW IN THE CLASSROOM

Work continued during the year on a project to develop material to be utilised as part of the Civil, Social and Political Education curriculum for second level schools up to junior certificate level. The Service is being assisted by the Civil, Social and Political Education Support Team of the Second Level Support Service of the Department of Education and Science. The aim of the project is to provide material for a course of some ten weeks duration culminating in an action project to take the form of a mock trial in the classroom. The material will include a hard copy resource pack together with material in electronic format. The project will be completed during 2005.

STUDENT WORK PLACEMENT PROGRAMME

Education of the young citizen included the opportunity to work in an office of the Service in 2004. A number of students were facilitated via a student placement programme agreed with University College Cork. Assignments completed by the students included a project on the Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997; a project to identify best industry practice in the area of records management and a project to assemble information for citizens called for jury service.

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PRESENTATIONS ON THE WORK OF THE COURTS

Staff of the Service continued to engage with the wider community to educate the public on the operation of the courts system during the year:

EXPLAINING THE WEBSITE

The Service supported an information technology seminar organised by the Law Society of Ireland to highlight various electronic facilities available to solicitors including standard desktop facilities, the *Legal Diary on-line* and facilities available in the Land Registry.

OFFICE OF WARDS OF COURT

The Office of Wards of Court continued to be available to assist and provide guidance to persons and organisations dealing with the affairs of incapacitated persons. During 2004, an officer gave a presentation to social workers and nursing staff attached to the Adelaide and Meath Hospital, Tallaght in relation to wardship and its implications. The Registrar of Wards of Court gave a lecture to the Law Society of Ireland as part of its Continuing Legal Education Programme and a lecture to the Society of Trust and Estate Practitioners (S.T.E.P.).

**PROBATE OFFICE**

The Probate Office also participated in the Law Society's Continuing Legal Education Programme by delivering papers and making presentations to solicitors in Cork and Dublin as part of the probate programme.

Staff of the Probate Office gave presentations to registrars in the High Court. Presentations to the Office of Wards of Court, the Office of the General Solicitor for Minors and Wards of Court and the Examiner's Office are planned for 2005.

JUDGES' LIBRARY

Staff of the library provided training in specialist areas to outside bodies such as the Law Society of Ireland and other libraries during the year.

VISITORS FROM ABROAD

Judges, staff and others involved in various legal systems around the world were facilitated by the Service on visits during the year. (see page 48).

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**SUPPORTING INITIATIVES BY OUTSIDE AGENCIES**

Where appropriate, and as a means of avoiding unnecessary duplication, the Service continues to promote a range of information produced by different community groups, support organisations and other government agencies. During 2004 the Service promoted a number of publications produced by some of these outside agencies. They included a publication for families coping with marriage breakdown published by the Law Society of Ireland and an information pack for families produced by the Family Mediation Service which operates under the auspices of the Family Support Agency. The Service also promoted a guide for grandparents of children whose parents are not married to each other published by the National Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their children.

The Service continues to promote the work of OASIS (Online Access to Services, Information and Support) (www.oasis.gov.ie) an eGovernment website developed by Comhairle to provide information on the social and civil rights of everyone in Ireland at various life stages. The site contains a wide range of

information about the operation of the court system including information about civil and criminal proceedings, information for people called for jury service and information for victims of crime.

IMPROVING STATISTICS

The Service acknowledges that public policy formation cannot be effective without detailed and relevant statistics. Considerable progress was made during the year in the drive to improve the range, type and quality of statistical information available with the emphasis being on the provision of information in understandable formats.

Statistics committees were established in the Supreme & High Courts and the Circuit & District Courts to carry out a major examination of the procedures operating for the collection of statistics. The committees reviewed the adequacy of the statistical categories and information currently collected by court offices and, where necessary, produced revised statistical reporting templates for offices. This exercise has ensured that appropriate measurement criteria have been identified to (a) capture all business conducted by the

office and (b) accurately reflect case volumes, productivity and timeliness in case disposal.

Work commenced on the procurement of an electronic reporting facility to provide statistical and management information from the various information technology systems following the completion of the statistics review. The ability to produce material from across all court jurisdictions in a common format is seen as a major element of the drive to improve the quality of the information available. It is intended that the first reports using the new facility will be available in mid-2005.

The Service co-operated with the Law Society of Ireland to encourage solicitors in Dublin to provide information to accompany the issue of family law proceedings in the High Court and Circuit Court. The information covers a range of matters including the relief sought, the ages of both parties and any minor children and whether the parties have legal representation. It will be used to improve the quality of information available in family law cases in both courts.

Statistics continue to be maintained in 2004 on a manual basis for the Personal Injuries Assessment Board. The project to

Mandate 3



improve the quality of data available electronically will include the ability to extract this material from the information technology systems in the various court offices.

The Service continued to assist outside agencies by undertaking projects to make statistics available where possible. During the year, the Dublin Circuit Criminal Court office provided information for the National Crime Council on some 180 cases disposed of in the Central Criminal Court.

PUBLISHING STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON THE INTERNET

A statistics section was developed as part of the redevelopment of the website of the Service. The section has been populated with information on a range of matters including civil, criminal, family and licensing cases. The information is backdated to the year 2001 and includes trends for particular categories including domestic violence, murder and rape over a number of years. In 2005, the Service will use the improved information made available by the new reporting facility to enhance the statistics section.

DEVELOPING A HIGH QUALITY MEDIA SERVICE

The Service remains committed to assisting the media report on cases coming before the courts. During 2004, the Media Relations Advisor of the Service dealt with a large number of daily enquiries about cases and decisions. The service provided extended beyond the mere release of information about current cases to include such matters as explaining the court system and assisting with research into less recent cases for television documentaries, radio features and newspaper articles.

The Media Relations Advisor held a number of press briefings during the year to highlight matters such as the launch of the Annual Report 2003. He also circulated press releases on a broad range of topics such as the opening of refurbished courthouses, updates on building projects and details of the completion of major initiatives in the information technology and financial areas.

The Advisor assisted the Information Office to support Public Access to Law, organisers of the much lauded National Mock Trial Competition. The support provided included making courtroom and other facilities available in the Four Courts, judging the newspaper and

television reporter section of the competition and arranging for the event to be recorded on film. This support for educational initiatives was continued through the relationship maintained with the colleges where journalism features as a course subject. The Advisor provided seminars and tutorials about reporting on the courts and organised numerous tours of the Four Courts for the students during the year.

A series of meetings with the representatives of local media around the country were held during the year by the Advisor accompanied by representatives of local court offices, usually the Country Registrar, the Chief Clerks for the District Court offices and the local Regional Manager. These meetings are in keeping with the commitments contained in the Customer Service Action Plan of the Service to consult with, communicate with and brief groups who use the courts and court offices on a regular basis.

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DEVELOPING THE WEBSITE

The Service recognises that the Internet and the worldwide web are two of the most important tools available for facilitating improvements in efficiency and effectiveness in organisations – both public and private. One of the key issues facing any organisation is how to use this technology imaginatively. The website of the Service, *www.courts.ie* was launched in November 1999 and provided information on a wide range of matters. Various additions were made to the site to improve the range and type of information available culminating in a decision to engage in an exercise to completely redesign the site. The new look site, launched in October 2004, preserves the essential features of the old site while presenting a range of new features utilising a host of design features including improved navigation, enhanced look and feel and industry best practice accessibility aids including adherence to the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) guidelines.

One of the most significant new features of the site is the availability free of charge of judgments of the Supreme Court and the Court of Criminal Appeal. Apart from the obvious benefit to



the community of easy access to judgments of the courts, this new initiative relieves the relevant court offices of the necessity to circulate judgments in hard copy. It is intended to explore the feasibility of publishing judgments of the High Court on the website in 2005.

The use of a Content Management System allows court offices access the website remotely to update content, most particularly, details of court sittings. At year end, this facility was available to staff of the Legal Diary Team in Dublin and to staff of Dundalk Circuit Court. A comprehensive training exercise will be undertaken from early 2005 to provide staff of the remaining Circuit Court offices

with the expertise necessary to enable them publish information to the website.

Much of the information available in English on the site is also available in Irish in a dedicated section "*As Gaeilge*". Work on the provision of the site in Irish will form part of the development of the site during 2005.

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The redeveloped website was one of four websites shortlisted in the Best State Body category of the Irish eGovernment awards 2005 announced in December 2004. The awards run by Public Sector Times and Elucidate and sponsored by the Institute of Public Administration and REACH attracted some 240 entries in seven categories. The winners will be announced in February 2005.

Highlights of the new website:

- Information of particular interest to the legal profession including court rules and fees, court terms and sittings, practice directions and court forms is divided into separate sections and easily located along the main menu
- Legal Diary section providing information on court lists has been updated with option of downloading the entire day's diary as one document
- Judgments of Supreme Court and Court of Criminal Appeal available, many on day of delivery
- Students of all levels provided for in dedicated section containing diverse information including information on careers in the legal system
- Heritage of court buildings highlighted in dedicated section which includes history of the law and tour of the Four Courts
- Selection of court statistics available to facilitate easy access to information about work of the courts
- As Gaeilge section provides selection of information on the site in Irish
- Offices & Maps section provides contact details and digital maps for every court office in Ireland



Mandate 3

Monthly visits to website of the Service

Month	Visits
January	57,732
February	55,701
March	59,642
April	50,849
May	49,092
June	45,303
July	49,818
August	36,814
September	41,280
October	53,468
November	51,251
December	39,142
Total	590,092

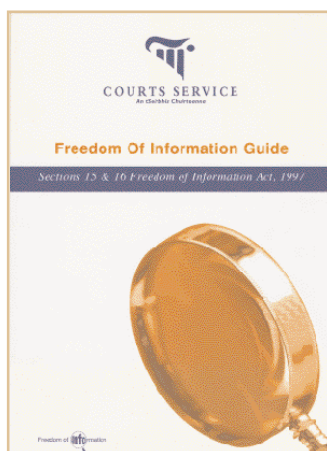
FACILITATING THE OPERATION OF THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT, 1997

The Service remains committed to ensuring the effective operation of systems and arrangements for dealing with all matters coming within the ambit of the Freedom of Information Act.

During the year, the Freedom of Information Guide outlining the structures and functions of the Service which was already available in English was published in Irish. The Guide provides information on the classes of records held and explains the procedure for making a request under the Act. Some of the records held by the Service are routinely available to the public and will continue to be available without the need to make a formal request under the Act.

**Requests received under the Freedom of Information Act, 1997**

	2004	2003
Access granted/part granted	1	10
Refused/records restricted under section 46(1) (b)	6	5
Handled outside the Act/withdrawn	24	39
Transferred	-	1
Total number of requests	31	55



Mandate 4

Provide, manage and maintain court buildings

The Service remains committed to improving the standard of court buildings and facilities all around the country.

In many cases, the challenge continues to be to provide facilities of a standard expected in the world of today while preserving the history and heritage of the past; to combine the best modern architectural design and information technology facilities with the careful preservation and restoration of buildings of national importance.

Judicial involvement in administrative matters has played a critical role in the advancement of many projects initiated by the Service since its establishment. One of the most obvious manifestations of this involvement has been in the advancement of the Capital Development Programme where the work of the Building Committee (see page 15) has greatly assisted the progression of many major projects and has provided much valued guidance in respect of a range of issues including policy, standard design briefs, priorities and security.

PROGRESSING THE CAPITAL BUILDING PROGRAMME

The Capital Building Programme titled *"Building for the Future"* covers the period from 2002 to 2008 and is the blueprint for the very ambitious programme to refurbish and maintain the court buildings of Ireland. The programme placed a priority on developing county town venues where most court sittings take place and where the majority of court offices are located. The programme also enables the Service to avail of opportunities to provide modern court facilities in conjunction with local authorities and other agencies. The benefits of such co-operative projects include better value for money and more expeditious provision of facilities. Examples of such facilities include Tubbercurry, Ballyshannon and Lismore.

By the end of 2004, almost all county town courthouses had been refurbished. In 2004 work was completed in Castlebar,

Navan, Ennis, Cork and work had commenced in Longford and Nenagh courthouses leaving only six county towns outstanding namely Tullamore, Kilkenny, Wicklow, Wexford, Mullingar and Roscommon. Preliminary planning had commenced in respect of Kilkenny and Wicklow courthouses. Work is expected to commence in respect of Tullamore in April 2005.

Other developments in 2004 included the construction of new courthouses in Ballyshannon and Bray. Work was well advanced in Ballyshannon at the end of the year and scheduled for completion in June 2005 and in Bray in early 2006. Refurbishment works at Lismore courthouse were scheduled for completion in mid 2005. Work will commence in early 2005 on the construction of a new court facility in Belmullet as part of a *one-stop-shop* development there. Work is expected to commence in September 2005 on Fermoy courthouse.

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PROJECTS COMPLETED IN 2004:

CASTLEBAR

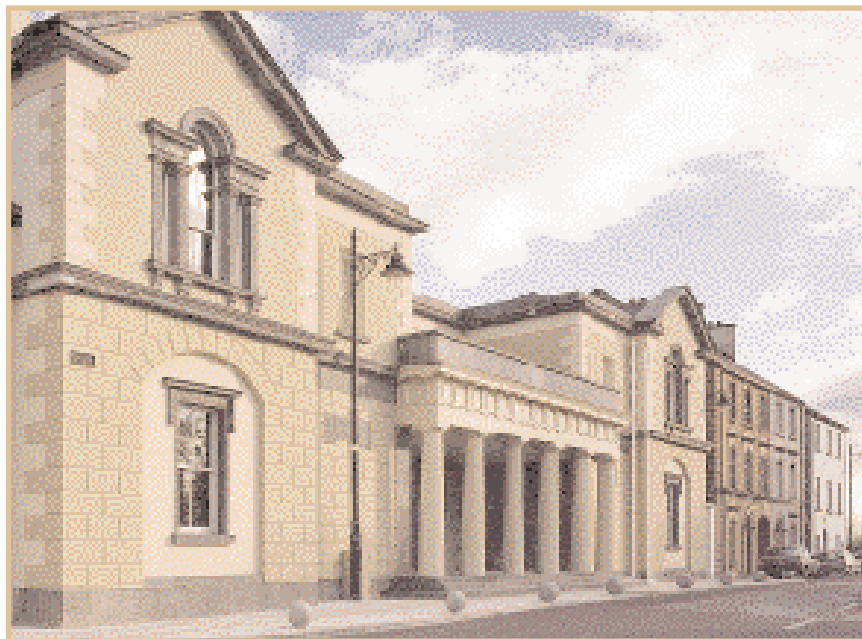
Cost: €11.6 million

Facilities: The courthouse now accommodates four courtrooms with adjoining judges' offices, consultation and meeting rooms with modern facilities for all court users. It also accommodates the staff of the Circuit and District Courts, 2 jury rooms, victim support facilities, media facilities and legal practitioners' facilities. Holding cells have also been provided. The building has been cabled to facilitate video conferencing and digital audio recording of proceedings.

NAVAN

Cost: €600,000

Facilities: The new facilities include the provision of a modern courtroom with judges' office, an office for the District Court Clerk, consultation rooms, legal practitioner's room and a holding room for those in custody. The accommodation is also accessible for people with disabilities.

**ENNIS**

Cost: €9 million

Facilities: The two original courtrooms were upgraded and modified to improve accessibility and acoustics but the historic fabric was maintained. An additional courtroom for civil and family law was added to the lower ground floor along with judges' offices, practitioners' rooms, consultation rooms, jury rooms, victim support facilities, media facilities and public waiting areas. New offices for staff of the Circuit and District Courts, a new lift for easier access and cabling throughout the entire building for all modern information technology applications including video conferencing were also provided. The courthouse can now accommodate the High, Circuit and District Courts.

CORK

Cost: €26 million

Facilities: The old bar room was removed and the courtyard glazed over at roof level to allow natural light into the heart of the building at all levels. A new fire-rated glass floor was inserted at first floor level creating an assembly area which links the two main courtrooms while still providing daylight to new staff offices underneath. This new enclosed atrium is lined with the existing glazed bricks and has a new fully glazed roof supported by coffered glass beams. By reducing the ground floor level of the whole building by over two feet, the ceiling height was greatly increased throughout this level, effectively adding an extra floor of accommodation to the building. This facilitated the addition of three new courtrooms, eight consultation rooms, a family law office and barristers'/solicitors'

Mandate 4

offices at the existing upper levels, without compromising any of the existing four courtrooms in the building. The ground floor now includes two new stone-lined entrances on either side of the portico steps, leading to a central foyer, flanked by new reception/security facilities. It also provides spacious, well lit and well ventilated offices and facilities for the court staff, as well as a victim support suite with video link room.

See *page 70* for details of the technology provided in Cork courthouse.

PROJECTS UNDERWAY IN 2004:**Drogheda** (temporary)

- will be completed in January 2005

Lismore

- will be completed in June 2005 (joint project with Waterford County Council)

Nenagh

- will be completed in December 2005

Ballyshannon

- will be completed in June 2005

Longford

- will be completed in April 2006

Bray

- will be completed in March 2006

PROJECTS DUE TO COMMENCE OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS INCLUDE:

- Wexford
- Kilkenny
- Wicklow
- Mullingar
- Criminal Courts Complex
- Letterkenny
- Tralee
- Waterford
- Swords
- Drogheda (permanent building)
- Blanchardstown
- Limerick
- North Kildare
- Cork District
- Roscommon
- Thurles
- Monaghan
- Killarney

REFURBISHMENT/ CONSTRUCTION TO COMMENCE IN 2005:**Belmullet**

- April 2005 (joint project with Mayo County Council)

Tullamore

- April 2005

Fermoy

- September 2005

DUBLIN REGION**SECURITY IN THE FOUR COURTS**

A range of measures will be put in place during 2005 to improve security in and around the Four Courts complex. The measures will include the provision of security kiosks with scanning equipment at the entrances to the complex and the restriction of vehicle access. Certain people including judges, staff, solicitors and barristers will be exempt from having to pass through the scanners and will be issued with proximity/swipe cards to enable them gain access to the complex.

Mandate 4

ADDITIONAL COURT ACCOMMODATION

A major emphasis in the Dublin region during 2004 was on the procurement and fit out of additional courtrooms and offices for judges and staff. A number of proposals were considered including refurbishment works and the acquisition of additional accommodation in the Commercial Court premises in Bow Street; the creation of additional offices in Áras Uí Dhálaigh; increased use of certain accommodation in Phoenix House and the procurement of additional courtroom space in the King's Inns and the Law Society Building in Bow Street.

COMMERCIAL COURT

Work was completed on the Commercial Court in Bow Street in Dublin. A courtroom was furnished and fitted to the highest standard together with offices and kitchen facilities for judges and staff. The court commenced hearing cases in January 2004. A major feature of the fit out of the courtroom was the provision of the most up to date technology facilities. *(See page 71 for details).*

PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS**CRIMINAL COURT COMPLEX**

The Service received approval in 2004 for the procurement by way of public private partnership of a purpose designed Criminal Courts Complex for Dublin. This will be a state of the art criminal justice facility suited to the administration of criminal justice in twenty first century Ireland. The building will be designed to concentrate all central Dublin criminal business in one location. This will involve the transfer of courts and administrative offices from the District, Circuit, Special and Central Criminal Courts to the new facility. The delivery of this facility by means of a public private partnership will present an opportunity to avail of private sector innovation, ensure efficient delivery and so deliver best value for taxpayers.

The Service will seek expressions of interest from the private sector in mid-2005 for the delivery of this key infrastructure project which will be the greatest single capital investment in court buildings and services since the foundation of the State.

The building of this facility will result in a much improved service to all court users – members of the public, witnesses, jurors, judiciary, professionals and staff. The complex will contain 22 courtrooms which will be enabled for video conferencing, digital audio recording and electronic display of evidence. A site at Infirmary Road close to the Legal Quarter, current court buildings and the new Luas light rail system has been identified for the complex.

In particular, first class facilities for jurors, consultation rooms and waiting areas will also be provided. Public facilities will be included together with accommodation for other court users including witnesses and victims of crime and their relatives. The new facility will also allow for the efficient and dignified management of prisoner movement throughout the complex by way of dedicated circulation routes to and from court. A further feature will be dedicated facilities for legal practitioners and the media.

Mandate 4

**COURTHOUSES
VESTED IN 2004**

Midleton, Longford, Carlow, Listowel, Green St., Ennis, Kilrush, Kanturk, Ballina, Westport, Monaghan, Tralee, Thomastown, Macroom, Mallow, Ballinrobe, Swinford, Youghal, Smithfield (Children Court), Castlecomer, Ballyhaunis

OTHER PROJECTS

On page 65 the projects due to commence over the next few years throughout the country are referred to. The Service will seek to provide additional court accommodation at a number of these locations by way of public private partnership projects. These include Cork District Court, Waterford, Swords, North Kildare, Limerick and Letterkenny.

VESTING OF COURT BUILDINGS

Court accommodation currently in the ownership of local authorities or of the Office of Public Works may be transferred to the Service by order of the Minister for Justice, Equality & Law Reform. The Service has identified some eighty buildings to be vested. A total of twenty one courthouses were vested in the Service by the end of 2004.

**Understanding
Europa Nostra**

Europa Nostra is a pan-European federation of more than 200 non-governmental heritage organisations, which represents millions of citizens throughout Europe. It aims to encourage the protection and enhancement of heritage in the fields of architecture, urban and rural planning.

**AWARDS FOR REFURBISHED
PROJECTS****SLIGO COURTHOUSE**

Continuing the winning theme established in 2002 and 2003, Sligo Courthouse received an award at the prestigious Europa Nostra Cultural Heritage Awards held in Munich, Germany during the year. The major refurbishment effort was selected from entries all across Europe and rewarded with a Diploma in the Architectural Heritage section for the successful restoration of a Victorian neo-Gothic building while implementing new elements of the fabric of the building.

LIMERICK COURTHOUSE

Limerick County Circuit Courthouse won the "Best Civic Building" award at the *Limerick Looking Good Environment Competition 2004* in the Special Category Awards in October 2004.

**MAINTAINING COURT
BUILDINGS**

Maintenance includes minor refurbishment, electrical works, security alarms and fire extinguishers and preventative works such as painting, cleaning gutters and checking roofs. The Service operates an extensive maintenance programme for the large number and variety of court buildings in Dublin and around the country. The Regional Offices are responsible for the maintenance of court buildings outside of Dublin.

The Service was assisted in 2004 by the allocation of the sum of €150,000 for the maintenance of courthouses in certain rural areas under the *Clár programme*. The funding was provided on the basis of €1 from the programme for every €2 provided by the Service and was used to assist with the refurbishment at a number of venues including Lismore in Waterford and Clifden in Galway.

A series of preventative maintenance contracts were put in place in respect of venues around the country to cater for mechanical and electrical installations such as lifts, alarms, boilers, ventilation systems and fire extinguishers.

Mandate 4

Court buildings...preserving a place in history

Michael Davitt founder of the Land League was one of the defendants in the “Sligo State Trials” one of the most remarkable trials ever held in Sligo courthouse. He was arrested and brought to Sligo to face charges of sedition following a speech given at a Land League meeting in Gurteen. The trial in November 1879, attended by Charles Stuart Parnell, collapsed after a week. The dock used in the trial was restored in 2004 and will be located in the foyer of the refurbished courthouse.

A considerable maintenance effort in the Dublin Region resulted in an improvement in the quality of accommodation provided in the Four Courts complex. The wide range of projects undertaken included the refurbishment of judges’ offices; the relocation of some judges, staff and other officials to new accommodation; several other painting and decorating projects; improvements to air conditioning and heating facilities; improvements in the quality of the lifts; and the installation of new and the preservation of, existing railings.

SECURITY IN COURT BUILDINGS

The security of court users is a major consideration in the planning and implementation of all court building projects. During 2004, all new or refurbishment projects provided for separate



circulation routes for judges, staff, juries, prisoners and the public. In addition, a series of other features including swipe card access to private areas, panic buttons and intruder alarms were included. Provision was also made for the installation of security equipment in the main foyer of courthouses.

HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELFARE AT WORK

The Service adopted a revised policy on Health, Safety and Welfare at Work in March 2004 prepared by a sub-committee of the Central Partnership Committee. A Safety Monitoring Committee was established with overall responsibility for monitoring and reviewing health and safety policy in the Service. Additional training will be provided for staff safety officers in 2005, following which, revised safety statements will be prepared for each court building.

Mandate 5

Provide facilities for users of the courts

The Service continued to make every effort during 2004 to ensure that users of the Courts can avail of first class facilities.

COURT BUILDINGS AND TECHNOLOGY

Technology provides the courts with many opportunities to improve the administration of justice. Earlier in this Report the developments in the provision of information technology systems aimed at making the justice system more efficient outside of the courtroom were outlined. However, the use of information technology extends beyond court and other administrative offices of the Service into the courtroom itself.

The Service continues to keep apace with developments in the world of courtroom technology to ensure that the courts in Ireland are equipped with the most up to date facilities available. The advantages include improved accuracy, improved efficiency and lower costs, enhanced access to witnesses and evidence and enhanced transparency of the justice process to the public. The

commencement of initiatives previously referred to in this Report such as computers in the courtroom, video conferencing and digital audio recording illustrate the determination of the Service to make courtrooms in Ireland comparable with the best in the world.

During 2004, the programme of deploying computers in courtrooms nationwide was completed. Computers have been installed in courtrooms connected to the corporate network of the Service in many county towns.



Mandate 5

**CORK COURTHOUSE:
CELEBRATING A NEW AGE IN
COURT TECHNOLOGY**

The refurbishment of the courthouse at Washington Street, Cork was completed during the year. Three technology enabled courtrooms were provided as part of the project. Courtrooms 1 and 2 were provided with video conferencing, video link and digital audio recording facilities.

These facilities enable the taking of evidence from anywhere in the world provided that suitable video facilities are available at the location. The video link system (which is used for the taking of evidence from vulnerable witnesses, normally children) enables evidence to be taken from a designated witness room within the courthouse. The evidence taken by video conference or video link can be recorded within these courtrooms on either standard video recorders or on DVD. The Digital Audio Recording system enables all proceedings within the courtroom including video conferencing and video link evidence to be recorded and subsequently used for the preparation of transcripts.

In addition to the facilities provided in courtrooms 1 and 2, courtroom 4 has been equipped as a full technology courtroom and



includes:

- A system to display ad-hoc and non digital evidence
- An electronic evidence distribution system to facilitate the display of electronic data, scanned documents and images
- Technologies to display/present evidence from various sources such as laptops, video and audio players, CD and DVD
- Touch panel functionality which controls the operation of all elements of the technology within the courtroom.

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Major features of the technology facilities in the Commercial Court:

- Digital Audio Recording
- Electronic filing and exchange of documents facilities
- Electronic presentation of evidence facilities
- Laptop access points for both the judge and parties to a case
- Videoconferencing

COMMERCIAL COURT

Another example of how information technology can assist the courts is the Commercial Court previously referred to in this Report. In addition to innovations in the area of case management, the new court sits in a specially designed courtroom in Bow Street in Dublin. There are VDUs, laptop points, provision for the electronic filing and exchange of documents, electronic presentation of evidence, video conferencing and real time stenography. Consultation rooms are available for practitioners and there is a large screen to allow members of the public follow what is happening in the proceedings.

FACILITIES FOR FAMILY LAW

The Capital Development Programme contains a commitment on the part of the Service to provide facilities to enable litigants in family law cases conduct their business in an environment appropriate to this most sensitive of the areas of the law. All major refurbishment works completed to date have included the provision of dedicated family law facilities. Similar facilities were included as part of major refurbishments works completed during the year in Castlebar, Ennis and Cork. Other large projects underway at Nenagh, Longford, Tullamore and Bray will also provide for them.

VICTIM SUPPORT FACILITIES

The Capital Development Programme also includes a commitment to improve facilities to support victims and their families. All major refurbishment works completed to date have included provision of victim support facilities which include a dedicated room with appropriate facilities located away from the main business of the court. Major refurbishment works completed during the year in Castlebar, Ennis and Cork included victim support facilities and they will also be

Facilities provided for court users include:

- Reception desks in all new projects
- Information display units
- Information display plasma screens in Ennis, Castlebar and Cork courthouses
- Facilities for the media in all major towns
- Family law facilities in all county towns
- Victim Support facilities at all major venues
- Ennis, Castlebar and Cork courthouses cabled for video conferencing technology

provided as part of large projects underway at Nenagh, Longford, Tullamore and Bray.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Work continued during the year on the development of a standard courthouse brief to accommodate the needs of all court users. A draft brief was prepared by the Building Committee following consultation with members of the judiciary, Directors and Regional Managers, County Registrars and District Court Clerks. The brief will be tested in a mock courtroom environment in 2005 to ensure a standard design and layout for courtrooms.

Mandate 5

Summary of new and refurbished court buildings since the establishment of the Service:

- Portlaoise
- Buncrana
- Baltinglass
- Templemore
- Mallow
- Athy
- Cloverhill
- Trim
- Carlow
- Carrickmacross
- Westport
- Limerick Circuit Court
- Arva
- Dundalk
- Borrisokane
- Sligo
- Navan
- Kilrush
- Tubbercurry
- Castlerea Remand Court
- Smithfield Family Law
- Roscrea
- Derrynea
- Loughrea
- Listowel
- Portarlinton
- Rathdowney
- Commercial Court
- Chancery Place, Four Courts
- East Wing, Four Courts
- Ennis
- Castlebar
- Cork Circuit Court



PROVIDING FACILITIES FOR DISABLED COURT USERS

All new or refurbished courthouse projects provide access for people with disabilities. Induction loops are provided in courtrooms for people with hearing difficulties. Disabled access facilities were provided at a number of venues during the year including Castlebar, Navan, Ennis, Cork, Boyle, Granard and Castlepollard. Work was in progress at year end to provide such facilities in Strokestown.

PROVIDING FACILITIES FOR JURORS

A review of facilities for people called for jury service continued during the year. The review examined the arrangements for the formation and composition of jury panels, facilities for jurors in court premises, information currently provided to jurors and other relevant issues. Proposals will be made to the Board for revision of legislation and improvements to facilities, reception arrangements and information disseminated to jury summons recipients in 2005.

The Dublin Circuit Court revised the procedure for calling juries during the year. The change from a fortnightly call to a weekly one reduced the imposition on those members of the public called for jury service. Another successful initiative was the deployment of a member of staff to meet jury panel members when they arrived for jury duty.

PROVIDING FACILITIES FOR MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES IN COURTS

Efforts continued during the year to facilitate the media to report accurately on the work of the courts. The Service is committed to providing facilities tailored to meet local needs and included provision for desks and telephone facilities at many of the venues where projects were completed during the year.

Chapter 4

Our Staff



Our Staff

Our Staff



Change for most people involves moving from the known to the unknown. The future is uncertain and this can adversely affect the competencies, self-worth and coping abilities of the staff of any organisation.

CULTURE

The challenge for the Service is to create an environment where staff accept the need for and commit physical and psychological energy to the change process. Clarity of vision, carefully thought out strategies and well developed business processes will not, of themselves, deliver success. They need to be complemented by a culture where innovation is both encouraged and rewarded and where staff are afforded a genuine involvement in the change process. This poses particular challenges for an organisation like the Service which operates in a highly regulated environment. There is a need to exercise control while at the same time encourage flexibility, innovation and creativity. It is tempting to concentrate on values such as stability, predictability and getting it right. Changing culture requires transformation of purpose and a focus on customers and results. If managers and staff are directly involved in the change programme it is easier to create a participative

and learning culture where continuous change becomes the norm.

The Service places a major emphasis on the power of teamwork and in particular on the value of good leadership as a means of fostering a climate of meaningful staff involvement. Communication remains a key factor in this process. It fosters involvement and ownership. The Service remains committed through its various employee involvement programmes to developing an organisation where communication is recognised as being as much about listening, understanding and demonstrating interest and appreciation, as it is about imparting views and information. The Service appreciates that success in this area depends to a very large extent on the willing co-operation of our staff. Restructuring and change will only succeed if those affected are involved in a meaningful way in its planning and implementation.

The Service continues to develop a learning culture within the organisation. Learning organisations encourage their staff to learn regularly from their work and encourage and reward them for taking their own initiatives. The importance of the partnership model was referred to earlier in this report. Partnership structures have provided a solid basis at all levels of the Service in the move from a hierarchical to an employee involvement culture. In addition, experimentation needs to be the norm as new ideas are tried out and become part of the learning process. The approach of the Service has been very much by way of supporting new projects, some of which have been previously referred to – e.g. the new Commercial Court (see page 49 and the Pilot Drug Court (see page 53).

Our Staff



SUPPORTING OUR STAFF

The Service's training and development programme located within the Human Resources Directorate has been a key enabler of the change and modernisation programme. It has been designed to support the new strategic approach, business planning, performance management, partnership, information technology, customer service and the many other changes. Training and human resource management generally will play a vital enabling role in sustaining the momentum in the future and in preparing the Service to meet new and emerging challenges. The following are some examples of initiatives aimed at supporting our staff :

INDUCTION POLICY

A revised induction policy was put in place during 2004. Each new entrant to the Service is provided with a specially developed induction pack and an opportunity to undertake induction training.

MERIT-BASED PROMOTION

Competency based interviews are now the norm in the Service. Participants are required to demonstrate their skills and aptitudes in a structured manner

under headings of relevance to the particular post. During 2004, a number of internal promotion competitions at all levels were organised and managed. All participants were informed in a timely manner of the outcome of the interview process and panels were established from which successful candidates were promoted as vacancies arose.

HUMAN RESOURCES HELPDESK

The Human Resources Directorate operates a helpdesk for staff and dealt with 184 queries during the year. The facility will be expanded in 2005 with the development of an information service on human resource issues for distribution to all staff. Priority will be given to issues that frequently arise at the helpdesk.

MANAGERS HANDBOOK

A handbook for managers was completed during the year and will be issued in 2005. The handbook has 7 sections including management of new staff, attendance, performance, staff/career development, inappropriate behaviour, occupational health and welfare and business planning.

TIME AND ATTENDANCE SYSTEM

The Service commenced an examination of the application of a time and attendance system during 2004. This system will enable the Service to meet the requirements of the Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997 and allow for a more effective management of the flexi-time system. It will also provide management information on attendance patterns together with a more streamlined method for managing annual leave.

SICK LEAVE

The inputting of sick leave into the Human Resource Management System was finalised in 2004. The provision of a central record of all sick leave enables the Service to undertake an analysis of sick leave patterns and days lost due to illness. Reports on individual staff members' absences and reasons for absences can be readily made available from the system.

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DISABILITY LIAISON OFFICER

The Service continues to designate a member of staff to act as the *Disability Liaison Officer*. In 2004, the officer attended a two day conference organised by the National Council for the Blind of Ireland.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE OFFICER

The Service has engaged the services of an *Employee Assistance Officer* on a shared basis for a number of years. A full time officer will be assigned to the Service in early 2005. This will enable the Service to provide a better quality, more proactive service to staff.

POSITIVE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

A *Positive Working Environment* policy document was circulated to all staff during the year. The document detailed the civil service policy on harassment, sexual harassment and bullying. It also outlined the provisions of the *Employment Equality Act, 1998* in relation to the statutory offences of harassment and sexual harassment. In addition, it briefly outlined the support and assistance available from the

Supporting work life balance

The Service actively supports the Civil Service Equality Unit of the Department of Finance in the promotion of a wide range of family friendly and work life balance schemes. These schemes help employees to combine their work with responsibilities and choices outside of the workplace. The Service has 13 such initiatives in place including worksharing; flexitime; term time; career breaks; paternity leave; special marriage leave; bereavement leave; carers leave; maternity leave; adoptive leave and parental leave. A teleworking/e-working initiative will be tested on a pilot basis in 2005.

Employee Assistance Service to parties who are either making, or the subject of, a complaint of harassment, sexual harassment or bullying and detailed the procedures that should be followed in investigating a complaint.

RETIRED STAFF AND JUDGES

The Service continues to acknowledge the contribution made by retired staff and judges to the operation and management of the courts in Ireland over the years. Functions held in May and November were attended by many serving and retired staff and judges.



STAFF TALENTS OUTSIDE THE WORKPLACE

The determination of management to support staff through a range of new structures and initiatives has been equalled by staff who continue to be actively involved to make them a success. Reference has been made earlier in this Report to the initiatives supported by staff within the workplace environment. Their participation in a variety of initiatives outside the workplace has also contributed to the enhancement of their existing skills and has enabled them develop a range of other skills which serve to improve the quality of the service delivered by the Service. The following examples illustrate the diverse nature of the talents of our staff in this regard:

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EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

The popularity of the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) where participants engage in a series of computer courses in matters such as word processing, database creation and spreadsheet techniques continued during the year. Staff participated in courses in the Irish language with a view to being able to meet the obligations imposed by the Official Languages Act, 2003. Many members of staff undertook courses in legal studies, business studies and a variety of other courses including human resource management and accountancy. Examples include the member of staff awarded a Masters of Science degree from the Open University Faculty of Management, Manufacturing and Technology; solicitors in the Office of the General Solicitor for Minors and Wards of Court who were

awarded diplomas in estate and trust planning and property tax respectively and the several members of staff who qualified as barristers and were called to the Bar of Ireland.

SPORTING ACHIEVEMENTS

The Service is the grateful beneficiary of the team building and communication skills developed by so many of our staff involved in a variety of sporting activities. Examples of success on the sporting field during the year included two members of staff who were part of the team crowned All-Ireland junior champions in Gaelic football.



SOCIAL CLUB

Social events afforded staff many opportunities to meet outside office hours during the year. The Social Club of the Service organised many such events including a summer barbeque and outings to greyhound dog race meetings.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Staff displayed a range of skills in various ways during the year. Their creative writing skills were evident from the many contributions made to *Courts Service News* in the form of reviews of holidays, films and books and varied accounts of events both inside and outside the organisation as they occurred.

The Courts Service choir continued to ensure a high profile for the Service at many social and other events, the highlight being their performance at the Mass for the beginning of the new Legal Year in October.

Communication skills continue to improve thanks to the voluntary efforts of the staff who co-ordinate the popular *Speechcraft* programme. Based on the educational programmes created by Toastmasters International, a worldwide organisation dedicated to developing people as excellent

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communicators and leaders, the programme continues to help staff by emphasising the importance of improving their listening, thinking and speaking skills. The group, based in Dublin, conducted early morning sessions during the year and expanded its client base to include people from outside the organisation.

Many court offices organised events to raise money for charity during the year. Activities such as the *Women's Mini Marathon* and *People in Need* were well supported by staff all around the country. Coffee mornings were organised to raise funds for the Irish Hospice Foundation while shoeboxes were filled with toys to assist *Operation Christmas Child*. In a further gesture of generosity, much needed support for the *Blood Bank* was provided by staff who donated blood regularly.

