



## Table of Contents

<b>Welcome</b>	<b>page</b> 2	<b>7 The Plan</b>	<b>page</b> 18
<b>Foreword</b>	3	<i>Mandate 1</i>	19
<b>Introduction to the Strategic Plan</b>	4	Manage the Courts	19
<b>Members of the Board</b>	5	Developments 2000 - 2002	19
<b>1 Introduction</b>	6	Key Outputs 2002 - 2005	20
Development of the Plan	7	Strategies	21 - 28
<b>2 Mandate of the Courts Service</b>	8	<i>Mandate 2</i>	29
<b>3 Structure of the Courts Service</b>	9	Provide Support Services for the Judges	29
3.1 The Service	9	Developments 2000 - 2002	29
3.2 The Board	9	Key Outputs 2002 - 2005	29
3.3 Functions of the Board	9	Strategies	29 - 31
3.4 Committees of the Board	9	<i>Mandate 3</i>	32
3.5 The Chief Executive	10	Provide Information on the Courts System to the Public	32
3.6 The Management of the Service	10 - 11	Developments 2000 - 2002	32
3.7 The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform	12	Key Outputs 2002 - 2005	33
<b>4 The Judiciary</b>	13	Strategies	33 - 34
<b>5 Environmental Analysis</b>	14	<i>Mandate 4</i>	35
5.1 External Environment	14	Provide, Manage and Maintain Court Buildings	35
5.2 Internal Environment	15	Developments 2000 - 2002	35
5.3 Internal Capability	15	Key Outputs 2002 - 2005	36
<b>6 Mission and Values</b>	16	Strategies	36 - 38
6.1 Mission Statement	16	<i>Mandate 5</i>	39
6.2 Guiding Principles	16	Provide Facilities for Users of the Courts	39
6.3 Values	16 - 17	Developments 2000 - 2002	39
		Key Outputs 2002 - 2005	39
		Strategies	39 - 40
		<b>8 Implementing the Plan</b>	41
		Key Challenges	41 - 42
		<b>Appendix 1</b>	
		<b>Profile of the Courts Services</b>	43
		<b>Appendix 2</b>	
		<b>The Courts System in Ireland</b>	44 - 45
		<b>Appendix 3</b>	
		<b>Structure of the Courts</b>	46
		<b>Appendix 4</b>	
		<b>Organisational Chart</b>	47

## Welcome

**From the Chief Justice.**

**The Hon. Mr. Justice Ronan Keane**

In establishing the Courts Service it was envisaged that a streamlined, effective and forward-looking organisation would evolve and take responsibility for the organisation and administration of our courts.

It would not be an overstatement to say that most of this has taken place and that the improvements to services to the judiciary, practitioners of law and the public have been beyond many expectations.

One of the main tools used by modern, effective organisations is to step away from the day to day work and plan strategically for the medium term. In pursuing its first three-year strategic plan for 2000-2003, the Courts Service has pursued the creation of an expeditious, responsive and inclusive public service.

That pursuit has been attained largely as a result of the sense of partnership not only within the organisation but also with all parts of the legal community and with the myriad of other public bodies with which we do business.

This new plan furthers the desire to achieve a lot more – not just in an aspirational sense but also in a very practical way – through set targets and goals, and performance indicators which will track and guide progression.

I commend this report as a further step in our development of a world-class service, ensuring greater understanding and access to our courts, and efficient and dignified treatment within the administration of the courts system.

November 2002

## Foreword

**By the Hon. Mrs. Justice Susan Denham,  
Judge of the Supreme Court and  
Chairperson of the Courts Service Board**

### Three Year Strategic Plan

The opportunity to plan the future management of the courts is one of the most important tools of change introduced with the Courts Service. To have the facility to plan the path ahead is a golden opportunity. The very process of planning strategic change is a catalyst itself. The implementation of our first Three Year Strategic Plan has seen re-invigoration and the evolution of a modern, vibrant corporation.

In carrying out our functions, of organising court administration, supporting the judiciary, providing court buildings and meeting the needs of court users, we have made significant strides and in so doing we have learnt a great deal. One of the important facts which we have learnt is that we do many things very well indeed. It is clear that the corporation contains an abundance of talent. Throughout our organisation people are leading change. Changes in the local areas of work are being brought about by local staff. Further, as challenges arise skills are being used and developed to meet future needs with creative flair. We have also learnt that we have many friends in other institutions and in the professions of law who are supportive of our great aims.

The first Three Year Strategic Plan 2000-2003 has brought us along the road of change. It helped us to reach many of our 127 goals for improvement. This plan, our 'next step' strategy, will compliment recent changes, and lead to a cohesive and calibrated provision of top class services to the judiciary and court users.

In some areas we have taken great strides. In areas such as court buildings and the introduction of electronic media into the court environment the needs of decades are being addressed. These are readily apparent in magnificently restored and modernised courthouses around the country and in the first steps we have taken towards eCourts in Ireland. We are well on the way to having the ability to computerise, store and process the data relating to three quarters of a million matters each year. These developments have enabled the provision of more information on the courts, especially through a growing base of statistics and a series of publications. All of this has been coordinated and published by our dynamic Information Office and Courts Media Relations Service.

Enter a refurbished court building today and you will experience 21st century standards in a heritage location. This has been brought about by the planning and enactment of the last strategic plan. Our future work is outlined in this our second plan. Its success will depend on a continued effort to achieve the goal of a world class court service. The process of partnership among the staff of the Courts Service has enabled the immense changes brought about in the last few years. We look forward to maintaining and developing this shared purpose both within our corporation and in the community. We look forward and plan for a world class model court service. This plan is built on our recent successes and is the blueprint for our future achievements. I recommend this plan to all. It is a plan which sees change as a challenge, and which proposes meeting that challenge with this dynamic programme.

November 2002



## Introduction to the Strategic Plan

**By the Chief Executive  
Mr. P.J. Fitzpatrick**

The Courts Service is now three years in existence and during that short period we have established a strong corporate identity both with the range of people and groups who deal with us and with the public generally. We are confident also that during that time we have met and responded to the confidence placed in us by Government when setting us up in November 1999.

We were very aware at the time of our formation that a considerable number of shortcomings had been identified with the existing institutional arrangements, with the management structure, the state of our courthouses, the lack of modern information technology systems and the extent and manner of our interaction with the public. Our first Strategic Plan published in 2000 set out an ambitious range of actions to seek to fulfil the mandates given us by the Government and to respond to the identified shortcomings. In the intervening period we have made enormous strides in relation to almost every one of the 127 objectives we set for ourselves then. Our building programme has benefited from considerably increased investment right across the country. We have developed our Information Technology infrastructure from a very basic level to a position comparable to any in the public sector. We have put unified staff structures in place and established regional structures in order to ensure that relevant decisions are taken at the appropriate level. Our communication with members of the public and key groups has improved enormously. We have also worked closely with members of the judiciary in implementing initiatives sought by them and in providing a wide range of supports to them. There have been many more developments in all the key areas and reference to some are made in this Plan.

Our success could not have been achieved without the support of a considerable number of groups and people. Of particular importance have been our staff who have embraced all the change required following our formation and who have actively participated in every initiative. The Board of the Service has assiduously pursued its policy-making role and demonstrated strong leadership throughout the three years as well as wholeheartedly supporting and interesting itself in all the developments as they took place. The judiciary at every level have had major input, whether as members of the Board, participating in various committees or showing their support in a wide variety of ways. We have been supported also by the legal profession and the many other groups with which we interact on an ongoing basis as we have strived to develop the Service into one which delivers a 'world class' service. It would not have been possible to make progress at the pace and across the range of levels without the considerable support of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and his staff and I am very grateful for this. Support too has been willingly given by the Minister for Finance and his staff who have maintained close contact with the Service both in the period before its establishment and since.

We have set ourselves very challenging objectives and targets in our second Strategic Plan. I feel it is important that we acknowledge what has been achieved in the first three years of our existence but that we do not dwell unduly on it. We need to maintain the same pace of implementing change while consolidating the excellent traditional values which have brought us thus far. I look forward to these challenges and I know that I can again rely on the goodwill, hard work and cooperation of all those involved in making the next three years equally successful.

November 2002

## Members of the Board

3 years commencing 9th November, 2002.



The Hon. Mrs. Justice Susan Denham, Chairperson, Judge of the Supreme Court. Nominated by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.



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



The Hon. Mr. Justice John Murray, 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 David Anderson, Judge of the District Court. Elected by the ordinary judges of the District Court.



Mr. P.J. Fitzpatrick, Chief Executive.



Mr. Conor Maguire, 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. Michael Mellet, Deputy Secretary General, Department of Justice, Equality and 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.

## 1. Introduction

This is the second Strategic Plan to be developed and produced by the Courts Service since our establishment in November 1999. The Courts Service Act, 1998 which is the legislative basis for the establishment of the Service requires us to prepare and submit to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform a strategic plan every three years. This Plan covers the period from 2002 to 2005. The purpose of the strategy is to map out the direction of the Service for the next three years as well as the scope of our activities while being cognisant of the environment in which we operate and the resources available to us. By so doing, it enables the Board, management and staff to focus on the major goals and targets to be achieved and provides the underpinning for the organisational initiatives to be undertaken as well as our operational effectiveness.

As before, the Plan takes into account a number of key factors:

- ◆ the constitutional role, responsibilities and independence of the judiciary
- ◆ the 6 Reports and 2 Working Papers produced by the Working Group on a Courts Commission
- ◆ the Programme for Government published in June 2002
- ◆ the role and position of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform
- ◆ the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*
- ◆ government policy on bilingualism, particularly as set out in section 7 of the Courts Service Act, 1998
- ◆ the Statement of Strategy of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
- ◆ the dynamic and constantly evolving responsibilities and role of the courts arising from new legislation as well as from a changing environment, both internal and external
- ◆ the Government's strategy to realise the potential of the information society as reflected in the strategy document *New Connections*
- ◆ government policy in areas such as equality and diversity
- ◆ the National Development Plan 2000 - 2006;
- ◆ views of users
- ◆ policy documents approved by the Board.

In accordance with the underlying principles of the Strategic Management Initiative, our Strategic Plan will also take account of:

- ◆ the contribution which the Service can make to national economic and social development
- ◆ the provision of better, high quality, services
- ◆ ensuring the most beneficial, effective and efficient use of the resources of the Service.

It will be recalled that the Courts Service was established in November 1999 against a backdrop of serious shortcomings which had been identified by the Working Group on a Courts Commission whose work led directly to the establishment of the Service. These institutional shortcomings included:

- the Irish courts system had remained largely unaltered since its establishment in 1924
- there has been an enormous increase in civil and criminal litigation
- there was seen to be an unacceptable delay in the determination of cases
- there were instances of overworked and poorly organised staff
- there was evidence of a lack of adequate back-up and support services to judges
- there was an absence of adequate systems for communicating information and of modern computer and information systems to support the increasing workload of the courts.

The Working Group also pointed out a number of factors which they saw as contributing significantly to the problems within the court structure including:

- lack of clear management structures with accountability and responsibility
- lack of clear reporting structures
- lack of adequate performance measurements;
- inadequate understanding of and utilisation of technology



## 1. Introduction

- an absence of adequate planning, with the emphasis on day-to-day planning and procedures
- fragmentation of the administrative systems within and between each of the courts
- minimum training and development of staff
- lack of professional management support to any of the above requirements
- lack of financial information on the operation of the courts
- an absence of strategic planning;
- no annual reports
- inadequate information service to the public
- limited statistical information in a meaningful format.

This formed much of the agenda for the Service on its formation and which was sought to be addressed in our first Strategic Plan. Some 127 strategies and objectives were included in that Plan and we have made significant progress on almost every single target set. It is proposed to make mention of some of the progress made under each of our legislative mandates as we set out our objectives and targets for the next three years. These objectives and targets are intended to be as challenging as those we set for ourselves in our first Strategic Plan.

### Development of the Plan

The Plan has been developed in accordance with the guidelines approved by Government and, as with our first Strategy, it has been developed using a comprehensive consultation process and with an emphasis on partnership with the staff. All our main stakeholders, including groups such as the Bar Council and the Law Society, Chief State Solicitor, Attorney General, Legal Aid Board, Victim Support,

Rape Crisis Centre, An Garda Síochána, Irish Prison Service, Equality Authority, National Disability Authority as well as government departments and agencies were invited to make submissions and the response was very satisfactory. Internally, we have placed considerable emphasis on developing the Plan in partnership with our staff who will, ultimately, be responsible for its implementation. A number of supporting approaches were utilised:

- ◆ the Central Partnership Committee has had a key role in the Plan's development
- ◆ a representative group of staff participated in focus groups
- ◆ all staff were invited individually to make proposals for inclusion
- ◆ each office, coordinated by the manager, reviewed the previous Plan and considered new or revised initiatives for the new Plan
- ◆ all the senior managers were involved in strategy workshops.

The combined internal and external input is reflected in the Plan and it is to be hoped that, equally, there will be common ownership of its implementation.

## 2. Mandate of the Courts Service

*The mandates and functions of the Courts*

*Service remain as set out in the Courts Service Act, 1998:*

- (a) to manage the courts,
- (b) to provide support services for the judges,
- (c) to provide information on the courts system to the public,
- (d) to provide, manage and maintain court buildings, and
- (e) to provide facilities for users of the courts.

*The structure of this Plan is centred around these mandates and our ultimate objective of providing a world class service to all users of our services.*



## 3. Structure of The Courts Service

### 3.1 The Service

The Service is a body corporate and, pursuant to Section 4 of the Courts Service Act, 1998, is independent in the performance of its functions.

- ◆ a nominee of the Minister representing consumers of the services provided by the courts,
- ◆ a nominee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and
- ◆ a nominee of the Minister, following consultation, of a person with knowledge and experience in commerce, finance or administration.

### 3.2 The Board

The Board of the Service consists of 17 people and is chaired by the Chief Justice or another judge of the Supreme Court nominated by him/her. Section 11 of the 1998 Act specifies the composition of the Board to be:

- ◆ the Chief Justice or a Supreme Court judge nominated by him/her
- ◆ a judge of the Supreme Court elected by the ordinary judges of that court
- ◆ the President of the High Court or a judge of that court nominated by him/her
- ◆ a judge of the High Court elected by the ordinary judges of that court
- ◆ the President of the Circuit Court or a judge of that court nominated by him/her
- ◆ a judge of the Circuit Court elected by the ordinary judges of that court
- ◆ the President of the District Court or a judge of that court nominated by him/her
- ◆ a judge of the District Court elected by the ordinary judges of that court
- ◆ a judge nominated by the Chief Justice in respect of expertise in a specific area of court business
- ◆ the Chief Executive
- ◆ a practising barrister nominated by the Chairman of the Council of the Bar of Ireland,
- ◆ a practising solicitor nominated by the President of the Law Society of Ireland,
- ◆ an elected staff member,
- ◆ an officer of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform,

### 3.3 Functions of the Board

The functions of the Board under the legislation are to determine policy in relation to the Service and to oversee the implementation of policy by the Chief Executive.

In carrying out its functions the Board shall have regard to:

- ◆ the resources of the Service for the purposes of such performance and the need to secure the most beneficial, effective and efficient use of such resources, and
- ◆ any policy or objective of the Government or a Minister of the Government insofar as it may affect or relate to a function of the Service.

### 3.4 Committees of the Board

Three committees of the Board have been established. The Finance and Audit Committee has assisted greatly in the formulation of policies for the implementation of modern financial systems for the Service and the reform and modernisation of arrangements for the management of court funds. The Board is presently considering the establishment of a separate Audit Committee. The Family Law Court Development Committee has addressed issues of policy on development of family law courts, improved family law court facilities and the reporting of family law cases as well as information to the public and practitioners on family law and the production of meaningful statistics. The District Court Committee has reviewed District Court areas and districts and prepared proposals for the most radical reorganisation of District Court districts since the formation of the State.

### 3. Structure of The Courts Service

#### 3.5 The Chief Executive

The Chief Executive is the Accounting Officer for the Courts Service and has responsibility for the management and control of the staff as well as the administration and business of the Service and reports to the Board in relation to the performance of these functions.

#### 3.6 The Management of the Service

The Courts Service, under the Chief Executive, is organised in seven Directorates as follows:

◆ *Director of Operations and Chief Registrar for the Supreme and High Courts.*

The responsibility of this Directorate includes:

- ◆ The Supreme and High Court offices and support services to the judiciary of those courts
- ◆ The business of the various offices of the Supreme and High Court including the Central Office, Examiner's Office, General Solicitor's Office, Official Assignee's Office, Probate Office and Taxing Masters' Office.

◆ *Director of Operations for the Circuit and District Courts.*

Responsibilities of this Directorate include:

- ◆ the 42 District Court offices and the 26 Circuit Court offices throughout the country
- ◆ support services to the Circuit and District Court judges
- ◆ accommodation requirements for all sittings of the Circuit and District Courts
- ◆ reviewing Areas and Districts
- ◆ acting as a support and referral service to court offices on procedural matters.

◆ *Director of Corporate Services.*

Responsibilities here include:

- ◆ the Information Office, including a Statistics Unit and a Publications Unit (the Annual Report, the Courts Service Newsletter, family law bulletins, information leaflets, booklets etc.)
- ◆ continuing development of our website
- ◆ media relations
- ◆ information technology encompassing the provision of modern, high quality and leading-edge information and communication systems and a nationwide infrastructure to support the management and administration of the Service
- ◆ internal audit (for administrative purposes only)
- ◆ judicial support including support for the Judicial Studies Institute, the provision of enhanced research and secretarial facilities, the judges' intranet and support for all members of the judiciary on a range of issues through a dedicated Judicial Support Unit
- ◆ Freedom of Information
- ◆ secretariat functions involving support to the Board and the Chief Executive Officer
- ◆ liaison with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and central coordination of the Service.

◆ *The Director of Estates and Buildings.*

This Directorate has responsibility for:

- ◆ capital projects involving planning, developing and carrying out capital and refurbishment works as well as arranging the lease or rental of accommodation
- ◆ preparation and costing of capital business plan
- ◆ transfer of courthouses, currently in the ownership of Local Authorities and the Office of Public Works, to the Service
- ◆ fitting, equipping and maintaining courthouses and other court and office buildings to modern standards
- ◆ general management of the Four Courts complex

## 3. Structure of The Courts Service

- ◆ ensuring the ongoing application of best safety, health and welfare standards in all buildings and offices
- ◆ ensure that all premises are adequately equipped to meet the communications needs of the Service e.g. phone, data and, where appropriate, video-link facilities.
- ◆ *The Director of Finance and Accountant of the Courts of Justice*  
Responsibilities here include:
  - ◆ as Accountant of the Courts of Justice responsible for management and investment of High Court funds
  - ◆ financial accounting and control, including the production of annual financial statements, in respect of all financial activities of the Service
  - ◆ financial management and planning, including the provision and interpretation of financial management information
  - ◆ ensuring value for money in the utilisation of resources
  - ◆ developing and implementing financial controls and procedures that comply with best accounting practice
  - ◆ putting in place best practice arrangements for the management of all court funds
  - ◆ managing and accounting for all monies collected through Circuit and District Court offices, such as fines, fees, bail etc.
- ◆ *The Director of Human Resources*  
Responsibilities of this Directorate include:
  - ◆ change management issues including business planning, performance management, internal communication and customer service
- ◆ organisational strategy and development
- ◆ partnership arrangements
- ◆ training and development of staff
- ◆ recruitment, promotion, competitions, pay and pensions, personnel administration, discipline, grievance, and other Personnel functions
- ◆ industrial relations and the Conciliation and Arbitration scheme
- ◆ developing and implementing policies in areas such as equality, diversity, bullying and sexual harassment
- ◆ employee assistance support
- ◆ Data Protection
- ◆ judicial training in information technology.
- ◆ *The Director of Reform and Development*  
This Directorate was established in 2002 and has responsibility for:
  - ◆ coordination of initiatives and proposals for changes in legislation on courts administration, modernisation and procedures
  - ◆ provision of administrative support to the Working Group established by the Board to review the courts jurisdictions
  - ◆ supporting the Rules Committees in modernising and simplifying court rules and terminology
  - ◆ assessment of the implications of information and communications technology and eGovernment initiatives for court rules and procedures
  - ◆ the Office of Wards of Court.

### 3. Structure of The Courts Service

#### 3.7 The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform

While responsibility for the day-to-day management of the courts transferred under the 1998 Act to the Service, the Minister continues to be politically accountable to the Oireachtas and has a formal role in certain areas. The Service is required to report to the Minister on its activities on a yearly basis and the Minister will lay a copy of this report before each of the Houses of the Oireachtas. The Service must, of course, ensure that the Minister is provided in a timely and effective manner with all necessary information to discharge his/her ministerial accountability and responsibility in relation to the Service.

### 4. The Judiciary

The judiciary constitute the judicial organ of government pursuant to the provisions of the Constitution and a primary role of the Courts Service is to provide administrative support for the judiciary in the exercise of their powers and functions.

## 5. Environmental Analysis

### 5.1 External Environment

A very great number of individuals, groups and organisations interact with the Service on an ongoing basis. These include;

#### 1. Parties to court actions/cases

- ◆ litigants in civil actions
- ◆ accused in criminal cases
- ◆ parties to family law proceedings
- ◆ criminal cases involving children
- ◆ licensing applicants

#### 2. People not parties to actions

- ◆ witnesses in court actions
- ◆ victims of violence
- ◆ specialist witnesses

#### 3. Professionals

- ◆ barristers
- ◆ solicitors
- ◆ law centres
- ◆ probation officers
- ◆ gardaí
- ◆ prison officers
- ◆ medical profession
- ◆ health boards
- ◆ law clerks
- ◆ cost accountants

#### 4. Individuals and professionals availing of the services provided by the Courts Service and including:

- ◆ probate matters
- ◆ matters involving bankruptcy
- ◆ Land Registry issues
- ◆ wards of court

#### 5. Public Representatives

- ◆ members of the Dáil and Seanad
- ◆ local public representatives

#### 6. State Bodies

- ◆ government departments and offices, notably the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Finance

- ◆ local authorities
- ◆ health boards

#### 7. Other Groups and Individuals

- ◆ the media
- ◆ voluntary groups
- ◆ advocacy and support groups
- ◆ schools
- ◆ trade unions

Even since the establishment of the Courts Service at the end of 1999 it has been noticeable that the pace of change in the environment in which we operate has been enormous. To be effective, we need, firstly, to be in a position to identify these changes and their implications for us and, secondly, to be in a position to respond to them. The types of change being encountered by the Service include:

- ◆ Information Technology - the deployment of modern information and communications technologies throughout the Service has introduced and accelerated an enormous degree of change both in the manner in which we do our business and the analysis of business done
- ◆ continuing dramatic changes in social relationships and family models
- ◆ emphasis on responsibility and accountability at a range of levels
- ◆ legislative changes impacting on the business of the courts
- ◆ continuing increase in the recourse to litigation
- ◆ public expectation regarding the quality and timeliness of services provided
- ◆ government commitment in its Programme for Government to reform of the courts system
- ◆ other government policy initiatives reflected in the Programme, including equality, disability, the Irish language and updating of the legislation on health and safety
- ◆ the range of initiatives relating to restructuring of the courts and increasing efficiency of litigation and other court processes, including the reports of the Committee on Court Practice and Procedure, the Company Law Review Group, the Personal Injuries Assessment Board, the Motor Insurance Advisory Board, as well as developments in court reform and service delivery in other jurisdictions

## 5. Environmental Analysis

- ◆ public finances
- ◆ the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*
- ◆ increasing number and influence of support and interest groups
- ◆ international developments and links with other jurisdictions
- ◆ the requirement to develop and implement ePublic Services, facilitating the provision of information and services electronically
- ◆ increasing diversity of the population and, consequently, the users of our services.

organisation as a whole and to the discrete elements within it whether it be information technology, financial management, training and development, business planning, performance, human resources, information, infrastructure and others

- ◆ the continuing focus on creating and maintaining a common corporate identity right throughout the organisation
- ◆ the Government's Quality Customer Service initiative and its emphasis on the type and process of service provided
- ◆ the partnership approach which is a core element of government policy and its implications in terms of consultation with and involvement of staff at all levels and locations.

### 5.2 Internal Environment

The three years since our establishment has involved enormous change, considerable movement of staff and the need to adapt to new systems and structures. The response of the staff to these challenges has been quite magnificent and is reflected in the considerable progress achieved in the interim. The very positive response from the judiciary reflected in their willingness to actively participate in committees set up to examine and report on a variety of relevant issues has greatly assisted the entire change programme. We have also been supported by the legal profession and their representatives and by the very many groups interacting with us on an ongoing basis. The support of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Finance has also been critical in the progress made since our establishment.

If we are to successfully meet the demanding and ambitious targets set out in this Plan we will need to reflect the same flexibility and adaptability as heretofore. As with our external environment, the internal environment continues to reflect considerable ongoing change:

- ◆ the increased emphasis on a strategic approach to the business of the

### 5.3 Internal Capability

Commitment and flexibility at all levels within the organisation are critical to us in meeting our mandate and being responsive to an increasingly dynamic external environment. These have already been evident in abundance over the past three years and will continue in importance over the period covered by this Plan and will include:

- ◆ continuing commitment to ensuring a professional, highly-trained and motivated staff
- ◆ developing an environment which facilitates and encourages creativity, commitment and a widespread input from staff
- ◆ continuous review of internal systems and structures
- ◆ being proactive in identifying change needed and being willing to respond positively
- ◆ monitoring and evaluating on a continuous basis our capacity and effectiveness in meeting our strategic objectives and responding to changing demands
- ◆ recognising the importance of our users and our role in the community and society and ensuring that the service we provide is sensitive to differing needs
- ◆ willingness to extend our use of new technologies to further develop and enhance our capability to provide continuously improving levels of service
- ◆ continuing to welcome the active participation of judges in organisational initiatives impacting on the administration of justice.



## 6. Mission and Values

### 6.1 Mission Statement

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

### 6.2 Guiding Principles

To meet our mandate and to fulfil our Mission, the Service will continue to be guided by certain fundamental principles which were originally enunciated in our first Plan and which will underpin all our operations:

- ◆ highest quality service to the judiciary and the public
- ◆ prompt and effective service which is responsive to the needs of users
- ◆ public accountability and value for money
- ◆ equality, fairness and integrity and
- ◆ public trust and confidence.

The focus over the lifetime of this Strategic Plan will be on ensuring that the administration of justice, as effected in the courts, is facilitated by the Service; seeking to consistently give top class service; developing a highly trained and motivated staff; having a collective sense of the organisation's underlying purpose; consistently searching for improvement, while evaluating our own performance on an ongoing basis; and placing a strong emphasis on participation and collaboration with judges, staff and with the many professional and other bodies and individuals that interact with the Service.

### 6.3 Values

Since our establishment we have sought to reflect in our initiatives and in our operations, both internally and externally, a series of values which had been identified by our staff in developing our first Plan. These values were seen then, and continue to be acknowledged, as essential to our long-term success both in the manner in which we interact internally and the manner in which the Service is reflected by us to the wider community. They must be central to how we conduct our business over the next three years.

#### 6.3.1 Commitment to Excellence

We will seek to provide the very highest quality service in all areas of activity, both internally and externally.

## 6. Mission and Values

### 6.3.2 Customer Focus

In our earlier analysis of our external environment, we identified the wide range of group and individuals with which we interact during the course of our work. A continuing and ever-present value will be that we will handle our contacts with all with whom we interact in a sensitive and professional manner.

### 6.3.3 Valuing our staff as our greatest resource

The developments and progress made by the Service since its establishment three years ago has been facilitated to a very great extent by our staff right throughout the country. Ensuring that we retain this level of commitment requires a structured approach to ensuring effective communication and involvement through partnership and other means. We need to continue to enhance our commitment to training and development and to ensure that good performance is acknowledged and recognised.

### 6.3.4 Teamwork

The range of strategies identified in this Plan is unlikely to be implemented effectively unless all staff feel that responsibility is shared across all levels and areas within the Service. The concept of teamwork, in its real sense, will need to permeate all our operations.

### 6.3.5 Unity of Purpose

Associated with teamwork is a shared common understanding of the purpose of our organisation and its impact on society and the critical importance of an efficient and effective service at all levels.

### 6.3.6 Fairness and Transparency

We will continue to operate in a manner which is open to scrutiny and which will emphasise fairness and equity.

### 6.3.7 Professionalism

In all our dealings both internally and with our customers and the wider community we will set and seek to maintain the highest professional standards. This places a premium on matters such as the procedures we operate, the standards we set, our efficiency, our willingness to assess our own performance and the training and development we put in place for our staff.

### 6.3.8 Willingness to Change

We will constantly and honestly review the performance of the organisation and the quality of the service we provide and embrace and promote the necessary change to ensure our ongoing effectiveness.

## 7. The Plan

The Strategic Plan is intended to be a forward looking document that serves as our framework for action over the next three years. We have structured the Plan around the framework of the five statutory mandates to ensure that there is a constant linkage between the obligations and responsibilities placed on us by the legislation and the actual strategies proposed.

It is critical too that the emphasis is placed on implementation of the Plan and the presentation of each of the strategies has a performance indicator explicitly associated with it. In line too with our commitment to transparency and accountability we have prefaced each mandate and its associated strategies with some highlights of what we have achieved since our establishment in the context of our first Plan.

Once again the strategies produced in this Plan will be implemented through the annual business plans produced by each Directorate and Unit in 2003 and following years.

# Mandate 1

## Manage the Courts

The single most important function of the Service is to manage the day to day work of the courts and the court offices. This work and the environment in which we operate has changed considerably in recent years. We are conscious that this environment is influenced by a considerable number of external factors. The factors identified in our first Plan as impacting on our workload remain relevant and include:

- ◆ the number of civil cases initiated
- ◆ the number of cases proceeding to trial or hearing
- ◆ the nature, length and complexity of cases
- ◆ legislative initiatives and their impact on the range and type of criminal proceedings and civil actions
- ◆ procedural changes such as alterations in jurisdiction or the manner in which remedies may be sought.

Our capacity to fulfil this mandate while adapting to the ever changing environment is influenced by our ability to acquire and retain resources, to put the appropriate supporting mechanisms in place, to avail of modern technology and, particularly, to maintain a highly motivated workforce.

## Developments 2000 - 2002

There has been a very sizeable number of developments in this area since the establishment of the Service at the end of 1999. There was a very smooth transition from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to the newly formed Service. Management and administrative structures reflecting a unified staff structure have been set up and consolidated at both central and regional levels. Each of the seven Directorates is now fully functioning and a regional structure comprising seven

small offices structured along the lines of the Circuit Court circuits is now in place. The objective in setting up the regional offices was to ensure that responsibilities which were more appropriate to being performed at a regional or local level would be devolved to those levels. Their existence also allows us to offer a more immediate and localised response to the needs of our users.

The period has seen considerable emphasis in the areas of staff training and development. The new Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) which is designed to ensure that the work, performance, career and development needs of staff are managed and developed in the interests of staff, the Service and users is now in place following an extensive organisational wide training programme. The system is actively supported by a comprehensive ongoing training programme for all staff. It is worth noting that in 2001 almost €800,000 was spent on training compared with €70,000 in 1998. PMDS feeds into the business planning process which is now operational in every office and this in turn feeds into and is informed by the Strategic Plan.

In common with other Civil Service Departments and public bodies, we put in place a Partnership structure consisting of management and staff and which is designed to allow staff at all levels to have a meaningful input into a range of organisational issues. The Central Committee is chaired by the Chief Executive and has had a major role in advancing matters such as the Customer Service Action Plan, the Training and Development Plan, Performance Management, Work Sharing and Identification Cards. It has also proved a very useful forum for discussing matters of mutual interest such as accommodation, health and safety and many more.

The financial area has seen enormous progress over the past three years. New governance and management arrangements have been put in place for the more than €760m of court funds. This includes the establishment of an Investment Committee and the appointment of independent investment advisers.

## Mandate 1

Excellent progress has also been made in the computerising of the accounting functions in the Circuit and District courts, the first pilot sites having come on stream in December 2002. Financial management practices right throughout the organisation are also undergoing major reform.

An annual Administrative Budget was agreed with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Finance for the first time in 2001 and revised and renewed for 2002. This allows considerably greater flexibility as well as accountability in the manner in which our budget is spent.

A notable achievement also was the smooth changeover to the Euro of all court operations on 1 January 2002.

In the area of information technology, our five year strategy entitled 'eCourts' was published in February 2001 and this lays the foundation for the deployment of modern, high quality and leading edge information and communication systems as well as providing the underlying technical platform for the implementation of government policy in relation to the development of the information society and the future development of electronic services such as efilings. Significant progress has been made in implementing key components of the strategy such as:

- ◆ deployment of flexible local and wide area networks throughout the Service
- ◆ the deployment of modern office productivity tools to all members of staff
- ◆ implementation of the Criminal Case Management System
- ◆ development and implementation of interim systems in a number of operational areas to meet specific business requirements
- ◆ enhancement of the Courts Service website

- ◆ continuous development and enhancement of information technology facilities for judges through the judges' intranet
- ◆ enhanced capability to provide reliable and meaningful statistical and management information
- ◆ implementation of a new courts accounting system.

On the courts operational front committees of the Board have been established in a number of areas. One of these committees has been active in reviewing District Court areas, districts and venues and the Board approved its proposals for a major reorganisation of districts to align them with county boundaries to the greatest extent possible and to align offices with districts.

*The Board will continue to put in place arrangements, such as the establishment of the Working Group to Review Court Jurisdictions, to review the effective operation of the courts.*

Other notable developments under this mandate included:

- the establishment and evaluation of the Pilot Drug Court
- a Family Law Recording project
- progress in relation to dealing with family law in a sensitive manner was made in all three jurisdictions
- establishment of user groups for the Children's Court in Dublin and for the criminal work of the Dublin Metropolitan District Court
- procedural changes in the areas of funds management to facilitate implementation of the new modernised trustee investment regime
- reforms in procedure and court practice by rule were initiated in the areas of committee fees and conveyancing practice.

### Key Outputs 2002 – 2005

- ◆ persons seeking a legal remedy are provided with an efficient, sensitive and user-friendly court service with the minimum of delay
- ◆ an emphasis on training, development and empowerment of staff with a view to maximising the efficiency and effectiveness of individual offices and the organisation

## Strategic Plan 2002 - 2005

### Mandate 1

- ◆ implementation of information technology and financial strategies and systems which facilitate the effective operation of the courts and accountability in relation to our business
- ◆ the introduction of business process change to make optimal use of technology and other facilities that will provide improved customer service and better value for money
- ◆ advance and coordinate the ongoing change management process in the Service.

#### Strategies

*1. To ensure that the skills and competencies required for the effective operation of the Service are identified and made available through targeted training and education programmes*

#### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ provide focused programmes of training for all staff reflecting organisational and individual needs and priorities
- ◆ develop appropriate on-the-job training
- ◆ develop a policy on further education and refund of fees reflecting both the needs of the organisation and the development requirements of staff.

#### Performance Indicators

- ⊗ structured review on an annual basis of all role profile forms returned by staff
- ⊗ annual programmes of training informed by role profile forms as well as the strategic needs of the Service
- ⊗ a regional and local approach to the provision of training in place from 2002
- ⊗ a partnership approach adopted to training and development
- ⊗ policy on further education and refund of fees agreed before end March 2003

- ⊗ annual review of impact of training on the organisation to be presented to the Chief Executive and Senior Management Team.

*2. Ensure an effective business planning process across the Service*

#### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ all units within the Service to complete an annual business plan
- ◆ put in place a structured review process for all business plans.

#### Performance Indicators

- ⊗ all business plans to be completed before mid January each year
- ⊗ plans to be developed using a participative and team process in each work area
- ⊗ business plans to be reviewed twice yearly in a process involving the Chief Executive and Senior Management Team.

*3. Develop and put in place a Human Resources Strategy which supports the organisational strategies in this Plan*

#### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ in consultation with staff develop a human resources strategy for the Service which supports the implementation of the organisational strategy
- ◆ support an environment which guarantees dignity at work for all staff
- ◆ create and maintain a positive and fulfilling work environment
- ◆ support managers and staff in the effective operation of offices
- ◆ ensure the effective operation of the Performance Management and Development System (PMDs).

#### Performance Indicators

- ⊗ utilising the partnership process develop a HR strategy before end June 2003
- ⊗ the HR strategy to cover areas such as devolution of responsibility and accountability, equality, diversity, training, recruitment and retention, mobility, partnership and performance. Account also to be

## Mandate 1

taken of matters such as leadership styles, partnership and team approaches in the workplace

- ⚙️ appoint an Equality Officer and a Diversity Officer to oversee the implementation of the relevant initiatives in those areas
- ⚙️ review on an ongoing basis and in a structured manner the staffing and support needs of individual offices
- ⚙️ develop and distribute a staff handbook which sets out the relevant issues and procedures relevant to their working conditions and employment before end November 2002
- ⚙️ develop and issue a managers' handbook giving guidance to managers in their handling of organisational and staff issues before June 2003
- ⚙️ reorient the human resource function to a more strategic and support focus
- ⚙️ implement a new computerised Human Resource Management System before end 2003
- ⚙️ initiate the development of a comprehensive personnel and skills database
- ⚙️ ensure before end March 2003 and subsequently on an ongoing basis that staff are fully briefed on matters relating to bullying and harassment and dignity at work and that appropriate policies are in place
- ⚙️ provide appropriate training for line managers
- ⚙️ finalise PMDS training before end of January 2003
- ⚙️ support managers and staff in the effective implementation of PMDS.

*4. Ensure to facilitate and cooperate with Government initiatives requiring input from the Courts Service*

#### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ legislative initiatives impacting on the Service will be put in place without delay

- ◆ due regard will be had to Government policy

#### Performance Indicators

- ⚙️ cooperate with and make the necessary input to the Penalty Points initiative relating to road traffic offences
- ⚙️ assist the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment in advancing the work of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board.

*5. Ensure an effective means of communication and cooperation with other Government Departments and Offices in relation to functions impacting on the work of the Service*

#### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ develop structured relationships with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Finance in relation to the requirements of the Service and the judiciary
- ◆ take a proactive role in ensuring that issues impacting on the courts and the Courts Service are taken into consideration when formulating policy or legislative proposals
- ◆ develop and maintain links with agencies in the criminal justice system to ensure cohesion in the relevant areas of the administration of justice.

#### Performance Indicators

- ⚙️ an agreed protocol with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in relation to strategy, finance, personnel, policy and other issues coming within the remit of the Minister
- ⚙️ assist the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in relation to improvements to the criminal justice system including the proposals in the Programme for Government
- ⚙️ a continuing positive working relationship with the Department of Finance
- ⚙️ included by Departments for consultation purposes in relation to proposed policy or legislative changes
- ⚙️ liaise with relevant Government Departments in progressing implementation of legislative reform initiatives identified or formulated in respect of the Wardship jurisdiction of the courts
- ⚙️ take an active role in developing and coordinating structured lines of communication with other bodies in the criminal justice area, particularly An Garda Síochána and the Prisons Service



## Strategic Plan 2002 - 2005

### Mandate 1

- ⚙ examine, in conjunction with the Prisons Service, the possibility of introducing video link/conferencing between courts and prisons for certain court business
- ⚙ review the operation of the courts in Cloverhill and Castlerea with a view to determining the feasibility of extending the arrangements to other venues.

*6. Advance and facilitate the strategic management process in the Service and the implementation of this Plan*

#### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ assign specific responsibility for the implementation of each of the strategies in this Plan
- ◆ review implementation on an ongoing basis
- ◆ cooperate with and facilitate the introduction of all further strategic management initiatives.

#### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ responsibility for strategies assigned to individual Directors as part of the annual business planning process
- ⚙ structured review of progress in implementing the Plan
- ⚙ ensure timely participation in Civil and Public Service wide change initiatives.

*7. Support, develop and advance the partnership process throughout the Service*

#### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ extend the partnership process to include regional structures and regional representation
- ◆ further develop the scope of topics which might usefully be addressed in a partnership context
- ◆ ensure the widest possible input – geographical, grade and gender – into the partnership process
- ◆ develop the ethos of partnership and teamwork in each office.

#### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ regional partnership structures to be in place by end June 2003
- ⚙ annual review of programme of topics to be considered by the Central Partnership Committee
- ⚙ all partnership committees to be balanced on a geographical, grade and gender basis
- ⚙ training for all grades to include a module on teamwork and partnership.

*8. Have in place processes and procedures which ensure that the quality of service provided by every office is delivered in an efficient, effective and sensitive manner*

#### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ in consultation with staff, complete and publish our first Customer Service Action Plan
- ◆ identify the standard of service to be delivered across the Service
- ◆ identify and develop opportunities for cooperation with relevant external bodies
- ◆ implement all objectives set out in that plan
- ◆ ensure timely and efficient processing of all documents including warrants and other documents essential to the justice system.

#### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ plan completed and published before end November 2002
- ⚙ Quality Customer Service Officer appointed before end of March 2003 and whose main role will be to oversee and coordinate implementation of the plan
- ⚙ implementation of the plan formally reviewed on an annual basis
- ⚙ as part of the reviews ensure a widespread input from users of our services
- ⚙ improve interaction between Circuit and District Court offices and engage in dialogue with the judiciary to develop proposals to improve efficiency in court offices
- ⚙ in consultation with the judiciary, further develop standardised court orders and consider the possibility and scope for their production electronically
- ⚙ Gardaí and other users receiving the appropriate documentation from the Service in a timely and efficient manner

## Mandate 1

- ⚙ further develop our relationship with schools, colleges and local communities
- ⚙ pursue the scope for the establishment of a formal forum consisting of key stakeholders such as the Gardaí, legal profession, Prison Service and Probation and Welfare Service.

*9. Further develop a strategic and sensitive approach to the provision of Family Law court services*

#### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ ensure, in consultation with the judiciary, that all family law matters are dealt with, as far as practicable, separate from other court business and in a manner sensitive to the nature of the business.

#### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ continue to support the role of the Family Law Court Development Committee of the Board
- ⚙ support judicial and legislative initiatives, including case management, in the area of family law
- ⚙ progress as a matter of priority during the course of this Plan the development and construction of a purpose designed Family Law Court (High, Circuit and District) and ancillary facilities in Dublin
- ⚙ review, in consultation with the President of the High Court, the optimum arrangements for hearing appeals on circuit of family law matters
- ⚙ provide modern-day family law and ancillary facilities in those locations outside Dublin where such cases will be dealt with
- ⚙ progress the provision of medical, social and other necessary reports to judges in family law cases.

*10. Continue implementation of the 5 Year Information Technology Plan 'eCourts'*

#### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ select a strategic procurement approach for delivery of the strategies including consideration of Public Private Partnership.

#### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ completion of business case in relation to the procurement approach by end June 2003
- ⚙ adopt a partnership approach with the Department of Finance in considering the optimum approach`
- ⚙ implement agreed procurement strategy by end 2004.

*11. Enhance both the internal and external IT infrastructure across the Service*

#### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ provide a high quality, reliable and modern IT system throughout the Service
- ◆ ensure the provision of modern office productivity tools in all our offices.

#### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ complete the implementation of local and wide area networks providing seamless integration of all court sites into a modern communications infrastructure before end 2002
- ⚙ provide comprehensive support to ensure the reliability, integrity and high availability of information and communications systems
- ⚙ ensure maximum business benefit from the investment in technology through the implementation of the recommendations of the Business Realisation Group
- ⚙ implement a Courts Service intranet across the organisation by end March 2003
- ⚙ undertake a review of security related to information technology infrastructure and implement agreed recommendations to protect the security and integrity of Courts Service information and data.

## Mandate 1

*12. Actively implement and support the provision of new information systems and enhancements to meet defined business objectives*

### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ continue, in consultation with business units, the identification and implementation of IT solutions in appropriate areas and in accordance with strategic priorities.

### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ deployment of the criminal case management system throughout the country before the end of 2003
- ⚙ implement additional enhancements to the Criminal Case Management System by end 2003 to meet emerging business requirements
- ⚙ implement a fully automated penalty points system by the end of 2003
- ⚙ facilitate integration of relevant aspects of our IT systems with those of other criminal justice agencies
- ⚙ complete the deployment of interim systems by end 2003
- ⚙ support the implementation of the Human Resource system, the Courts Accounting system, the Funds Accounting system, the website and such other systems as may be agreed with heads of units.

*13. Deploy to the greatest extent possible electronic delivery of services in accordance with the Government Policy on eGovernment*

### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ identify the areas within the Service which are best suited to the electronic delivery of services and advance its implementation in such areas.

### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ put in place a web-enabled small claims procedure in the District Court before mid 2003
- ⚙ finalise an examination of the scope for the electronic payment of fines by mid 2003 and seek to have the facility in place by end 2003
- ⚙ introduce the electronic display of documents in the Supreme Court for October 2003
- ⚙ establish a database for publication of Supreme Court judgments on the Intranet/Courts Service website
- ⚙ complete the process of publication of court forms electronically via the web site by mid 2003
- ⚙ identify registers maintained by court offices for conversion to electronic form for use at counter level and via the website by mid 2003
- ⚙ review annually the scope for further delivery of service electronically.

*14. Devise and implement improved arrangements for the management of our financial allocation*

### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ produce relevant financial information in a comprehensive, timely and structured fashion to facilitate strategic and management decision making and ensure that value for money is achieved
- ◆ ensure that proper controls and procedures are in place in relation to financial transactions
- ◆ devolve financial responsibility and accountability to appropriate regional and local management levels
- ◆ comply with relevant legislation and professional standards in respect of accounting requirements
- ◆ review processes on a structured and ongoing basis.

### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ complete implementation of the new financial management system at pilot sites by April 2003
- ⚙ initiate devolution of financial responsibility during 2003 in conjunction with the new Financial Management System
- ⚙ complete annual Appropriation Account in respect of the Courts Service vote for audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General by 31 March each year
- ⚙ continue to implement policy statements providing for best practice in securing the probity of all financial transactions

## Mandate 1

- ⚙ carry out Expenditure Review of selected activities and expenditure on a structured and phased basis
- ⚙ during 2003 identify the areas appropriate for specific value for money studies and develop and put in place a structured process to carrying them out
- ⚙ put in place on a trial basis new purchasing/procurement arrangements in January 2003.

*15. Put in place new arrangements for the management and investment of court funds*

#### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ identify, agree and initiate implementation of a modern, effective and accountable system for managing and investing court funds.

#### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ appoint new fund managers by January 2003
- ⚙ establish Central Funds Office for the management of all court funds during 2003
- ⚙ complete external audit of central funds office annual financial statements in December of each year
- ⚙ issue first annual statement of account to each beneficiary in December 2004
- ⚙ publish half yearly updates on investment performance of court funds from end 2003
- ⚙ commence operation of AGRESSO financial system in the Accountant's Office by March 2003
- ⚙ implement business process changes to funds accounting operations in the High Court during 2003
- ⚙ complete transfer of certain accounting functions from the General Solicitor's Office to the Central Funds Office by December 2003
- ⚙ complete the implementation of business process changes relating to the

management of Circuit and District Court funds by December 2004

- ⚙ make proposals to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform regarding dormant court funds
- ⚙ carry out a tender process for the appointment of investment advisors by June 2004 following expiration of current contract.

*16. Ensure a modern, effective, technology supported courts accounting operation*

#### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ develop and implement in each court office a computerised courts accounting system which enables the Service to account for and manage all funds and financial activities generated through the operation of the courts.

#### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ agree by end of 2002 new arrangements for processing of courts accounting activities that will achieve greater utilisation of scarce resources and improve service provision
- ⚙ introduce new arrangements for the management of certain courts accounting activities, including fines and bail, during 2003
- ⚙ introduce a facility for the electronic payment of court fees during 2003
- ⚙ continue to put in place improved internal controls and procedures in relation to Circuit and District Court monies
- ⚙ complete the roll-out of AGRESSO financial system to all 70 Circuit and District Court offices by end of June 2004.

*17. Devolve authority and responsibility to the greatest extent possible to Regional and Unit managers*

#### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ identify the appropriate functions and tasks to be devolved and formally assign responsibility and accountability
- ◆ put in place monitoring and reporting arrangements that will ensure the provision of ongoing feedback on performance.

## Strategic Plan 2002 - 2005

### Mandate 1

#### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ review the operation of the Regional structures before end March 2003 to ensure maximum contribution to the effectiveness of the Service
- ⚙ initiate the devolution of certain HR functions to both Regional and Unit managers before end 2002 with appropriate reporting and accounting mechanisms
- ⚙ review on an annual basis the effectiveness of current devolution arrangements and the scope for more effective operation.

*18. Ensure that practices and procedures are optimal and consistent across relevant offices*

#### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ review practices and procedures in the different jurisdictions and implement, where appropriate, consistent best practices and procedures between offices
- ◆ put in place a policy of documenting all offices' practices and procedures so as to ensure consistency and continuity in best practice.

#### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ commence review of court office practices and procedures with appropriate consultation before end 2002
- ⚙ outcome of review to be communicated to Rules Committees for consideration where appropriate
- ⚙ liaise with various Rules Committees and interested bodies with a view to supporting initiatives for rationalising and simplifying court procedures
- ⚙ new agreed practices and procedures to be placed on our intranet
- ⚙ practices to be adopted when new legislation, statutory instruments or policy changes also to be posted on the intranet

- ⚙ review process to ensure best practices are in place
- ⚙ initiate an examination, to begin before end March 2003, with a view to seeking common opening hours in all our offices
- ⚙ conduct a study during 2003 on the feasibility of the provision of single court offices in provincial areas covering both Circuit and District Courts while respecting the integrity of the separateness of the two courts.

*19. Progress, in consultation with the President and judges of the District Court, the reorganisation of the District Court Districts*

#### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ advance, in consultation with the judiciary, the reorganisation proposals contained in the review completed by the District Court Committee and adopted by the Board.

#### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ proposals in relation to review of District Court Districts to be advanced during 2003.

*20. Review, in consultation with the President and judges of the Circuit Court, the court venues and the allocation of business generally in the Circuit Court having regard to demographic changes and the growth in the Dublin area*

#### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ analyse and develop proposals on the appropriate organisation of the venues and circuits for the distribution of business for the Circuit Court as a whole.

#### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ review to be progressed during 2003.

## Mandate 1

*21. Ensure that an adequate number of staff are competent in the Irish language so as to allow for service to be provided in Irish as well as in English. Account also to be taken of those whose first language is neither English nor Irish*

#### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ develop and enhance the capacity for individual offices to conduct the business of the Service in Irish as well as English
- ◆ further enhance our effectiveness in dealing with users whose first language is neither English nor Irish.

#### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ review the capacity of each office of the Service to conduct business through Irish before end June 2003
- ⚙ develop a policy on bilingualism before end of 2003
- ⚙ offer ongoing training to staff to help provide and enhance each office to deal with users through Irish
- ⚙ review on a jurisdictional basis the capacity of offices to do business with users with first languages other than Irish or English.

*22. Promote and develop good internal communication throughout the Service*

#### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ identify best principles of communication and ensure their implementation at all levels of the organisation.

#### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ develop a formal internal communication strategy using the Partnership structure before end 2003
- ⚙ ensure implementation of the strategy through its inclusion on all units' business plans

- ⚙ review the implementation of the strategy on an annual basis
- ⚙ continue to develop the *Courts Service Newsletter* and the *Directorate Bulletin* while regularly reviewing their effectiveness
- ⚙ ensure maximum use of our intranet facility for the dissemination of information throughout the organisation.

*23. Participate in international fora and initiatives aimed at improving cooperation and increasing knowledge and awareness of developments elsewhere*

#### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ identify the scope for greater cooperation at EU and other levels in matters relevant to the work of the Service
- ◆ further develop relationships, both formal and informal, with Court Services in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

#### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ continue to support the current forum in place for cooperation with Courts Services in the UK including hosting a Conference before the end of 2002
- ⚙ identify during 2003 the scope for input to or through other relevant international fora and bodies and develop appropriate strategies.



## Mandate 2

### Provide Support Service For Judges

The effective administration of justice is dependent on the effective functioning of the judiciary which in turn requires efficient and effective support from the Courts Service. This was acknowledged by the Working Group on a Courts Commission which noted that "an efficient management system is of the utmost importance to the courts and the State..... The service which is provided in the court system is the means by which the public obtain justice. An inefficient service impedes justice. In addition, the Courts Service is of importance in commerce and the business community. Commerce is at a disadvantage if the system is inefficient and ineffective".

### Developments 2000 - 2002

Since the establishment of the Service significant developments have taken place which have led to the availability of enhanced support to judges at all levels. Funding made available to the Judicial Studies Institute has increased from £5,000 in 1999 to €360,000 in 2002 and the additional funding has enabled the Institute to increase the extent and availability of judicial training and also to publish a Judicial Studies Newsletter and a Judicial Studies Journal. The number of judicial research assistants has been increased and the research tools made available to these researchers, electronic or print, have been greatly enhanced. An Executive Legal Assistant to the Chief Justice has also been appointed. The Judges' Library has been relocated and facilities and support greatly improved. More structured and focused secretarial support is also now in place and this has considerably aided the judiciary in their work.

Members of the judiciary have been very much aware of the scope of information technology to assist in a range of areas and this has been facilitated by the Service over the past three years. All members of the judiciary now have modern laptop computers with access to a range of information facilities including a dedicated Judges' Benchbook, web based legal databases relevant to the discharge of their judicial functions and access to electronic versions of the Irish Law Reports since 1919. The judges' intranet continues to be developed and the range of services available to Judges in an electronic format is being continually extended.

A feature of the past three years also has been the much improved accommodation in a large number of locations. Particular attention has also been given to improving judicial accommodation during the period. The ongoing programme of improvements will continue over the coming years.

### Key Outputs 2002-2005

- ◆ Appropriate support services for the judiciary
- ◆ An effective, proactive and productive relationship between the judiciary and members of the staff of the Service while fully respecting the constitutional independence of the judiciary.

### Strategies

*1. Identify, in consultation with the judiciary and in a structured manner, the appropriate resources in terms of support, accommodation and funding for training required*

### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ Adopt a structured programme with specific objectives for the development and enhancement of services, facilities, accommodation and other measures necessary to enable the judiciary to carry out their functions effectively and efficiently
- ◆ Consult with the relevant members of the judiciary in the preparation and implementation of the programme



## Mandate 2

- ◆ enter into dialogue with the Departments of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and Finance on the reasonable and realistic resources necessary for the implementation of the programme.

## Performance Indicators

- ⚙ interim progress report on the preparation of the programme, with particular regard to the Four Courts complex, to be made by end March 2003
- ⚙ proposed programme to be presented to the Board by mid 2003
- ⚙ resources within current budget available to implement programme and achieve objectives to be identified
- ⚙ structured discussions with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and, as appropriate, the Department of Finance in the light of the adopted programme in the context of the Estimates for 2004.

*2. Develop an effective working relationship and communication process between the judiciary and the staff of the Service*

## Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ agree a structured form of communication with members of the judiciary in each jurisdiction and location to supplement the informal communication process
- ◆ support the various initiatives taken by the judiciary in matters such as reducing waiting times in courts where such waiting times exist
- ◆ put in place a protocol for introducing newly appointed judges to the Service.

## Performance Indicators

- ⚙ an effective open and productive working relationship between the judiciary and members of staff of the Service

- ⚙ protocol in relation to newly appointed judges in place by end 2002
- ⚙ initial structures for communication in place by end March 2003
- ⚙ provide meaningful statistics on court operations to the Presidents and the judiciary in order to support them in managing ever increasing lists
- ⚙ review all scheduled hearing days and dates, in consultation with the judiciary, to ensure the most effective use of available courtrooms
- ⚙ willingness on the part of staff to offer input to as well as to cooperate with judicial initiatives
- ⚙ continue to expand on successful consultative committees put in place with the judiciary since our establishment.

*3. Support the judiciary in initiatives undertaken by them in relation to judicial case management and continue to review and develop administrative case management procedures*

## Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ support and assist the judiciary in initiatives undertaken by them in relation to judicial case management
- ◆ put in place an effective management information system, including relevant statistical information, which will allow the identification of, and scope for, managing the business of the Courts Service in the optimum manner
- ◆ implement all realistic and feasible means of better managing the administrative casework of the Service
- ◆ ensure that the role of the County Registrar is developed and utilised to best effect.

## Performance Indicators

- ⚙ the parameters for a management information system agreed before end June 2003
- ⚙ the management information system to be actively used as a support in developing policies and plans for the Service
- ⚙ continuous assessment of the effectiveness of administrative case management processes to be built into Unit Business Plans from 2003
- ⚙ active support for the judiciary in case management initiatives

## Mandate 2

- ⚙ support the implementation of the increased quasi-judicial powers given to County Registrars under the Court and Court Officers Act, 2002.

### 4. Ensure the judiciary are effectively supported in their work

- ⚙ review, in consultation with the judiciary, the arrangement for listing of cases with a view to ensuring its most effective operation
- ⚙ establish by mid 2003, in conjunction with the Chief Justice and Supreme Court judges, a judgments database of Supreme Court judgments on the Courts Service website.

### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ assess the various areas of support provided to the judiciary and seek to ensure that they are both sufficient and effective
- ◆ support the President of the High Court in establishing specialist divisions.

### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ continue to improve the library and research facilities available to the judiciary
- ⚙ ensure the secretarial support is organised in the best manner to facilitate the work of the judiciary
- ⚙ support the work of the Judicial Studies Institute
- ⚙ actively support the initiatives of the President of the High Court in relation to the creation of commercial and other specialised divisions
- ⚙ facilitate the provision of training to the judiciary in information technology and such other areas as identified by them as relevant and appropriate
- ⚙ continued enhancement of the information technology services available to the judiciary through the judges' intranet
- ⚙ review as a matter of urgency arrangements for the provision of transcripts/recordings of court proceedings
- ⚙ progress the provision of medical, social and other necessary reports to judges in family law cases

## Mandate 3

### Provide Information on the Courts System to the Public

The Courts Service has long recognised the importance of facilitating the understanding of the administration of justice not just for those who have a direct interaction with the courts and the Courts Service but also for the general public. It is widely acknowledged that a public which is well informed on the working of courts is likely to have a greater respect for the institution that is the courts and its vital work in a free society. This fact and the ensuing role and responsibility are reflected in the third statutory mandate given to the Courts Service by the Courts Service Act, 1998 – to provide information on the courts system to the public.

The information gap that needed to be filled was identified by the Working Group on a Courts Commission as including the absence of an information service to the public, the lack of annual reports and the absence of statistical information in an understandable format. It is a truism to state that public policy formation cannot be effective without detailed and relevant statistics. Those statistics reflecting the business of the courts and the Courts Service are vital in this respect.

### Developments 2000-2002

An Information Office was established in 2000 and now comprises a Publications Unit, a Website Management Group and a Statistics Unit.

The publications produced and issued over the past three years include "The Courts System in Ireland – an Introduction", a booklet designed to provide basic information on the structure of the courts in Ireland, leaflets on the Pilot Drug Court project in Dublin, one on Cloverhill

courthouse, one on the process of setting proceedings down in the High Court and "The Courts Service", a leaflet providing details of the organisational structure of the Service. We have also continued publishing and circulating the *Courts Service News* which is our Newsletter and issues five times per year. A series of leaflets on family law matters with the series titled *Family Law Information Bulletin* also issued. Finally, we have produced brochures coinciding with the official launch of newly refurbished court buildings and which give the historical, architectural and other details of the buildings.

The past two years have seen the publication of annual reports for the first time and which include not just details of developments during the years covered but which also provide a wealth of statistical information which has never previously either been collated or made available and which should prove particularly useful in public policy making.

In response to an ever increasing media interest in the courts and in line with a further recommendation of the Working Group, we established a Media Relations Service at the end of 2000 and this provides a single and central point for contact by the media.

Our web site is now well established and continues to be developed and expanded further. The site which has proved very popular with over 17,000 visits per month contains a comprehensive range of information on the courts system, the various administrative offices and a section entitled "Frequently Asked Questions". Other features include, the Legal Diary (updated daily), media releases, sections for students and heritage and many more.

## Mandate 3

### Key Outputs 2002-2005

- ◆ Production of information to the public in such formats which enable them to better understand the administration of justice and the operation of the courts
- ◆ Development and production of comprehensive statistics in an understandable format which give a clear picture of the business of the courts and which facilitate the more effective consideration and development of public policy
- ◆ Continued development of our relationship with the various strands of the media in the context of their crucial role in informing the public of court matters and being proactive in the dissemination of information
- ◆ Ongoing development of our annual reports with a view to ensuring that the information provided gives a clear and honest picture of the business of the courts and the court offices in each calendar year.

### Strategies

*1. Identify the areas of information which would best assist members of the public understand the operation of the court and court offices and produce this information and material in the most suitable and accessible formats*

### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ complete an audit of the areas of information which might usefully be provided to the public in leaflet, booklet or other format
- ◆ put in place a programme for production of such leaflets and booklets
- ◆ develop and disseminate a policy in relation to access to court documents.

### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ initial consultation exercise with relevant groups and individuals to be completed before end March 2003
- ⚙ strategy for production of information and best methods for conveying same to be completed by June 2003
- ⚙ annual programme for dissemination of material in a structured format
- ⚙ annual review of strategy and programme
- ⚙ in consultation with the judiciary, practitioners, the media and other interest groups, develop during 2003 a policy covering access to court documents.

*2. In consultation with relevant parties, identify appropriate statistics to be provided on an ongoing basis and ensure their production in a timely and appropriate manner*

### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ consult organisations and groups, including relevant government departments, with a view to identifying the quantity, quality and timeliness of statistics produced by the Service
- ◆ put in place process which ensures the effective collation of relevant statistics and their timely production.

### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ consultation exercise to be completed before end of 2002
- ⚙ relevant statistics required to be produced to be conveyed to individual offices also before end of 2002 and to be produced thereafter in a timely manner
- ⚙ annual review of statistics provided for courts and court offices and the manner and timeliness of their delivery.

*3. Continue to develop a high quality media service and a proactive relationship with members of the media*

### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ Review operation of the media relations service
- ◆ Identify means by which service can be further developed.

## Mandate 3

## Performance Indicators

- ⚙ consult with relevant members of both the national and local media on an annual basis in relation to the service being offered them by the media relations service
- ⚙ regional offices to develop structured strategy on ongoing relations with members of regional and local media before end June 2003
- ⚙ ensure relevant staff are effectively briefed on a consistent manner of dealing with media enquiries.

4. Continue to develop the Courts Service website ([www.courts.ie](http://www.courts.ie))

## Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ put in place a process which allows for the updating of the web site on a continuous basis
- ◆ further develop the website by expanding information on the Service and the courts
- ◆ provide the facility for the electronic retrieval of information from court registers via the web site
- ◆ identify areas of court business which are appropriate for the electronic delivery of services.

## Performance Indicators

- ⚙ review content of website on annual basis taking account of developments both nationally and internationally
- ⚙ commence placing provincial Circuit Court lists on our website during 2003
- ⚙ in association with the information technology programme and taking account of the eGovernment strategy identify areas of business which might be conducted using a web enabled environment, such areas to be initially identified before end March 2003 and revisited annually.

5. Ensure the effective operation of systems and arrangements for dealing with all matters coming within the ambit of the Freedom of Information Act, 1997

## Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ produce and publish the relevant booklets required by Sections 15 and 16 of the Freedom of Information Act, 1997
- ◆ examine the methods of records management within the Service to facilitate access to records for the purpose of the legislation
- ◆ provide appropriate and ongoing training to all staff dealing with requests under the legislation.

## Performance Indicators

- ⚙ section 15 and 16 booklets completed and published in hard copy and on the web by early 2003
- ⚙ initiate a study of current forms of record management across the Service with a view to considering the possibility of a single computer supported system
- ⚙ training on Freedom of Information to be reviewed every six months
- ⚙ updates on recent decisions circulated to relevant staff on a quarterly basis.

## Mandate 4

### Provide, Manage and Maintain Court Buildings

The Working Group on a Courts Commission was particularly critical of court accommodation throughout the country stating it to be in a state of crisis. The Group referred to the inadequacy of the number of courts in certain areas; the maintenance was seen to be grossly deficient; and the structure and facilities of many courts to be "deplorable". This was the context in which the Courts Service took over responsibility for the provision, management and maintenance of court buildings. The extent of the problem can be gauged from the fact that at that time there were some 240 premises used for court purposes and while a number of these were important civic and distinctive buildings, there were many, being leased or rented, which were a considerable way from being appropriate to the business of administration of justice being conducted in them. Many of those that were and are appropriate were in considerable need of urgent investment.

The Courts Service is of the view that court facilities, should not only be efficient and comfortable, but they should also reflect in their design the independence, dignity and importance of the business transacted in them. Public respect for the courts system is dependent on many factors. One of the most important of those factors is the condition of the buildings in which justice is administered.

### Developments 2000-2002

Significant additional funding was provided over the past three years for the courts building and refurbishment programme. This coincided with the launch in 2001 of our 7 year Capital Building Programme for the years 2002-2008 entitled

"Building for the Future". This programme identified those buildings which required refurbishment as well as those areas where new courthouses were required. It is agreed that substantial investment is required to bring the courts building stock up to modern standards.

With the significant additional funding over the past three years, new courthouses have been opened in Cloverhill and Castlereagh. Major refurbishments have been completed in Templemore, Mallow, Buncrana, Cashel, Trim, Westport, Carrickmacross, Athy, Sligo, Arva, Borrisokane, Kilrush, Baltinglass, Roscrea, Listowel, Carlow, Portlaoise, Ennis (Phase 1) and Cork (Phase 1). Major refurbishment work is also underway at Castlebar and Ennis and is almost completed in Dundalk and Limerick Circuit Courts as well as in Tubbercurry. More than 80 venues also have had significant improvements under the maintenance programme over the past three years.

There have been major developments and improvements in the Four Courts Complex which had been the subject of particular criticism by the Working Group. A new Central Office and registrars' accommodation has been provided in the East Wing. A much needed new Judges' Library is now in place as well as improved accommodation for Judicial Researchers.

Accommodation has been provided for the newly established High Court Judicial Secretarial Unit. A major programme is also now underway to provide appropriate access for disabled users. Lifts are being installed, ramps erected and toilet accommodation adjusted.

In 2001 also, six High Court offices and the Directorates moved into a new modern building in Smithfield adjacent to the Four Courts which also now houses three modern Circuit Family Courts and associated facilities. Many other projects are currently at the planning stage.

A crucial input to developing and advancing the capital development programme is provided by the Judicial Buildings Consultative Committee.



## Mandate 4

### Key Outputs 2002-2005

- ◆ an appropriate physical infrastructure developed in a structured manner for both courts and staff which reflects the sensitivity and importance of the business being conducted
- ◆ the most efficient and effective usage of court buildings commensurate with and supportive of the administration of justice.

### Strategies

*1. Progress the Capital Development Programme outlined in the Seven Year Development Programme*

### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ develop and implement annual programme of building and maintenance works consistent with budgetary allocation
- ◆ address additional strategic approaches to progressing the Programme, including consideration of Public Private Partnership arrangements
- ◆ in ongoing reviews of the programme, take account of demographic changes.

### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ plan developed and consultation initiated with the Judicial Buildings Committee in January each year
- ⚙ quarterly briefing for the Buildings Committee
- ⚙ annual review of programme including consideration of demographic changes and trends
- ⚙ implementation monitored and reported to the Chief Executive on a quarterly basis
- ⚙ effective financial and monitoring controls in place from 2002

- ⚙ adopt a partnership approach with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Finance in considering the optimum approach to ensuring the advancement of the programme.

*2. Put in place a process whereby relevant court buildings are vested in or transferred to the Courts Service*

### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ agree buildings to be vested or transferred
- ◆ progress discussions with the Office of Public Works and relevant local authorities
- ◆ agree with the Department of Finance and Local Authorities the relevant arrangements regarding caretaking.

### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ 70 court buildings vested in the Courts Service over the next three years
- ⚙ agreement reached with the Department of Finance in relation to caretaking arrangements in advance of the first building being vested in 2003.

*3. Take account of the historical and architectural significance of some of our courthouses, particularly in the context of refurbishment*

### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ reflect the appropriate protection of heritage elements of our courthouses in refurbishment projects
- ◆ develop structured relationships with bodies such as Dúchas, Local Authorities and the Heritage Council in relation to the heritage aspects of our buildings.

### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ Each contract for refurbishment and relevant maintenance contracts will include a provision regarding any heritage aspects pertaining to the building
- ⚙ A formal structured annual meeting with Dúchas and with the Heritage Council in which works completed in the previous year are reviewed and proposed works for the following year are discussed.



## Mandate 4

*4. Develop, in consultation with users, the essential requirements for court accommodation with a view to their provision in all courthouses*

### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ develop essential common requirements for courthouses
- ◆ continue to implement the protocol for consultation with key users and interested parties, including judges, staff, legal practitioners, probation and welfare service, support groups, local authorities, heritage and other relevant public bodies as well as the Gardaí, the Prison Service, the local community and the media
- ◆ take account of international developments in relation to court accommodation
- ◆ particular account to be taken of the needs of victims of crime in a court environment.

### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ draft document reflecting proposed requirements and facilities in courthouses completed by end March 2003 and agreed finally by end June 2003
- ⚙ account to be taken of victims of crime and other potentially vulnerable parties or witnesses to actions
- ⚙ develop process during 2003 which will allow for international developments in court accommodation and facilities to be considered in new projects.

*5. Delegate to the greatest extent possible responsibility for initiating and managing building and maintenance projects*

### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ using the regional structure, delegate responsibility relating to the

identification and management of building maintenance and refurbishment projects

- ◆ identify scope for delegating responsibility and budgets for maintenance of court buildings to the regional offices and initiate the process in tandem with the development of our financial management system.

### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ formal responsibility relating to buildings delegated to regional offices before the beginning of 2003
- ⚙ review with relevant director each quarter
- ⚙ budgets delegated, as appropriate, before the end of June 2003.

*6. Develop a comprehensive plan and strategy on Health and Safety in respect of all buildings and areas within the remit of the Courts Service*

### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ assess the Health and Safety requirements for all areas coming within the remit of the Service
- ◆ develop appropriate safety statements in compliance with the legislation
- ◆ appoint safety officers and safety representatives, as appropriate, at each relevant location
- ◆ put in place structured arrangements for review.

### Performance Indicators

- ⚙ prototype safety statement prepared before March 2003
- ⚙ safety statements for Dublin buildings and all county town venues by end June 2003
- ⚙ safety statements for remainder of relevant buildings before end of 2003
- ⚙ safety officers and/or representatives appointed within one month of completion of each safety statement
- ⚙ annual review of operation of statement in respect of each building.

## Mandate 4

*7. Review security arrangements in all court buildings in a manner which seeks to balance the effective administration of justice with the requirement for justice to be administered in public and with the security and safety of all parties*

### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ in consultation with relevant parties, in particular An Garda Síochána, develop a policy on security in court buildings
- ◆ develop a policy on arrangements regarding prisoners in all court buildings.

### Performance Indicators

- ⊗ Agreed report completed and submitted before end November 2002
- ⊗ Further review the issue of security in court buildings other than the Four Courts during 2003
- ⊗ Draft policy on prisoner arrangements to be developed during 2003. .

## Mandate 5

### Provide Facilities for Users of the Courts

The facilities that were available for users of the courts prior to the establishment of the Service were also a matter of considerable criticism by the Working Group on a Courts Commission. One of the reports referred to the structure and facilities of many courts as deplorable. Facilities in our courthouses and court buildings must reflect and respond to the business being conducted there and cannot be immune to the reasonable needs of users and staff.

The range of those using court facilities is considerable, ranging from victims of crime to litigants to staff and judiciary. Expectations of the quality of facilities have rightly increased. Similarly, the environment in which we operate has also changed dramatically: considerable developments in technology; greater customer focus; a more observant and critical media; a more mobile population and considerable increases in cases such as family law which demand particular sensitivity in handling.

### Developments 2000-2002

In all our buildings refurbished over the past two years we have provided facilities for users with disabilities including barrier-free access, ramps, toilets and induction loops for those with hearing difficulties. All of the new signage erected on our buildings includes, where appropriate, a panel providing information in Braille, in a format approved by the National Council for the Blind. We also recently conducted an audit of disabled facilities at the Four Courts complex in Dublin and, following this, we have initiated a major programme throughout the complex with a view to improving disabled access.

Since 2000, we now provide each serving civil juror with luncheon vouchers to the value of €15, thereby redressing the longstanding situation in which criminal jurors received lunches but civil ones did not.

We have also placed considerable emphasis over the period on improving the quality and the timeliness of the information available to the media. We have appointed a media relations expert who is the contact point for all queries from the media and who is proactive in his dealings with journalists.

We have also introduced the use of electronic display panels in the Four Courts for the purpose of keeping members of the legal profession and the public aware of the details regarding courtroom venue, times and presiding judge of court in actions taking place in the building. The electronic display panel is also used as a notice board for relevant court information.

### Key Outputs 2002-2005

- ◆ put in place a structured programme for bringing all court facilities up to an acceptable standard
- ◆ take account of the particular needs of vulnerable users of the courts, including victims of crime and children
- ◆ provide appropriate facilities for the media in courtrooms

### Strategies

*1. Ensure that all our courthouses contain suitable facilities to enable court users to access and use our buildings and to conduct their business effectively*

### Strategy for Implementation

- ◆ develop a prototype brief reflecting the appropriate facilities as a point of reference for all refurbishment works of existing courthouses and for all new courthouses being built
- ◆ take account of the needs of the key users, including judges, staff, legal profession, Probation and Welfare staff, Gardaí, Prison Officers, jurors, public and media. Particular account to be taken of the needs of children involved in court proceedings

## Mandate 5

- ◆ make best use of information technology in providing facilities for users
- ◆ regularly review progress.

**Performance Indicators**

- ⚙ prototype brief completed, following appropriate consultation, before end March 2003
- ⚙ annual update of brief
- ⚙ signage within all courthouses and in the areas adjacent to courthouses to be visible and of a consistent and high standard
- ⚙ identify scope for information technology in providing user friendly facilities in courthouses and initiate a programme of putting same in place on a national basis
- ⚙ ensure audio facilities in all courts are effective and effectively used
- ⚙ progress reviewed on an annual basis.

*2. Develop a programme to provide appropriate facilities for disabled court users*

**Strategy for Implementation**

- ◆ continue and constantly review programme for providing access for disabled users to new court buildings and those being refurbished
- ◆ initiate structured programme for such access to existing building stock.

**Performance Indicators**

- ⚙ structured consultation programme with relevant parties and representative groups before end 2002
- ⚙ programme of implementation developed before end March 2003
- ⚙ annual review of progress and priorities.

*3. Provide adequate facilities for jurors*

**Strategy for Implementation**

- ◆ identify quality of facilities considered appropriate in view of the crucial role of jurors
- ◆ develop programme of bringing those courthouses not meeting the standards considered appropriate up to the required standard.

**Performance Indicators**

- ⚙ targeted quality of juror facilities agreed before end of 2003
- ⚙ programme of upgrading these facilities to be also agreed before end of 2003
- ⚙ user friendly information videos and leaflets designed and developed during 2003 and added to as appropriate in the following years.

*4. Provide adequate facilities for media representatives in courts*

**Strategy for Implementation**

- ◆ consult with members of the media regarding the appropriate facilities for representatives of the media which facilitate their reporting of cases
- ◆ address in a structured manner existing shortcomings in facilities currently available.

**Performance Indicators**

- ⚙ assessment of media facilities to be completed as part of the overall assessment of the existing building stock
- ⚙ refurbishment and building programme to incorporate updating and modernisation of media facilities
- ⚙ annual review of progress and future priorities.

## 8. Implementing the Plan

This Strategic Plan has been developed with our focus very much on implementation. We are confident that in the three years since our establishment that the identity of the Courts Service as a distinct entity offering a very real contribution to society is now firmly in place. We have sought in this Plan to identify the various areas within our statutory remit, to build on the areas and responsibilities that we already do well and to further develop those areas which have the capacity to contribute further to our effectiveness as an organisation, our contribution to the administration of justice and through this to the benefit of society as a whole. We have very consciously placed an emphasis in the Plan on implementation, setting challenging targets in respect of all the strategies and plans developed and itemised.

In terms of moving towards implementing the Plan we are aware that real and lasting progress can only be made by taking a holistic approach. Thus, in the Plan reference is made to effective structures, processes, systems, culture, our interdependency with a range of bodies and individuals and, most notably, the continued input and dedication of the staff of the Service. The means through which the Plan will be implemented and monitored during its life include:

### ◆ Annual Business Plans

The Service's annual business planning process will translate the strategies set out in the Plan into detailed unit work programmes with a level of detail and further performance indicators beyond those set out in the strategy. Each business plan will be developed with a partnership and team approach allowing the opportunity for each member of staff to have a meaningful input and ultimate

ownership of the Plan and the means of achieving the objectives set. The plans will be reviewed in a structured manner involving the Senior Management Team and the heads of the individual units with sufficient flexibility built in to allow for ongoing legislative and policy changes.

### ◆ Performance Management

The second link in the process lies in the effective implementation of the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) which allows for each individual's contribution to the ultimate achievement of the strategies set out in this Plan.

### ◆ Monitoring, Review and Reporting

Progress in implementing the strategies and targets set out in the Plan will be a key task for the Senior Management Team which will review progress formally on a twice yearly basis and on a directorate and unit level on a monthly and quarterly basis. The review at senior management level will monitor progress on achieving the objectives, will consider any barriers to further progress, will adjust plans, as necessary to meet any new demands or challenges arising and will consider any required redeployment of resources and reordering of priorities. The Chief Executive will provide regular reports on implementation of the Plan to the Board. Formal reviews of progress in implementing the Plan will be submitted on an annual basis to the Board and to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

### Key Challenges

There are, of course, a number of challenges facing the Service in terms of successfully implementing the challenging targets set out in the Plan. These challenges include:

### ◆ Resources

The nature of much of the work in the Service is labour intensive. One of the main challenges we face over the next three years is our capacity to acquire and retain

## 8. Implementing the Plan

sufficient resources to maintain and improve our current service and also to respond to the changing environment and demands placed on the courts. As well as acquiring and retaining staff we will also need to be in a position to motivate and offer effective training and development structures to those staff. Resources also are a critical element in improving the courts infrastructure. Reference is made in the Plan to an appropriate environment reflecting the dignity and importance of the work conducted. The resources required for this purpose are considerable.

### ◆ Participation and Ownership

Over the past decade it has been increasingly recognised by successive Governments that for real progress to be made in organisations there needs to be a shift from the traditional hierarchical approach to one in which there is participation, partnership and common ownership of both problems and solutions. We are committed to continuing and further developing this approach on both an organisational and unit level. We have found over the three years since our establishment that there is a great depth of untapped potential at every level of the organisation and a willingness to contribute. We feel a responsibility to avail of and value both.

### ◆ Communication

Public sector organisations have traditionally tended to be introspective feeling that the greatest emphasis ought to be on ensuring that the work was done and that there was little need to engage in meaningful consultation either internally or with users. In more recent years there is an acknowledgment that we must combine this work ethic with effective communication processes both internally and externally. This is even more important for an organisation such as the Courts Service which is undergoing major change.

We are determined to develop further our internal and external communication processes and this will be facilitated to a considerable extent by the launch of our new Customer Service Action Plan.

### ◆ Review and Renewal

As a relatively new organisation we feel also that we must be prepared to constantly review our effectiveness and contribution as an organisation. We are willing on a regular basis to revisit our legislative mandates, the reasons for our establishment in the first instance and what we have contributed and to evaluate ourselves as an organisation with a view to renewing our sense of purpose and responding accordingly.

## Appendix 1. Profile of the Courts Service

Expenditure Year 2002 (Projected)

### Current Expenditure

	€ '000	%
Salaries and Wages	37,900	45%
Non Pay	24,853	29%
Total Current Expenditure	62,753	74%

### Capital Expenditure

Computer Equipment and Implementation of IT Programme	8,696	10%
Capital Works – Courthouse Buildings Programme	19,356	23%
Total Capital Expenditure	28,052	33%

**Total Current and Capital Expenditure 90,805**

Income

Appropriations-in-Aid 6,144

**Total Net Expenditure 84,661**

Number of staff employed as at December 2002: 1029

### Number of Offices

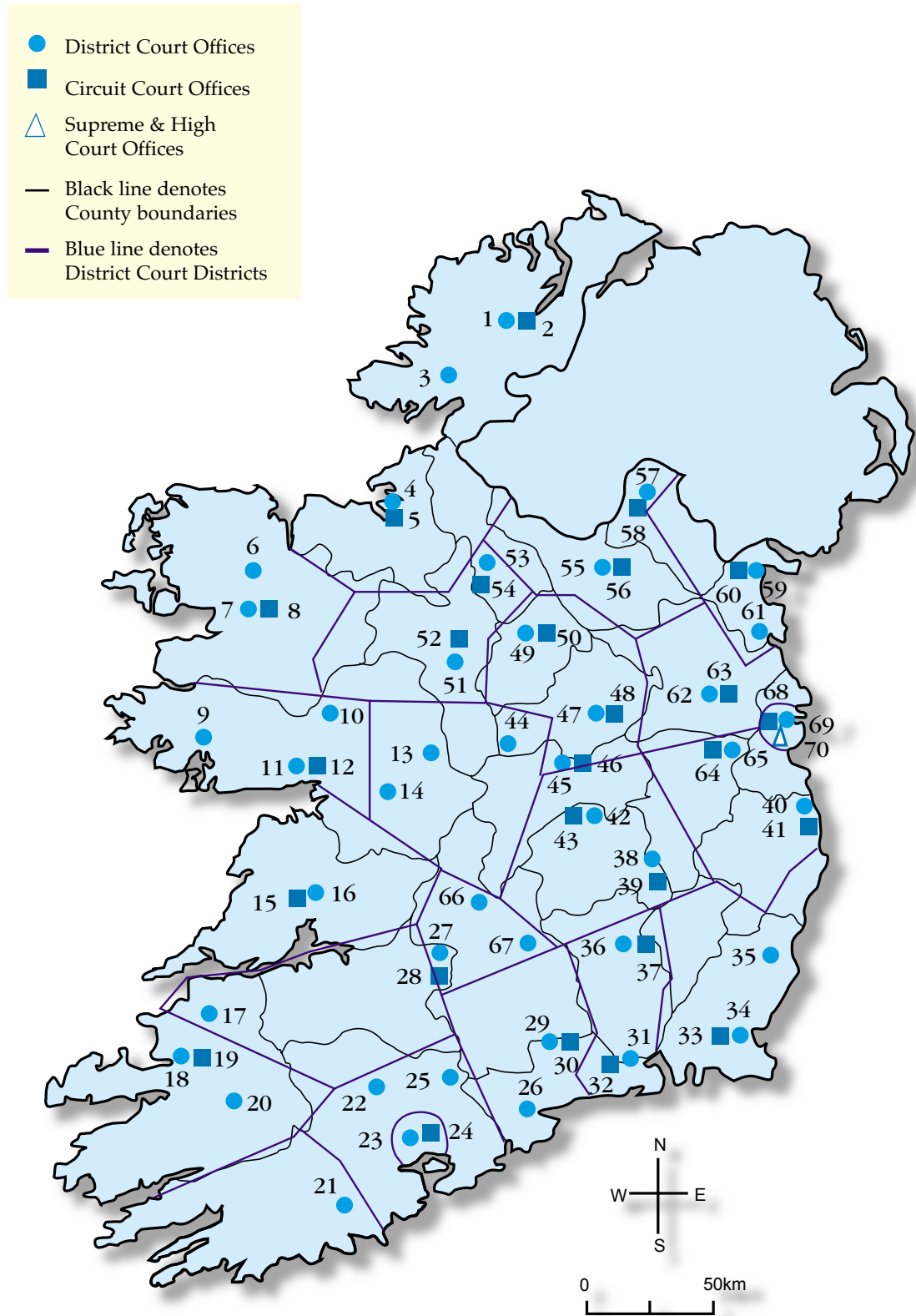
Supreme Court	1
Court of Criminal Appeal	1
High Court	11
Circuit Court	26
District Court	42

Number of locations where sittings take place

Supreme Court	1
High Court	28
Circuit Court	56
District Court	201



## Appendix 2. The Courts System in Ireland



## 8. Implementing the Plan

This Strategic Plan has been developed with our focus very much on implementation. We are confident that in the three years since our establishment that the identity of the Courts Service as a distinct entity offering a very real contribution to society is now firmly in place. We have sought in this Plan to identify the various areas within our statutory remit, to build on the areas and responsibilities that we already do well and to further develop those areas which have the capacity to contribute further to our effectiveness as an organisation, our contribution to the administration of justice and through this to the benefit of society as a whole. We have very consciously placed an emphasis in the Plan on implementation, setting challenging targets in respect of all the strategies and plans developed and itemised.

In terms of moving towards implementing the Plan we are aware that real and lasting progress can only be made by taking a holistic approach. Thus, in the Plan reference is made to effective structures, processes, systems, culture, our interdependency with a range of bodies and individuals and, most notably, the continued input and dedication of the staff of the Service. The means through which the Plan will be implemented and monitored during its life include:

### ◆ Annual Business Plans

The Service's annual business planning process will translate the strategies set out in the Plan into detailed unit work programmes with a level of detail and further performance indicators beyond those set out in the strategy. Each business plan will be developed with a partnership and team approach allowing the opportunity for each member of staff to have a meaningful input and ultimate

ownership of the Plan and the means of achieving the objectives set. The plans will be reviewed in a structured manner involving the Senior Management Team and the heads of the individual units with sufficient flexibility built in to allow for ongoing legislative and policy changes.

### ◆ Performance Management

The second link in the process lies in the effective implementation of the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) which allows for each individual's contribution to the ultimate achievement of the strategies set out in this Plan.

### ◆ Monitoring, Review and Reporting

Progress in implementing the strategies and targets set out in the Plan will be a key task for the Senior Management Team which will review progress formally on a twice yearly basis and on a directorate and unit level on a monthly and quarterly basis. The review at senior management level will monitor progress on achieving the objectives, will consider any barriers to further progress, will adjust plans, as necessary to meet any new demands or challenges arising and will consider any required redeployment of resources and reordering of priorities. The Chief Executive will provide regular reports on implementation of the Plan to the Board. Formal reviews of progress in implementing the Plan will be submitted on an annual basis to the Board and to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

### Key Challenges

There are, of course, a number of challenges facing the Service in terms of successfully implementing the challenging targets set out in the Plan. These challenges include:

### ◆ Resources

The nature of much of the work in the Service is labour intensive. One of the main challenges we face over the next three years is our capacity to acquire and retain

## 8. Implementing the Plan

sufficient resources to maintain and improve our current service and also to respond to the changing environment and demands placed on the courts. As well as acquiring and retaining staff we will also need to be in a position to motivate and offer effective training and development structures to those staff. Resources also are a critical element in improving the courts infrastructure. Reference is made in the Plan to an appropriate environment reflecting the dignity and importance of the work conducted. The resources required for this purpose are considerable.

### ◆ Participation and Ownership

Over the past decade it has been increasingly recognised by successive Governments that for real progress to be made in organisations there needs to be a shift from the traditional hierarchical approach to one in which there is participation, partnership and common ownership of both problems and solutions. We are committed to continuing and further developing this approach on both an organisational and unit level. We have found over the three years since our establishment that there is a great depth of untapped potential at every level of the organisation and a willingness to contribute. We feel a responsibility to avail of and value both.

### ◆ Communication

Public sector organisations have traditionally tended to be introspective feeling that the greatest emphasis ought to be on ensuring that the work was done and that there was little need to engage in meaningful consultation either internally or with users. In more recent years there is an acknowledgment that we must combine this work ethic with effective communication processes both internally and externally. This is even more important for an organisation such as the Courts Service which is undergoing major change.

We are determined to develop further our internal and external communication processes and this will be facilitated to a considerable extent by the launch of our new Customer Service Action Plan.

### ◆ Review and Renewal

As a relatively new organisation we feel also that we must be prepared to constantly review our effectiveness and contribution as an organisation. We are willing on a regular basis to revisit our legislative mandates, the reasons for our establishment in the first instance and what we have contributed and to evaluate ourselves as an organisation with a view to renewing our sense of purpose and responding accordingly.

## Appendix 1. Profile of the Courts Service

Expenditure Year 2002 (Projected)

### Current Expenditure

	€ '000	%
Salaries and Wages	37,900	45%
Non Pay	24,853	29%
Total Current Expenditure	62,753	74%

### Capital Expenditure

Computer Equipment and Implementation of IT Programme	8,696	10%
Capital Works – Courthouse Buildings Programme	19,356	23%
Total Capital Expenditure	28,052	33%

**Total Current and Capital Expenditure 90,805**

Income

Appropriations-in-Aid 6,144

**Total Net Expenditure 84,661**

Number of staff employed as at December 2002: 1029

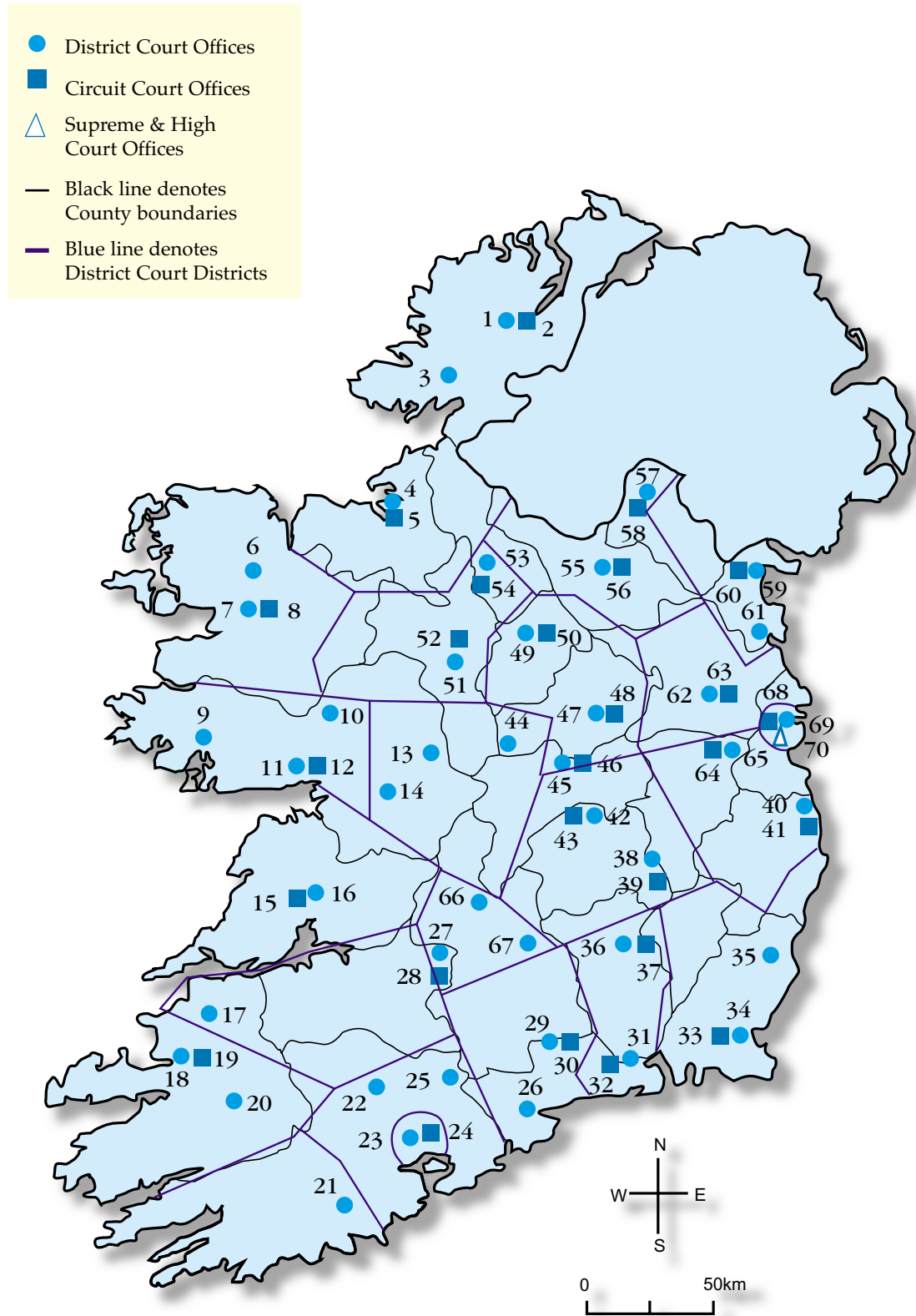
### Number of Offices

Supreme Court	1
Court of Criminal Appeal	1
High Court	11
Circuit Court	26
District Court	42

Number of locations where sittings take place

Supreme Court	1
High Court	28
Circuit Court	56
District Court	201

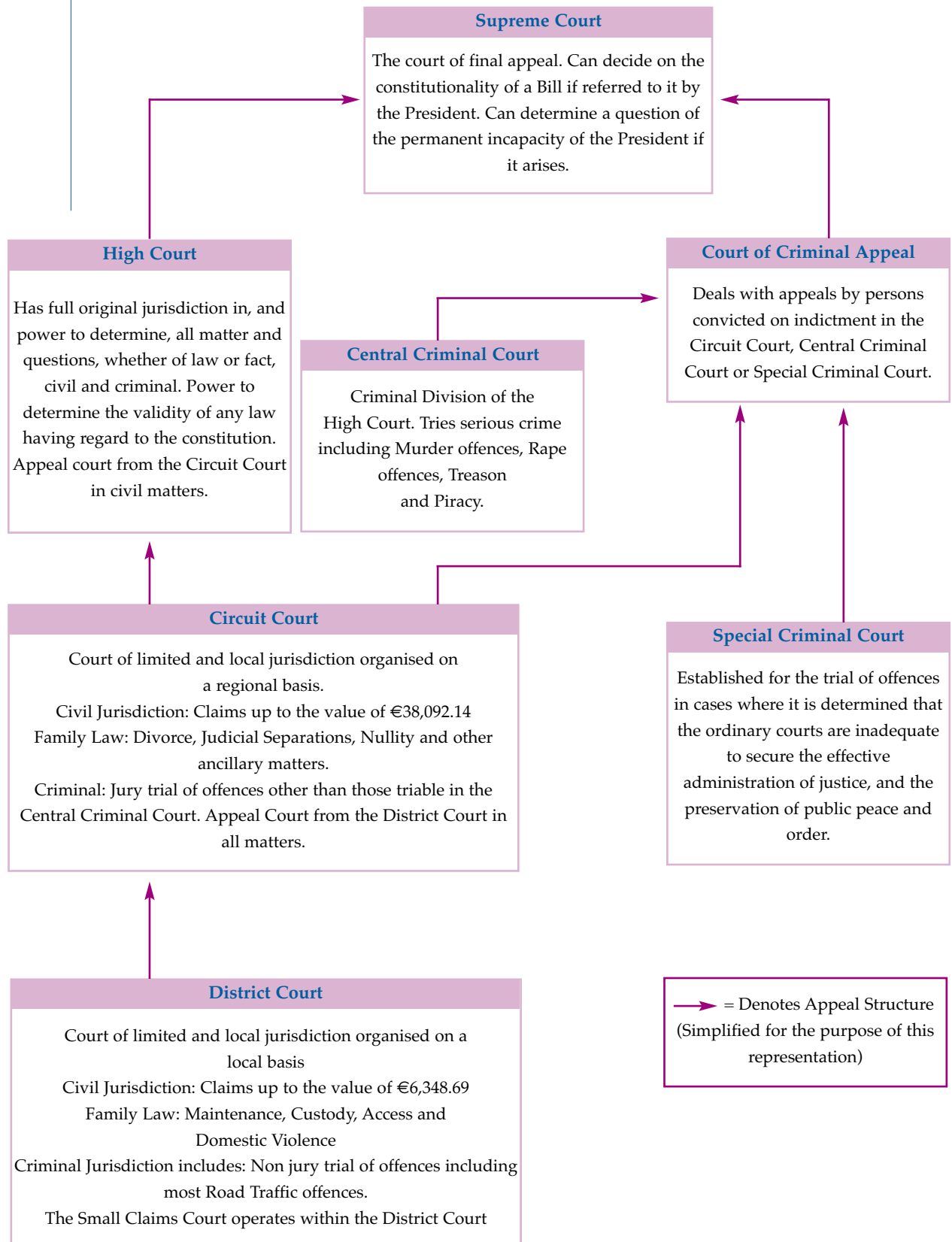
## Appendix 2. The Courts System in Ireland



## Appendix 2. The Courts System in Ireland

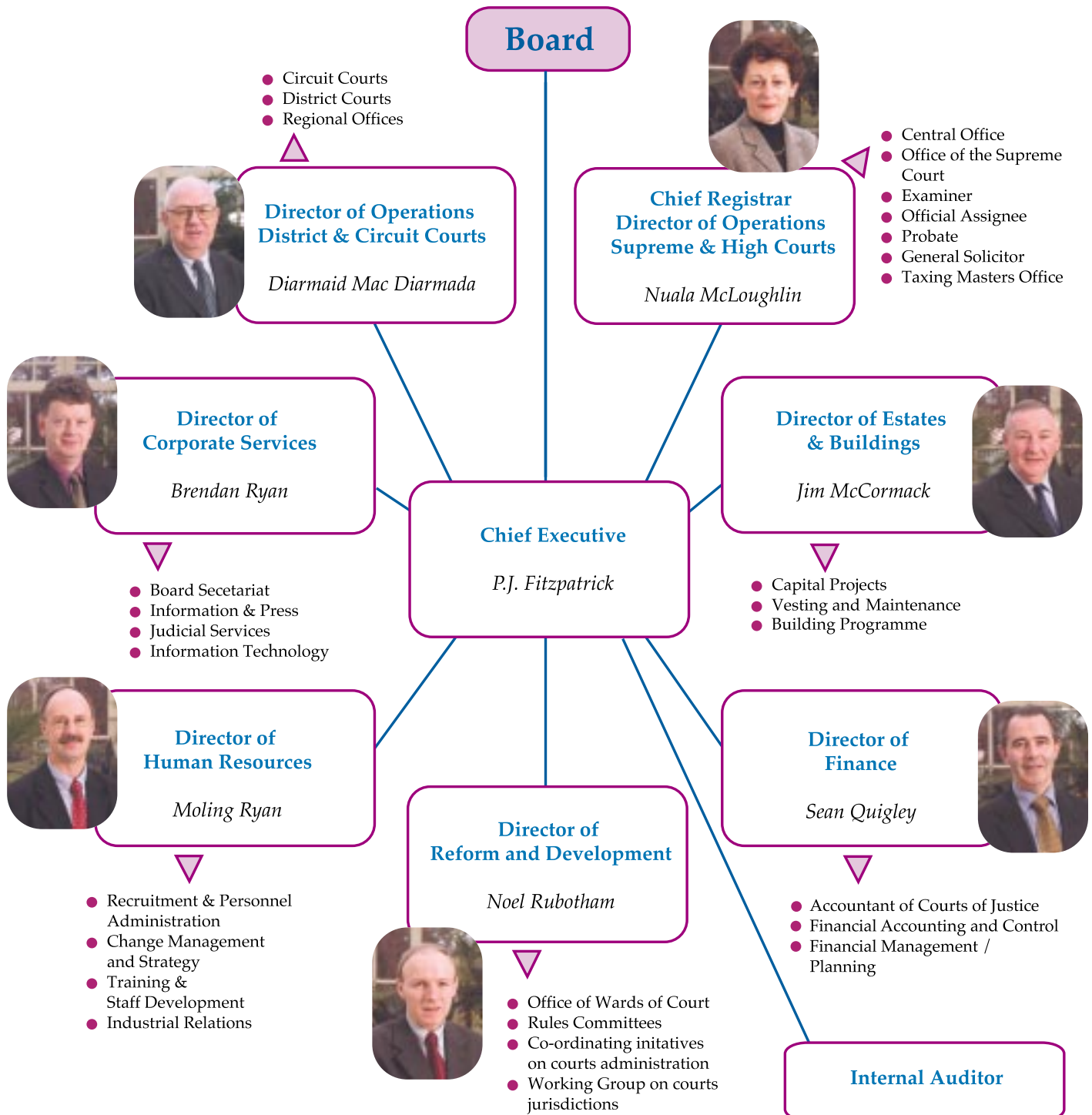
1 Letterkenny District Court Office	36 Kilkenny District Court Office
2 Donegal Circuit Court Office	37 Kilkenny Circuit Court Office
3 Donegal District Court Office	38 Carlow District Court Office
4 Sligo District Court Office	39 Carlow Circuit Court Office
5 Sligo Circuit Court Office	40 Bray District Court Office
6 Ballina District Court Office	41 Wicklow Circuit Court Office
7 Castlebar District Court Office	42 Portlaoise District Court Office
8 Mayo Circuit Court Office	43 Laois Circuit Court Office
9 Derrynea District Court Office	44 Athlone District Court Office
10 Tuam District Court Office	45 Tullamore District Court Office
11 Galway District Court Office	46 Offaly Circuit Court Office
12 Galway Circuit Court Office	47 Mullingar District Court Office
13 Ballinasloe District Court Office	48 Westmeath Circuit Court Office
14 Loughrea District Court Office	49 Longford District Court Office
15 Clare Circuit Court Office	50 Longford Circuit Court Office
16 Ennis District Court Office	51 Roscommon District Court Office
17 Listowel District Court Office	52 Roscommon Circuit Court Office
18 Tralee District Court Office	53 Carrick on Shannon District Court Office
19 Kerry Circuit Court Office	54 Leitrim Circuit Court Office
20 Killarney District Court Office	55 Cavan District Court Office
21 Clonakilty District Court Office	56 Cavan Circuit Court Office
22 Mallow District Court Office	57 Monaghan District Court Office
23 Cork District Court Office	58 Monaghan Circuit Court Office
24 Cork Circuit Court Office	59 Dundalk District Court Office
25 Fermoy District Court Office	60 Louth Circuit Court Office
26 Youghal District Court Office	61 Drogheda District Court Office
27 Limerick District Court Office	62 Trim District Court Office
28 Limerick Circuit Court Office	63 Meath Circuit Court Office
29 Clonmel District Court Office	64 Kildare Circuit Court Office
30 Tipperary Circuit Court Office	65 Naas District Court Office
31 Waterford District Court Office	66 Nenagh District Court Offices
32 Waterford Circuit Court Office	67 Thurles District Court Offices
33 Wexford Circuit Court Office	68 Dublin Circuit Court Office
34 Wexford District Court Office	69 Dublin District Court Office
35 Gorey District Court Office	70 Supreme and High Court Offices

## Appendix 3. Structure of the Courts





## Appendix 4. Courts Service Organisational Chart

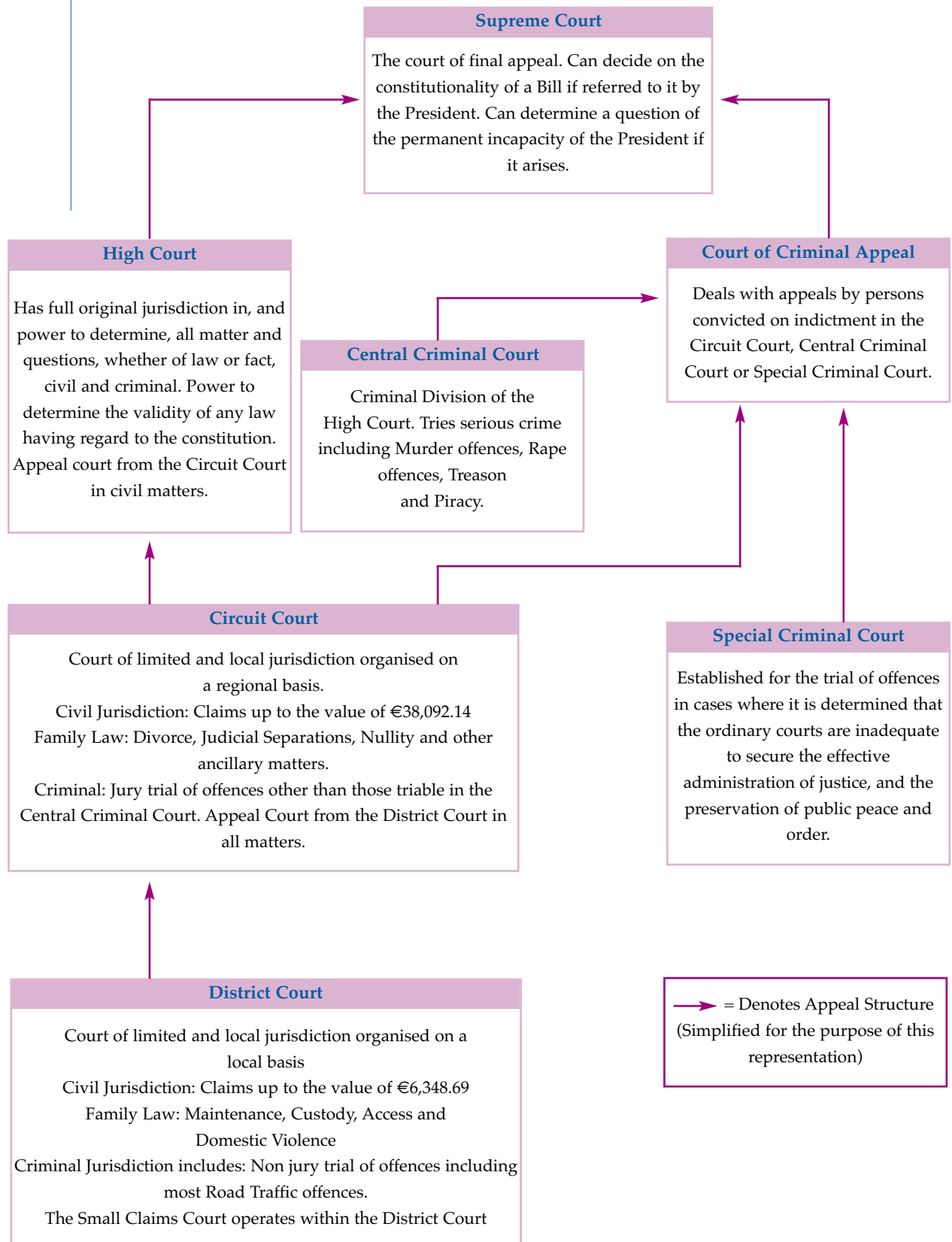


**The Courts Service**

## Appendix 2. The Courts System in Ireland

1	Letterkenny District Court Office	36	Kilkenny District Court Office
2	Donegal Circuit Court Office	37	Kilkenny Circuit Court Office
3	Donegal District Court Office	38	Carlow District Court Office
4	Sligo District Court Office	39	Carlow Circuit Court Office
5	Sligo Circuit Court Office	40	Bray District Court Office
6	Ballina District Court Office	41	Wicklow Circuit Court Office
7	Castlebar District Court Office	42	Portlaoise District Court Office
8	Mayo Circuit Court Office	43	Laois Circuit Court Office
9	Derrynea District Court Office	44	Athlone District Court Office
10	Tuam District Court Office	45	Tullamore District Court Office
11	Galway District Court Office	46	Offaly Circuit Court Office
12	Galway Circuit Court Office	47	Mullingar District Court Office
13	Ballinasloe District Court Office	48	Westmeath Circuit Court Office
14	Loughrea District Court Office	49	Longford District Court Office
15	Clare Circuit Court Office	50	Longford Circuit Court Office
16	Ennis District Court Office	51	Roscommon District Court Office
17	Listowel District Court Office	52	Roscommon Circuit Court Office
18	Tralee District Court Office	53	Carrick on Shannon District Court Office
19	Kerry Circuit Court Office	54	Leitrim Circuit Court Office
20	Killarney District Court Office	55	Cavan District Court Office
21	Clonakilty District Court Office	56	Cavan Circuit Court Office
22	Mallow District Court Office	57	Monaghan District Court Office
23	Cork District Court Office	58	Monaghan Circuit Court Office
24	Cork Circuit Court Office	59	Dundalk District Court Office
25	Fermoy District Court Office	60	Louth Circuit Court Office
26	Youghal District Court Office	61	Drogheda District Court Office
27	Limerick District Court Office	62	Trim District Court Office
28	Limerick Circuit Court Office	63	Meath Circuit Court Office
29	Clonmel District Court Office	64	Kildare Circuit Court Office
30	Tipperary Circuit Court Office	65	Naas District Court Office
31	Waterford District Court Office	66	Nenagh District Court Offices
32	Waterford Circuit Court Office	67	Thurles District Court Offices
33	Wexford Circuit Court Office	68	Dublin Circuit Court Office
34	Wexford District Court Office	69	Dublin District Court Office
35	Gorey District Court Office	70	Supreme and High Court Offices

## Appendix 3. Structure of the Courts



## Appendix 4. Courts Service Organisational Chart

