



Courts Service News

Nuacht na Seirbhíse Cúirteanna



An tSeirbhís Chúirteanna
Courts Service



**Courts Service
celebrates 25 years**

**Modernisation
Programme**

**Podcast
Series**



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Welcome to the December issue of Courts Service News

We're delighted to bring you our annual printed edition of the magazine of the Courts Service.

1999 was the year of the millennium bug, Gay Byrne presented his last Late Late Show, and a young Irish boyband called Westlife released their first album. Bertie was Taoiseach, Mary McAleese was President and the Courts Service was established! We've a special feature in this edition looking back at our first 25 years.

As we look back, we reflect on the Information Office (now the Communications and Media Unit) that was established in March 2000 to provide information about the Irish courts and to enhance public awareness of the courts generally. This very magazine began publication as the Courts Service was established. In the early days, we published leaflets on multiple subjects and began publishing our Annual Reports. Nowadays, we're busier than ever – see our article on page 15. We launched our first podcast series with the judiciary this year, read about it on page 6.



We open with some festive messages from our Chief Justice, The Hon. Mr. Donal O'Donnell, and our CEO, Angela Denning. The front and back covers feature photos of events honouring staff who have dedicated 25 years or more to public service. These events took place to extend our deepest appreciation for their service.

You can read about the progress of our 10-year Modernisation Programme,

now in its fourth year. We also hear about the progress our Information Communications and Technology (ICT) department has been making with the new Unified Case Management System (UCMS) that will enable faster and smoother case processing. There are also updates from our Innovation and Sustainability teams, and a roundup of the Inclusion Group's busy year of events.

We wish all our readers a happy and healthy Christmas and a peaceful New Year.



Christmas Message from The Chief Justice Mr Justice Donal O'Donnell

2024 was an exciting year for the Courts Service and the Judiciary as we marked the 100-year anniversary of our independent courts system.

The anniversary provided several moments for pause and celebration throughout the year to reflect on the achievements of our system and recommit ourselves to progress yet to make. Thanks to the collaborative work of a dedicated committee of judges and Courts Service officials, these moments included an academic conference at Dublin Castle, a ceremonial event in the Round Hall, the publication of a new edition of a book on the Supreme Court, the refurbishment of the area and lighting outside the Supreme Court, and a successful podcast series. The success of the centenary ceremony in May in particular, which drew attendance from court presidents and judicial representatives from across Europe and beyond, highlights the regard within which the Irish legal system is held across the world. However, it is important to remember that the success of our system is not inevitable and requires constant development to ensure that it will endure for the next 100 years.



One of the benefits of my role as Chief Justice is that I get to witness firsthand the range of activities and projects which are well underway in this regard, and which seek to achieve a courts system that is fit for purpose, efficient, and serves the needs of those who use it and support its operation. Many of these projects are captured throughout this publication, and I am pleased to report that improvements are already being seen and felt following the continued implementation of the recommendations of the Judicial Planning Working Group. I look forward to seeing this trend continue in 2025.

As the year draws to an end, I would like to acknowledge the hard work and goodwill of all those who work within the courts system and wider justice community. I am grateful for the dedication of my colleagues in the judiciary and all in the Courts Service, and I wish everyone a happy and relaxing Christmas period.

Donal O'Donnell
Chief Justice



A Christmas message from Angela Denning CEO

This November marked twenty-five years since the Courts Service was established. In reaching this milestone, I'd like to thank staff, the Judiciary and our many partners for their dedication to providing access to justice over the years.

As one of those who worked in the Courts in 1999, I remember a sense of anticipation and some uncertainty as to what the future would hold. Three immediate changes for staff which stand out were – the creation of regional structures, that all promotions would be by competition (reflecting a move away from promotion on seniority and suitability in some areas) and the widescale computerisation of the administration of the Courts. Many offices back in 1999 worked with pen and paper and only a few had any IT capability. The introduction of computers, email and some new applications in 2000 was a very tangible sign of positive change.

Another impactful change was the adoption of the "Working Group on a Courts Commission" recommendation that judges would work alongside others on the Courts Service Board and Committees. This recognised that Courts Service functions were concerned with the management and administration of the Courts rather than the administration of justice itself.

Another area that has changed dramatically is our Estate. In 1999 the District Court sat in over 200 venues. Over the last 25 years we have developed new courthouses and refurbished many others. This year, the long-awaited Dublin Family Courts project took a big step forward with its launch to market.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of our first CEO P.J. Fitzpatrick and his successor Brendan Ryan, and of all Courts Service staff, in building this organisation from the ground up. Strong working relationships developed with the judiciary and justice sector

from the early days have stood the test of time and are the foundation of our collaborative approach today.

Fast forward to 2024, we have over 1,200 staff working together in combined offices and teams which we could not have imagined existing 25 years ago. Through our Modernisation Programme we are establishing better ways of working and seeking to meet the needs of both the workforce of the future and an expanding court system. Our new Unified Case Management System is now replacing over 140 systems developed over more than 20 years, paving the way for the introduction of digital filing and an online portal. For more information on this, check out the ICT update later in this issue.

One thing that has not changed is that our people are our strongest asset, demonstrating public service values daily. Their work ethic and willingness to go the extra mile was exemplified during the pandemic when we succeeded in keeping courts open and safe. The challenges we and the judiciary face daily fluctuate with societal shifts. Changing behaviours, driven no doubt by social media, stress, trauma and other issues are starting to become more common in everyday life and in our workplaces. The safety of our staff, judiciary and all court users is a steadfast priority for the Senior Management Team and the Courts Service Board. In this changing environment we continue to work with everyone involved to ensure we have effective and appropriate protocols, supports and training in place.

In marking twenty-five years of the Courts Service, we have been



recognising staff who have worked in the Courts/Civil Service for twenty-five years or more. Thanks to this staff-inspired initiative, by the end of year, I am proud to say we will have acknowledged the contribution made by over 300 staff! Among those are Emer Darcy and Nina Brennan who joined our Senior Management Team this year, following Top Level Appointments Committee processes.

As I write this, I find myself wondering 'where have the years gone?' and marvelling at how dramatically the world has changed since 1999. We are at an exciting juncture for our organisation almost at the half point of our Modernisation Programme, our plans for the next three years are articulated in our Corporate Strategic Plan 2024 - 2027, published earlier this year and available on courts.ie. The ambitions central to the Modernisation Programme will be realised in the successful delivery of this Plan. We look forward to working with all of you to ensure the courts system can meet the challenges of the next twenty-five years and beyond.

I wish you and yours a happy and peaceful Christmas.

Angela Denning CEO
The Courts Service



An tSeirbhís Chúirteanna
Courts Service

If you would like to be a contributor to the magazine, please contact the editorial team at
courts servicenews@courts.ie

Courts Service News is the magazine of the Courts Service. Contributions are drawn from a wide area and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Courts Service. The editors reserve the right to edit all contributions.

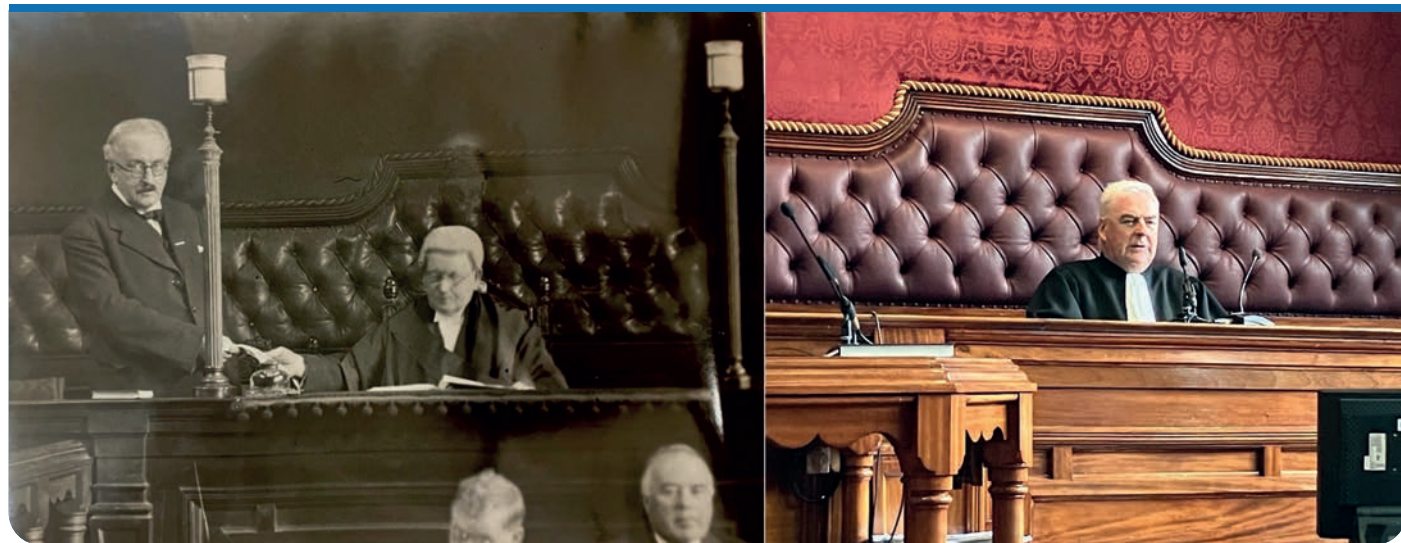
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Mr Justice David Nolan takes the same seat where his Grand-Uncle sat between 1932 and 1942



Family history repeats itself as Mr Justice David Nolan was recently assigned to sit in Courtroom No. 2 in Washington Street Courthouse, Cork, for the High Court Non-Jury Sessions in November 2024 – the same courtroom where his grand-uncle, Judge Joseph Kerry O'Connor once sat while he was a judge of Cork Circuit Court.

A short bio on his Honour Judge Joseph Kerry O'Connor (7 May 1875 to 8 June 1960)

Joseph Kerry O'Connor was born in Ashford, Co Limerick and educated by the Jesuits in both Crescent College Limerick and Clongowes Wood College, Kildare.

During his studies he worked as a clerk in the Dublin Metropolitan District, working part time with the Evening Herald as well as the Saturday Herald.

He was called to the Bar in 1900,

quickly establishing himself before featuring prominently in Maurice Healy's Book *"The Old Munster Circuit"*. Healy noted that he had a "quick eye for a humorous situation; he seized upon an ounce of fact, added a dash of fiction, and produced a pound of amusing pastiche". In 1903 he published *"Studies in Blue"* using the pseudonym Heblon. It was a collection of short stories which previously had appeared in the Evening Herald and showed humorous descriptions of cases before the Dublin Police Courts. It is referred to in James Joyce's *"Ulysses"* in the chapter, Ithaca.

The book was beautifully illustrated by Charles A. Mills R.A.H.A.

In 1917, he co-wrote a play with Oliver St. John Gogarty, called *"Blight"* for the Abbey Theatre, under the pseudonyms *"Alpha and Omega"*. It was said to have influenced Sean O'Casey to write *"Juno and the Peacock"*.

On 14 July 1923 he took silk in the first call of the Irish Free State in the Supreme Court in Dublin Castle. The Irish Times noted that the Chief Justice called each Counsel by his name in Irish and then addressed them in that language noting that they came immediately after those who were now King's Counsel. Thus, O'Connor and six others were the first Senior Counsel in the Common Law World.

As a silk he appeared in many leading cases, most notably for the accused, who



Judge Joseph O'Connor arriving at Cork sittings in 1934

were acquitted, in the infamous Honor Bright murder trial in 1926. As a Defence Counsel he was said to have few peers and was regarded by colleagues of the Bar as an Irish Marshall Hall (Sir Edward Marshall Hall, KC (1858 –1927) was an English barrister who had a formidable reputation as a skilled public speaker and successfully defended many people accused of notorious murders. He became known as 'The Great Defender').

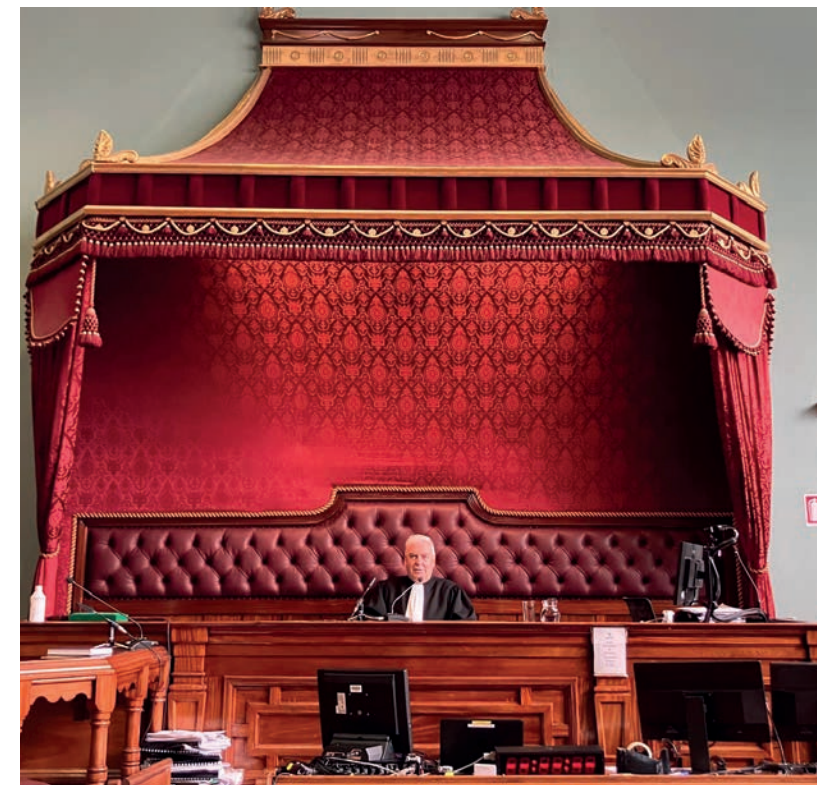
In 1928 he appeared for the family in a controversial public enquiry held in City Hall, into the shooting of an IRA man, Timothy Coughlan in the back of his head by the Gardaí. He was standing counsel for the Dublin United Tramway Company as well as the late Jim Larkin.

In 1932 he was appointed a Circuit Court Judge for the Munster Circuit travelling the length and breadth of the circuit dealing with both crime and civil matters. He was a sitting Judge of the Circuit Court when the Constitution created the Cork Circuit.

He was appointed a referee under the Military Services Pensions Act and played a big part in the *"buy Irish campaign"* from 1932 onwards. He retired in 1942.

He was a keen golfer and was a member of both Royal Dublin and Portmarnock Golf Clubs.

His niece Patricia Walsh and grand-nephew Mr Justice Nolan were both subsequently called to the Bar.



Judge Joseph Kerry O'Connor's grand-nephew Mr Justice David Nolan sitting in the same seat as his grand-uncle over 80 years later.

Irish Language Developments in the Courts Service

The year of 2024 marked a significant year for the development of the Irish language in the Courts Service with the appointment of Dónal Ó Gallachóir as the first Irish Language Strategy Manager for the organisation. He heads up the Irish Language Unit.

The main priorities for the development of the Irish language include ensuring compliance with the Official Languages Act 2003 and Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021, translation of materials into Irish, facilitation of court hearings in Irish, increasing the number of our staff members with competency in the language and most importantly, the development of a multiannual Strategic Plan for the Irish Language.

Significant progress has been made with the first Strategic Plan for the Irish language due for publication in early 2025. This Plan will chart out a roadmap for development and growth of Irish in the Courts Service over a three-year period, aiming to improve staff language competency and quality of service to the public. Whilst this means that practices in relation to the Irish language are changing, this Strategic Plan will aim to inform the

Aonad Gaeilge na Seirbhíse Cúirteanna
Irish Language Unit of the Courts Service

Aistriúchán
Tacaíocht
Comhairle

Translation
Guidance
Support



public and, importantly, Courts Service staff of what to expect throughout this process of change.

A key aspect in improving the quality of service we provide in Irish is to raise awareness and increase visibility of the language. A number of signage and promotional initiatives will take place in 2025 to achieve this goal and to normalise the usage of Irish across the Courts Service.

As the saying goes *Beatha teanga í a labhairt* (the life of a language is to

speak it), as in this spirit a particular focus in 2025 will be put on informing and encouraging staff to take part in practical Irish language training and upskilling, providing all members of staff an opportunity to improve their Irish.

The year of 2025 promises to be an important year for progress and evolution of the Irish language in the Courts Service. Join us on this journey in moving towards the Service becoming a genuinely bilingual organisation.

Coinnigh súil agam le linn 2025 do na forbairtí seo uile.

Bí í dteagmháil linn!



100 years of the Courts celebrated in our podcast series

We recently released **The Irish Courts Podcast**, a series of five episodes reflecting the operation of the courts over the last century. The series, featuring historical figures and cases from the past 100 years, celebrates the centenary of the Courts of Justice Act of 1924.

With input from major legal, judicial, and political figures, the series revisits cases where someone was prosecuted for a public kiss; where private relationships and their legal status were examined; the first woman to become a judge in Ireland; and how small cases have resulted in big changes in the law about representation in court. With almost 4,000 downloads to date, the series has featured in the "top 100" Irish podcasts on Spotify.

Launching the series, Chief Justice Donal O'Donnell said, "The coming into force 100 years ago of the Courts of Justice Act 1924 marked a significant milestone in the life of the new State and was, by all accounts, a remarkable achievement worthy of celebration. The aim, when we set out to brainstorm the topics for these podcasts, was to curate a series which would capture the human-interest side of law and bring to life some of the stories, big and small, which have taken place against the backdrop of our courts system, and in their own ways have impacted Irish society."

The podcast series was led by Chief Justice O'Donnell, Ms. Justice Iseult O'Malley of the Supreme Court, Mr. Justice Cian Ferriter of the High Court, Judge Gráinne Malone of the District Court, Lisa Maybury and Denis Burke of the Courts Service Communications and Media Unit, and was produced by Patricia Baker of Curious Broadcasts.

Visit courts.ie/podcasts or scan the QR code to access the series.



What does it mean to have a judicial system of your own? Chief Justice Donal O'Donnell and Mr Justice Gerard Hogan examine the sweeping reforms of the 1924 court system, highlighting its significance in fostering a fair and independent Ireland. Tune in to celebrate the radical spirit that shaped the nation's legal landscape!



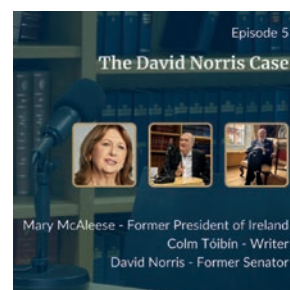
A look at the life of Eileen Kennedy, Ireland's first woman judge, whose groundbreaking appointment in 1964 marked a turning point in Ireland's legal history. Learn about her pivotal role in reforming the treatment of vulnerable children and her lasting impact on the judicial landscape through a rich and storied retelling.



Dive into the pivotal District Court cases of Healy v. Donoghue and DPP v. Gary Doyle, which transformed the landscape of legal representation in Ireland. Discover how these seemingly small cases established crucial rights for defendants and set the stage for modern justice practices.



The intriguing and controversial Julia Clarke case - a story that challenges our perceptions of justice and morality in 1930s Ireland. Imagine a summer evening and a young couple's innocent kiss that leads to an unexpected turn of events. We unpack the legal intricacies and social context surrounding this remarkable case, shedding light on a different era and its enduring impact on contemporary Ireland.



The David Norris case — a pivotal legal battle that challenged the constitutionality of laws criminalising male homosexuality. The episode features Colm Tóibín, former President Mary McAleese, and David Norris himself as they recount the struggle to overturn laws dating back to the British Empire. This is a story of courage, visibility, and the fight for equality in a society where love, until then, was criminalised.



2024 Year at a Glance

32,000
page views of our
Open Data Portal
data.courts.ie

165
video-enabled
courtrooms

48%
response rate
on Digital Jury
system

36%
more energy
efficient than
2009

1st
Round Table event
with members of
our Civic Society
Forum

An tSeirbhís Chúirteanna
Courts Service

531
staff are Trauma
Informed Practice
Trained

35,000
social media
followers

1st
Place Civil Service
Excellence Award
for user-centric
information on
family law.

4,000
downloads of the
Irish Courts
Podcast



Modernisation Programme

Better ways of working

As we reach the end of the fourth year of our 10-year Modernisation Programme, we reflect on how we're transforming the organisation. We have started bringing improved efficiencies and modernising how we administer the courts, provide support services to the judiciary and information to the public.

Our digital first approach is transforming our Information and Communications Technology system (ICT) systems, enabling the development of digital filing and online transactions with Courts and court offices. The ICT feature on page 16 gives an update on our digital, data and general ICT progress so far this year. ICT may be changing some of our operations, but ours is not a “digital only” approach. We are trying to optimise every aspect of our processes and services, putting the needs and experience of the public at the centre of everything we do.

Our user-centric goal to design services with users, for users works across the whole transformation programme. Working with key user groups to improve how we design and offer online and in-person services and information is an essential part of our Modernisation Programme.

As part of our continued engagement with civic society groups, we held our first Round Table event with



Round Table discussion event hosted by the Courts Service with Civic Society members: Back row, left to right: Mary Murphy, Age Action; Colleen Dube, NALA; Ciarán Galway, eolas Magazine; Dymrna Kenny, V-SAC

Front row, left to right: Aideen Hartney, NDA; Angela Denning, The Courts Service

members of our Civic Society Forum. This event which was documented in the September edition of Eolas Magazine, which shared insights into our collaborative approach to transformation. The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), Victim Support at Court (V-SAC), National Disability Authority and Age Action Ireland all shared their insights.

In the Courts Service, like other organisations, we have been developing our plain English capabilities. Plain English enables us to provide information that is accessible to more people, it helps us build trust with our users and can help empower them when having to navigate the court system. Building on the success of our user-centric information for family law, in 2024 we developed an online learning module, ‘A Simple Guide to Plain English’ for all staff. Working with the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and our own Learning and Development team, we have created a simple elearning tool. Tailored to those working in the courts, the tool provides plain English tips and examples of how to apply plain English guidelines across all our communications.

Civil Law Reform

Reflecting on 2024, we continue to make progress in achieving our vision to make the civil court system more accessible and empower civil users to take the best course of action and enable better outcomes for all.

Information Guides for Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Applicants (ADMC)

A focus for the Civil Reform team this year was to develop information guides to support people completing their Capacity Applications and Statement of Particulars forms. Following feedback

from our users, we developed new information guides to use before, during and after the application process. A new ADCM forms page is available on courts.ie to help people find the correct forms. In addition, we developed an Eligibility Checker to help people check if they need court consent to make a Capacity Application. You can view the new ADCM section on courts.ie.

Developing easy-to-understand information on Repossessions

Again, taking a user-centric approach we developed new comprehensive information on repossessions. This new information will help users understand the repossessions court process better and increase awareness of the many supports available. A special thanks to those who gave us valuable feedback, including public users, Courts Staff, County Registrars, members of the Judiciary and dedicated Support Services. Keep an eye out for the launch of our new repossessions information on courts.ie over the coming weeks!

Small Claims Research

We have also completed a joint research project on the small claims information and procedures. We worked with members of the Family Law team to understand the key pain points and challenges faced by users. As part of this work, the team engaged with a range of court users including public users, small claims registrars, Courts Service staff, the Judiciary, and representative groups. The insights gathered will help to support the provision of new user-friendly information and other potential improvements in this area.

For more information on our activities or if you have any questions or comments, email us at CivilReform@courts.ie.

Family Law Reform

This year our focus has been on supporting the implementation of the Family Justice Strategy, and in particular, modernising family law court application forms. Highlights include:

Supporting the Family Justice Strategy



Presenting the Courts Service Update at the Family Justice Development Forum

Work has taken place on a wide variety of actions that we are leading on across the Family Justice Strategy. We've been working in particular on the Family Justice strategy actions that cover services and supports as well as alternative dispute resolution.

We have collaborated with the justice partners on their projects, including:

- Child maintenance initiatives
- Setting up of the new Guardian Ad Litem service
- Developing child-friendly information
- Researching expert reports and the in-camera rule

In July, the Family Law Reform Team and the Courts Service ICT team presented a comprehensive update on the Courts Service's activities at the Department of Justice's Family Justice Development Forum. Great progress has been made so far and we will continue to work on implementing the Family Justice Strategy in 2025.

Successful testing of new Domestic Violence Application Form

The goal of this work is to create modern application forms that are user-friendly, accessible, and simple to complete.

The team have been focussing on application forms for:

- Domestic violence orders
- Maintenance orders
- Orders under the Guardianship of Infants Act, 1964
- Divorce

Taking a user-centric, collaborative approach in designing these forms, we have had input from a wide variety of groups including advocacy groups,



Cork Court Office Staff with new Domestic Violence application form

courts staff, judges, County Registrars, and end-users.

In August, we ran a successful pilot of a new domestic violence order application form in Cork and Dublin. The pilot ran for a period of 6 weeks and the feedback has been very positive. The next step for the team is to progress the forms through the court rules committee and begin a national rollout.

9th Civil Service Innovation and Excellence Awards – Family Law information online continues to benefit court users

In 2023 the Family Law Reform Team launched new, comprehensive plain

language family law information on the Courts Service website. The new pages offer step-by-step guides, eligibility criteria, and practical information about how to prepare for a family law court hearing.

We were delighted to receive a “Citizen Impact and Customer Service” award at the 9th Civil Service Innovation and Excellence Awards for the project. This award recognises initiatives where consideration of the customer has been central to the design and delivery of services, resulting in improved service provision, and in the quality of customer services.

The team would like to thank everyone who collaborated on this project, ensuring its success, and making family law information more accessible and user-friendly. You can visit this information at courts.ie.

Thank you

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to thank all staff, judges, county registrars, solicitors, barristers, and members of the public who helped us throughout the year. Thank you for attending our civic society meetings, workshops, giving us feedback, and responding to our many requests. We look forward to further collaboration with you in 2025!



Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards ceremony – Winner of Citizen Impact and Customer Service Award



2024 activities from the Courts Service Inclusion Group

The first Courts Service 'Celebration of Hope' event

The Courts Service Inclusion Group kicked off 2024 with the inaugural 'Celebration of Hope' event in the Criminal Courts of Justice on Thursday 22 February.



Pictured some of the members of the Courts Service Inclusion Group

The 'Celebration of Hope' event was created as a casual social networking event for Courts Service current and retired staff to inspire hope for the year ahead and to lighten the winter months before springing into brighter days!

The event focused not only on hope but also touched on grief, reflecting on the loss of friends and family within the Courts Service in recent years. We heard beautiful songs from the Courts Service Choir, speeches, poems as Gaeilge agus as Béarla, watched Maya Angelou's profound clip on 'Love Liberates' and shared three hopes each for the year ahead. We received amazing feedback from attendees on how much they enjoyed the event.

The second 'Celebration of Hope' event will take place again early in the new year and we look forward to another inspiring and positive event to kickstart 2025!

International Women's Day 2024

The theme for IWD 2024 was 'Inspire Inclusion'. For this we created an animated video to share interesting facts about women in support of women. For example, did you know, 60 million girls experience gender-related assaults on their way to school or at school? In line with this video, we shared a list of support services for women.

In addition, we held a fascinating lunch and learn event on 'Equality in law and 50 years since lifting the marriage bar' with specialist speaker the Hon. Ms. Justice Marguerite Bolger, Judge of the High Court. Over 75 people attended the event in-person and online.

Africa Day 2024

Throughout May, we held events on the lead up to Africa Day 2024 to celebrate our colleagues, family, and friends of African descent. Courts Service staff also attended the flagship Africa Day event in the Royal Hospital in Kilmainham, Dublin.

We held a lunchtime event in Court 29 of The Four Courts celebrating African diversity which included speakers: Patricia Erasmus, Senior Legal Executive Officer to the President of the High Court, Amanda Magadzire, Clerical Officer, Cork Office, and Eoin Heffernan, former Judicial Assistant who spoke about the United Nations International decade for people of African descent.

Interesting facts from the event: Africa is a diverse continent with 54 different countries. Home to 15% of the world's population. Of the 1.3 billion African people there are 2,000 languages. Lake Victoria is 85% of the size of Ireland. 70% of the world's cocoa beans come from Africa – thank you Africa!

We look forward to celebrating World Culture Day in 2025 with our multicultural colleagues.

Pride 2024

Our staff attended and celebrated Pride in a personal capacity and had a brilliant time celebrating, noting that "even the rain couldn't put a dampener on the day, a wonderful day full of dancing and good cheer!" – Aisling Crowther, Criminal Courts of Justice.



Aisling Crowther, Criminal Courts of Justice celebrating Dublin Pride with her friends and colleagues from other public service bodies.

Public Sector Duty Plan 2024 - 2027

In June, the Inclusion Group launched our Human Rights and Equality – New Public

Sector Duty Action Plan, which covers years 2024 to 2027. Its implementation will be part of our effort to demonstrate our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Human Rights for our staff and court users. You can read the plan in the 'Publications' section on our website: courts.ie/publications.

Coffee Morning and fundraising in Memory of Vicky McCarthy Keane

On 22 July 2024 family, friends and colleagues gathered in Mullingar Courthouse to remember the late Vicky McCarthy Keane who passed away from Motor Neurone Disease on 28 December 2022. Vicky was a solicitor who spent most of her career practising in Mullingar. It also doubled as a fundraiser for the Irish Motor Neurone Disease Association.



Centre - Inclusion Group member Gary Lee, Office of the General Solicitor for Minors and Wards of Court, and brother-in-law to Vicky, with her family and friends.

International Men's Day

For International Men's Day this year, colleagues celebrated men and supported them through 'Movember' by holding a coffee morning in the Criminal Courts of Justice to raise funds for Men's Sheds.

One of the six pillars of International Men's Day is: "To promote positive male role models; not just movie stars and sportsmen, but every day, working-class men who are living decent, honest lives." In this light, the theme for IMD 2024 is 'Positive Male Role Models'.

We sent out 'Appreciation Certificates' to all staff so they could share their appreciation with their male colleagues. Our male colleagues were delighted with the appreciation shown.

What's next?

We are looking forward to rolling out more important EDI activities in 2025 and hope our reach grows year on year!

Brought to you by the Courts Service Inclusion Group.



The Courts Service Celebrates 25 years

"I see it as a primary aim that we should convince every Irish citizen that the Courts are primarily a service to them, to which they are entitled as of right, where far from feeling out of place or intimidated, they should feel secure and at ease."

P.J. Fitzpatrick, Courts Service CEO, 1999.

On 9 November, 1999, Justice minister John O'Donoghue signed the order establishing the Courts Service as an independent body with responsibility for the management and development of the courts in Ireland. In signing the Order, the Minister gave effect to the most fundamental reform of court administration since the foundation of the State.



Minister John O'Donoghue with Chief Justice Liam Hamilton on Establishment Day, 9 November 1999.

The Irish courts system had remained largely unaltered since its inception in 1924, despite an enormous increase in civil and criminal litigation, resulting in long delays in determining cases, an overworking of staff and Judiciary, and a poor organisational structure. Large numbers of court offices operated in silos apart from one another.

The formation of the Service had been recommended by the 'Working Group on a Courts Commission', chaired by future Chief Justice Susan Denham, which first met in 1995 and worked tirelessly for three years producing six reports and various papers. Those reports provided the blueprint for the transition to an independent body which followed the enactment of the Courts Service Act, 1998. The Act identified the role of the Service to manage the courts, provide support services to the judges, maintain court buildings and facilities for courts users, and to provide information to the public.

Our first CEO P.J. Fitzpatrick said at the time that the Courts Service "is a uniquely Irish structure which, while

having similarities to systems in other countries, is at its core a wholly Irish organisation created to meet the needs of Irish society. It is a system designed to enable efficient and effective management so that justice may be delivered with greater speed and efficiency to the people."



Transitional Board of the Courts Service in 1999. CEO P.J. Fitzpatrick seated at centre.

The initial years of the Service saw great strides in unifying staff and management structures, developing Information Technology systems, improving service to the Judiciary, and enhancing the quality of information for those doing business with the courts. The CEO said he believed the first three years were all about infrastructural change, while the next three were about customer service and improving processes and procedures.

The Courts Service was one of four Civil Service organisations chosen by the National Centre for Partnership and Performance as case studies to reflect the manner in which change was effectively implemented in a number of areas.

The strong working relationships that

staff had established with the local legal communities, recognised by the 1995 Working Group, no doubt contributed to the goodwill the Courts Service enjoyed in infancy. That goodwill is still strong today. It was fundamental to the changes needed to keep courts open and safe during the pandemic and it is what will propel the improvements envisaged in our Strategic Vision 2030.

Coming right up to date, our Modernisation Programme was developed to realise our Strategic Vision aims to make jobs more meaningful and rewarding by streamlining and simplifying processes, reducing our reliance on paper-based operations and providing digitally-enabled operations. We have been supported with funding to rollout these changes and have added over 200 new members of staff to implement change and improve the workload. You can read more about the progress we are making in the Modernisation Programme and ICT articles in the pages of this publication.

Wide consultation, including the formation of user groups, has been a feature since the formation of the Service. The views and suggestions of those closely involved in the Courts system are taken into consideration in the development and operation of policy and initiatives. They also provide a useful forum for the exchange of ideas and help in making users aware of each other's needs and concerns.

In recent years, essential groups, such as the Judicial Modernisation Engagement Working Group, Legal Practitioners Engagement Working Group, and the Civic Society Forum, have been established. These groups convene regularly to provide updates on modernisation activities, to facilitate the important exchange of ideas, and to provide feedback directly to teams as they are developing new systems

Continued on page 14



Courts Service Timeline

On 9th November, 1999, the Minister for Justice signed an order establishing the Courts Service. Mr PJ Fitzpatrick is the first CEO of the Service. Chief Justice Liam Hamilton becomes Chairman of the Courts Service Board.



A new headquarters underway for the Courts Service.



Mr Justice Ronan Keane becomes Chief Justice.

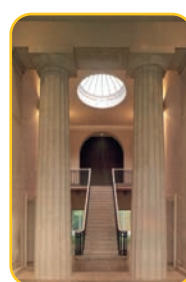
In its early months, the Courts Service produces its first 3-year strategy, along with 5-year ICT and Buildings strategies.

Launch of Drug Treatment Court in Dublin, offering an alternative to prison for offenders.

Doors open at Cloverhill Courthouse.

First Customer Service Action Plan published.

Legal Diary made available by email following demise of Mount Salus Press.



Establishment of Commercial Court announced.

Dundalk and Limerick Courthouses reopen after refurbishment.

New courthouse in Tubercurry opens.

Mr Justice John L. Murray appointed Chief Justice.

First murder trial in almost a century in Mayo held in refurbished Castlebar Courthouse.

Commercial Court hears first cases in Bow Street.



Digital Audio Recording (DAR) introduced (in the Supreme Court).

Courts Service website wins 'Best State Body Website' award at Irish eGovernment awards.



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Following a referendum, the Court of Appeal is established.

The Combined Office Project, replacing individual Circuit Court and District Court offices, ended with offices in Wicklow, Tralee (photo) and Cork. Project reduces the number of Circuit Court and District Court offices around the country from 62 to 33 between 2010 and 2014.



County Registrars replace District Court Judges taking evidence at request of EU member states' courts in civil / commercial cases.

Courts Service Online (CSOL) launched.



Mrs. Justice Susan Denham becomes Chief Justice.

First Combined Court Offices open in Naas, Monaghan and Ennis.

Legal Diary ceases hard copy printing.

Transforming Administration and Structures of the Courts (TASC) report was launched - outlining the blueprint for future change in the Courts Service.

Small Claims procedure now available online.

High Court Search introduced online.

The ICT system CAS replaces manual accounts in offices nationwide.

President Higgins officially opens new facilities in the former Public Records Office for the Court of Appeal.

Supreme Court sits in Cork, hearing cases outside Dublin for the first time since the Four Courts reopened in 1931.



Merger of the Office of the Accountant of the Courts of Justice ('the Accountant's Office') and the Courts Accounts Office.

Monaghan Courthouse wins Conservation and Restoration Prize at RIAI Awards.



Criminal Courts of Justice officially opens.

Work commences implementing the recommendations from the TASC report, combining Circuit and District Court Offices and rationalising court venues.

Brendan Ryan appointed CEO in December.

Courthouses open in Ardee and Blanchardstown.



Family Law Complex receives planning permission.

First podcast series released.

Family Law Reform team wins Civil Service and Innovation Excellence Award.

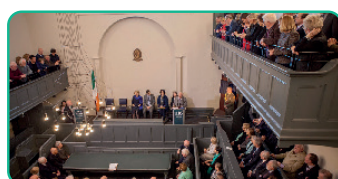
Cork Washington St, wins OPW Energy Saving Award for reducing energy use by 30%.



We established a Change Management Office to build on the momentum gained by our modernisation initiatives and drive our various change projects.

Former courthouse at Kilmainham transferred to OPW to convert to a museum.

An e-licensing system implemented in six pilot offices.



Mr. Justice Frank Clarke appointed Chief Justice.

Small Claims applications available online.

Courts Service chosen by the Civil Service Management Board to undergo an organisational review to assess capacity and capability.

eLicensing project pilot launched.

Bankruptcy Register Online also developed during the year.

The official openings of courthouses in Limerick, Cork, Waterford, Mullingar, Wexford and Letterkenny provides modern facilities for court users while making a further valuable contribution to the heritage of our country.

Angela Denning appointed as our CEO.

10 year strategy published - "Enabling access to justice in a modern digital Ireland" - a citizen-centred approach to service delivery, aims to make access to justice easier, quicker and more cost effective.

Opening of centralised services for the administration of jury summonses and the service of EU documents at Castlebar.

Number of Judges assigned to the Court of Appeal grows from 10 to 16.

Legal Cost Adjudicators Office established.



Successfully kept courts open and safe during the Covid pandemic by prioritising modernisation and innovative initiatives to meet the challenges that arise. Urgent and essential cases continue to be heard throughout, including domestic violence and criminal proceedings.

First ever 'virtual courts' take place with all parties joining remotely.

Mr Justice Donal O'Donnell appointed Chief Justice.

Introduction of Appointments Booking System.

Became a JAM Card friendly organisation.

Published 'Learning and Development', 'Communications and Stakeholder Engagement', 'Environmental Sustainability', 'ICT' and 'Data' Strategies to support Modernisation Programme.



Published our first People and Organisation and Estates Strategies to further support Modernisation.

First Innovation Education programme, tailored specifically to the Courts Service, vital to success of Modernisation Programme.

Courts Service Inclusion Group is established to protect the human rights of staff and users.

Launched our first app - The 'Four Courts 100' app developed for the 1922 centenary, giving people everywhere access to the architecture and history of the Four Courts.



Report and recommendations of the Judicial Planning Working Group sees 24 additional judges appointed in year one.

The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act, 2015 came into effect and established a new legal framework for supported decision-making in Ireland.

Unified Case Management System rollout starts.



and services. Additionally, an Access to Justice group has been created specifically for engagement on Civil topics.

As we move beyond 25 years, with our eye firmly on the future and realising our Modernisation Programme aims we are

dedicated to implementing better ways of working for staff, the judiciary, the legal profession and all court users.

"The issue of change and development of court management is on the agenda in many countries today because of the growth in the volume and complexity of

litigation worldwide." These were the words of the Working Group on a Court Commission in 1999, commenting on the completion of the work it had begun three years earlier – they remain as relevant as ever.

Our ICT Journey

The first 25 years of the Courts Service saw the focus of information and communication technology (ICT) on computerisation of some activities in courtrooms and court offices. ICT investment brought Digital Audio Recording; case tracking systems; online availability of searchable registries such as probate, licensing and legal costs adjudication.

Under the Modernisation Programme in the past three years, 165 technology-enabled courtrooms have been rolled out nationwide allowing the display of video evidence and enabling virtual attendance in court through remote technology. Wi-Fi is now in almost every location across the Courts Service estate. A modern desktop platform for personal productivity, email, calendaring and collaboration has been deployed to all judiciary and Courts



Technology-enabled courts become a reality in recent years.

Service staff and delivers improved cyber security across the organisation.

The focus of our future investments will be to continue to remove blockages and issues caused by the islands of legacy and standalone technology in our current solutions. Our vision is to enable digital filings for case work, improving the administration of justice, increasing transparency, and improving access to quality data. Paving the way towards this vision is the Unified Case Management System (UCMS) which has been

introduced to provide a single, modern platform replacing our 140 systems, one system at a time. This multi-year project will enable the digital management of cases over time. The UCMS will also support the work of the judiciary and their growing needs.

Achievements in the last year are highlighted in the ICT article on page 16 and plans for the next three years will be launched by the year's end in the next ICT Strategy – watch this space!



Data Dashboards have been developed in recent years.

Our Court Buildings

Possibly the most visible and tangible evidence of the early success of the Service was with the Courts estate. On our establishment in 1999, we inherited an estate of around 250 buildings, housing court venues nationwide. In most cases the maintenance of these buildings had been the responsibility of local authorities. Most of these buildings were in extremely poor condition (some described as being in "ruinous condition").

50 buildings were refurbished or newly built in just the first seven years. In early 2010 President Mary McAleese officially opened the Criminal Courts of Justice (CCJ), the largest courts building project since the foundation of the State.

2018 saw the conclusion of a major courthouse building project outside of Dublin - construction of four new courthouses in Drogheda, Letterkenny, Limerick, and Wexford; and substantial

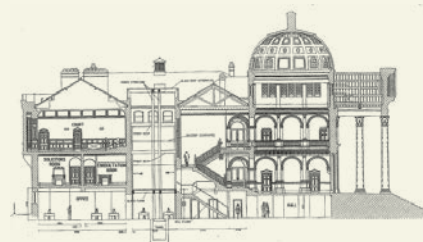
refurbishment works to existing courthouses in Mullingar, Waterford and Cork. The project delivered over 36,000 square metres of accommodation including thirty-one courtrooms and all relevant support facilities.

Many other historic courthouses have also been modernised including facilities in Kilkenny, Castlebar, Dundalk, Monaghan, Ennis, Nenagh and Trim. Coming right up to date, the new Family Law Complex for the Hammond Lane site, adjacent to the Four Courts, recently had its market launch (covered in the September edition of Courts Service News).

In 2022, we published an Estates Strategy, which sets out how we intend to develop the estate to respond to digitisation, modernisation, and new working arrangements. The Strategy also includes our Climate Action ambitions and sets out how we plan to fulfil them. The years ahead promise a mix of challenges and opportunities, as has always been the case with our extensive and varied estate.



Criminal Courts of Justice under construction



Plans for Cork Washington St refurbishment appeared in Courts Service News in 2003



Outreach – another busy year for the Communications and Media Unit team

2024 was another busy year for the CMU team. Part of our day-to-day job includes managing the Courts Service website and social media channels (we are active on LinkedIn, X, Facebook and YouTube). We have 35,000 followers on our social media channels and have issued over 1,000 posts across all platforms this year.

Our school visits and work experience programmes are as popular as ever. We host at least six tours a week during school term in the Criminal Courts of Justice (CCJ) alone. We also accept two transition year students each week for work experience in various court offices (our colleagues in Tallaght have come on board this year). These programmes are always booked up well into the following year.

We were also involved in the production of a podcast series for the first time – you can read about that on page six.

What has also become part of our business-as-usual in recent years has been participating in various annual events, some of which are below.

Heritage Week



Tours of the Four Courts Dome during Heritage week

For the first time, we collaborated with the Office of Public Works (OPW) to offer tours of the dome of the Four Courts, as part of Heritage Week 2024. These small-group tours were led by a conservation architect with the OPW.

The dome of the Four Courts is an iconic Dublin landmark and is not usually open to the public. This initiative is something we hope to repeat in 2025.

Visitors had the chance to see the magnificent starry night painted ceiling on the inside of the dome, and they also got to take in the views of Dublin from its lofty position.

The National Ploughing Championships

We attended the National Ploughing Championships in Ratheniska, County



Courts Service staff with the Minister for Justice at the Ploughing Championships

Laois for the third time this year.

After the heavy rainfall of last year, we were blessed with a glorious week of late September sunshine. This certainly lifted the spirits of all who attended the event, not least our volunteers who came from offices all over the country to represent us.

It was great to interact with so many people. Popular queries included Probate, Family Law, job opportunities for graduates, Assisted Decision-Making and Jury Service.

Culture Night



Mummers of Finglas perform on Culture Night in the Four Courts Round Hall

We opened the Four Courts to the public once again for Culture Night. This year, attendees were treated to tours and a creative performance by the Fingal Mummers in the historic Round Hall. The group acted, played music, danced and sang beautiful versions of traditional Irish music.

On the same evening, our colleagues in Waterford opened the doors of Waterford Courthouse to the public, providing tours of one of the city's most architecturally stunning buildings.



Open House tours in October

Open House

Open House is an annual Festival of Architecture. As part of this year's programme, we partnered with volunteer members of the Judiciary to conduct multiple tours of the Four Courts in October.

Bram Stoker Festival

Another first for us – an episode of Newstalk's Talking History radio podcast was recorded in front of a live audience in the Supreme Court in October. The event was run in conjunction with Dublin City Council's Bram Stoker Festival, and was focussed on Bram Stoker and the 'Petty Sessions: Weird and Wonderful Court Cases from Victorian Ireland'. The Petty Sessions were the courts of minor local jurisdiction during Stoker's time as a petty sessions clerk.

Robert Emmet Day

Irish republican Robert Emmet was executed on 20 September 1803, after the rebellion he led against British rule failed. On 23 July 2024, 221 years after Emmet's unsuccessful rebellion, the Courts Service held a special programme of events at Green Street Courthouse, the site where Emmet delivered his famous oration. The events included a tour of the courthouse, poetry, a historical lecture and a recital of Emmet's famous speech from the dock in Irish.

National Mock Trials Competition

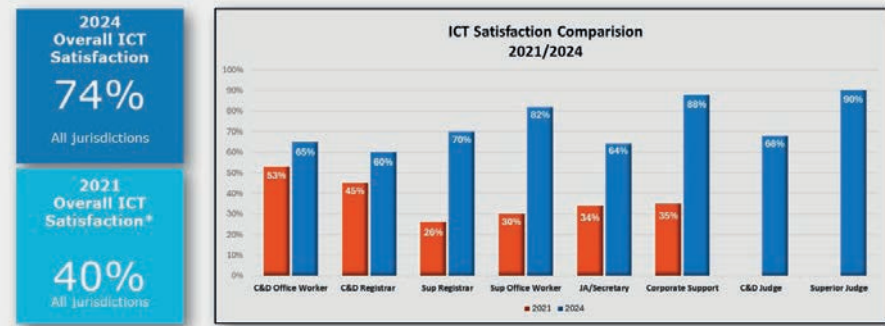
Over two consecutive Saturdays in May 2024, we were delighted to welcome students from 19 secondary schools nationwide to compete in the National Mock Trials competition. The competition took place in the CCJ, and was run in conjunction with Public Access to Law.

Judges, legal practitioners and Courts Service staff volunteered to judge the competition and ensure that everything ran smoothly. Congratulations to the winners, Coláiste Iognáid S.J. from Galway, who overcame the runners-up Holy Rosary College Mountbellew in a very competitive final.

Keep an eye on our social media channels for news of events in 2025.

A 2024 retrospective on the Information and Communications Technology Directorate

A 2024 Retrospective on the Information and Communications Directorate



Tech in our Courts and Offices

2024 marks another year of key milestones reached to improve the technology in the Courts Service. In 2023, we rolled out modern digital desktops to the Judiciary. In 2024, we carried out a programme of work to improve the technology on judicial benches. The rollout included 190 benches nationwide and provides a standard setup to support judges' use of technology within the courtroom. Successful delivery of this technology was a contributing factor to the improvement noted since 2021 in user satisfaction with ICT, moving from 40% in 2021 to 74% in 2024. This year we enabled video technology in a further 29 courtrooms, with a total of 165 courtrooms now video technology-enabled countrywide. This technology facilitates the remote participation of parties to proceedings and provides a digital evidence display solution in courtrooms. Our Wi-Fi service has been expanded significantly, covering all courthouses and court offices nationwide, except the CCJ, which is due to be completed in 2025.

Unified Case Management System

The multi-year initiative, to re-imagine and migrate all case-related activity, onto a single **unified case management system** (UCMS) was one of the main focuses for Digital teams this year. UCMS is replacing many legacy systems with a single, modern, and user-friendly system that looks and feels the same for all staff and members of the judiciary. It will also support an online portal for court users that will enable faster and smoother case processing, as well as improved data quality and security. Following the successful rollout of the UCMS to the back-office operations in the High Court in 2023, this year we have rolled out the UCMS to staff working on Circuit Family proceedings. This delivery has

resulted in the closure of 27 unconnected and legacy technology systems. Office staff were supported by the Digital team during initial implementation and afterwards during ongoing usage via Teams chat groups, weekly drop-in clinics, refresher sessions and on-site follow up visits.

An important milestone for the Digital Crime team was reached this year with the approval to replace ICMS and CCTS with UCMS Crime within the next two years. A number of parallel strands have been initiated to enable the creation of the crime version of UCMS; the design of a new legal aid process involving the Department of Justice, the Legal Aid Board and the Financial Shared Services Centre in Killarney; the integration of the UCMS with the courts accounting system; a new data exchange architecture for the UCMS; and the adoption of common data registries across the criminal justice sector.

By having a single Unified Case Management System, we are paving the way for the introduction of online filing. The team has made significant progress on the development of a Courts Portal. The Portal will become the

"Each time you use UCMS it's a little bit easier and you forget about CCFL. I think, 'How did I use it at all?' Now that we are used to the system it just comes naturally"

public-facing view of the UCMS for the legal profession, lay litigants and other parties. The Portal will allow new applications and other filings to be lodged, paid for if required, and tracked online. The Digital team are also working on a judicial view of the Portal for the judiciary. The Portal launched in November supporting Circuit Court Family law cases in Cavan, which we will expand on after a period of testing. For more information on the Portal please contact us on portal@courts.ie.

Developed jointly by the Probate Office and Digital teams, a new public-facing Probate Hub providing revised plain English and Irish content was launched. This significantly improved on the previous Probate section on the Courts Service website. The Supreme Court website <https://services.courts.ie/supreme-court> was similarly modernised with the involvement of the Superior Courts and Digital teams.

Our Data

Earlier this year, we launched a new [Data Retention portal](#) and data retention tools, which are now available to all offices. The portal provides easy-to-follow information and guidance to enable staff to efficiently manage records. It also includes a number of simple data management tools including the Checker app and Tracker app. The rollout of this initiative is not just about managing records and clearing file rooms; it is an essential step in fostering a healthier, safer, and more organised workplace for all staff. The Data Unit is also rolling out training to improve data access and literacy and to date over 230 staff have attended in-person and Teams training.

Data-driven decisions continue to be a focus across all business areas in the Courts Service and drive a continued momentum for dashboards to support analysis from within a single reporting portal. During the year comprehensive data dashboards were delivered for UCMS Family, UCMS High Court, Courtroom Utilisation, Circuit and District Sittings and HR Reporting. Our commitment to Open Data is underpinned by an online platform <https://data.courts.ie> which we launched earlier this year. The portal serves as a central hub for the publication, access, and sharing of Courts Service data. The achievements and progress made this year bring us to the end of our current ICT Strategy 2021 - 2024. Reflecting the Corporate Strategic Plan 2024 - 2027 and our Strategic Vision 2030 we have developed a new ICT, Digital & Data Strategy which will be launched soon on courts.ie.



Courts Service Innovation 2024: A year in review

New strategy launched

Over the past three years, we have built a strong foundation for innovation in the Courts Service. Our key achievements include upskilling our staff on innovative ways of working, creating a pathway to submit innovative ideas and converting these ideas into initiatives that have been rolled out across the Courts Service.



Our Innovation Strategy for 2024 to 2026 sets out our vision for innovation, focus areas for projects and initiatives, and our action plan. This strategy aligns more closely to the Courts Service Modernisation Programme's 2030 vision, and Better Public Services, a transformation strategy for the public service.

Our vision is to lead the way in innovative user-centred practices, collaborating with our partners and stakeholders, to help drive transformation in the Irish justice sector.

Welcome to our new Innovation Lead

This year we welcomed Judith Clinton as our Innovation Lead. Judith brings with her a breadth of experience from the private and public sectors. A heartfelt thank you goes to our previous Innovation Lead, Ruth Penney, who was welcomed back by her native county to work in the newly established Cork Central Criminal Court. We wish them both every success in their new roles.



Service Design Training Workshop

Early in 2024 we gathered our Innovation Advocates and staff from operational areas in the High Court, to hold a Service Design Workshop. The aim of the workshop was to boost our innovation capability and put service design methods and tools for Courts Service innovation into practice.

Taking a design thinking approach to solving problems, we came up with innovative solutions to Courts Service issues. This interactive training session is a follow on from our Innovation eLearning module which is available to all Courts Service staff.



We are preparing for a full rollout to all suitable Jury assembly areas in 2025.

Public Service Transformation Week

During Transformation Week in October, we held an ideas competition using the Service Design approach to hear ideas on how we can deliver better experiences for our service users. During the course of the week we released short design videos to guide our staff through the design approach right through to idea submission.

We had some great ideas and selecting a winner was a tough task for our judges. It was great to see the passion for delivering better services for our users, staff and environment in all the applications. Shout out to our winner Gaenor Murphy in Tallaght Courthouse for her idea on Peer Support.

Looking ahead to 2025

As we wrap up 2024, our focus turns to the future. We're currently creating our Innovation Plan for 2025 which will focus on delivering on the actions we set out in our new Innovation Strategy and also progressing key innovation projects such as Jury Support and Deed Poll.

A BIG thank you

Finally, we would like to thank our Innovation Sponsor, Emer Darcy, the Innovation Advocates, the Innovation Team, Courts Service staff, especially those that took part in our innovation projects, and the Senior Management Team for all their help, assistance, and support in continuing to promote innovation within the organisation and making Innovation real for the Courts Service!



Jury Support Project

The Jury Support Project was the Innovation Team's first 'Learn by Doing' service design project. Stemming from an idea submitted through our innovation pathway, our Innovation Advocates from across all regions worked together through a series of workshops to understand the needs, expectations, and pain points of jurors.

Through these service design workshops, we identified that jurors wanted more information on the jury service process. This led to the development of a Jury Information Video which provides clear, concise, and timely information to jurors regarding the jury process.

We ran a pilot in the Criminal Courts of Justice in Dublin and Limerick Courthouse, Mulgrave Street to gather feedback from jurors on the video. 91% of those surveyed found the video informative and easy to understand.



A year in review - The Sustainability Unit

It has been another busy year for the Courts Service Sustainability Unit with new projects, initiatives, and much more!

Our Progression

We were delighted to receive positive news with our annual sustainability results. Early each year we gather information on energy usage across our estates from the previous year and submit our annual returns to the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). This is one of our key performance indicators and this year our results validated our efforts showing we are 36% more energy efficient than 2009. We also generate 17% less carbon from our heating systems than we did just a few years ago.



Our Climate Action Roadmap for 2024

In September, we published our third Courts Service Climate Action Roadmap as part of the Irish Government's Climate Action Plan. The roadmap is a detailed document setting out how we are going to achieve our 2030 targets and required a huge amount of research and analysis on what projects are to

be actioned within this decade. In addition, we have transitioned to SEAI's new online platform where we can report our actions related to the Climate Action Mandate.

2024 Projects

Lighting Pilot: We kicked off the new year with a full lighting upgrade to the second floor of Áras Uí Dhálaigh, Four Courts, Dublin. This was a pilot project to test if the upgrade could be achieved within a working environment and to check the projects energy impact. The contractor sectioned off the floor on a phased basis and the works were complete within six weeks.

Deposit and Return Scheme: We implemented a pilot in our staff canteen in Phoenix House, Dublin, to collect cans and bottles for Dublin Simon Community charity, in line with the roll out of the Deposit Return Scheme 'Re-turn'. Dublin Simon Community uses the money collected from this initiative for essential supplies for their charity. The Sustainability Unit are delighted to see other venues nationwide carrying out this initiative and are providing venues with the assistance and resources they need.

Pathfinder Project: In April we finalised our review of the Pathfinder Report. The Pathfinder Report was developed in December 2023 to examine what was needed to bring our historic buildings to a Building Energy Rating (BER) of B. To



produce this report, contractors, energy engineers and conservation architects carried out a comprehensive examination of Sligo and Ennis courthouses.

Reusable water bottles: This summer we distributed Courts Service Reusable water bottles to all staff as part of our Plastic Free July initiative. We continue to encourage staff to reduce the amount of single use water bottles they use. Our reusable water bottles follow on from our successful reusable Courts Service staff reusable keep cup initiative run in 2022.

From July to October, we completed our annual boiler replacement and controls upgrade projects around the country, aiming to remove oil as a fuel source and increase energy efficiency. Previous upgrades have shown a reduction of over 50% in energy use. Summer 2024 projects this year included boiler upgrades in our HQ Phoenix House and in Listowel Courthouse. In cooperation with BAM, we also funded lighting upgrades in the PPP courtrooms.

To close out this productive year, we are now planning our projects and initiatives for 2025 and are focusing on additional resources to expand our energy efficiency, decarbonisation, and technical activities.



A.S.S.C. serving young people in their courts journey

Accompaniment Support Services for Children (A.S.S.C.) was founded in 2020 and began providing services for children and their families in January 2021. Our funding comes from CUAN, a new statutory agency set up by the Department of Justice.

The charity provides specialist support to young people who are victims of, or witnesses to, crime, as they navigate the criminal justice system. This support continues for as long as the child and their family require it, and is provided without charge. We also provide external training to

stakeholders who work within the criminal justice system.

We take a client-led approach and promote a culture of transparent communication for young people and their families, giving them a voice to in exercising their rights.

A.S.S.C. is volunteer-led, with a team of 65 volunteers. Our court accompaniment services include pre-trial meetings, DVD statement viewing, trial, sentencing, and appeals when applicable. Since January 2023, our court accompaniment service has expanded to operate nationwide,

serving all four provinces in Ireland. Our volunteers will also accompany children to forensic medical examination after disclosure, to the Sexual Assault Treatment Unit (SATU), Rotunda Hospital, Dublin, and the Child and Adolescent Sexual Assault Treatment Service (CASATS) in Galway. We're also excited to announce the expansion of the service to the Cork region.

We also provide a staff-led phone service for families of young persons, including support and advocacy after medical examination, during an investigation, while

awaiting direction from the DPP, during a trial, and post-trial. Since 2021 over 400 young people and over 400 family supporters have availed of A.S.S.C. services.

In 2024 we welcomed Jack MacHugh on board. Jack is the Court Accompaniment Officer in the Criminal Courts of Justice (CCJ), Dublin. Utilising generous donations given to A.S.S.C., Jack has led



a project supplying colouring books, pens and pencils, and fidget toys, which are available in the CCJ Victim Support Area, along with games for the Child Video Link Room. We aim to extend this to other

court locations in 2025.

Our 2024 Annual Volunteer Recognition Awards will be held in Galway in December, where we acknowledge our volunteers for their commitment and dedication.

Finally, we wish a Merry Christmas from all the A.S.S.C. team to all our supporters, stakeholders, and funders who have made our work for young people possible.

V-SAC highlights in 2024

2024 has been a very exciting year for Victim Support at Court (V-SAC) with lots of things going on - the appointment of Professor Marie Cassidy as the new patron, the opening of V-SAC's Cork Office and the completion of the COVIS (Court-based Victim Support) project, among other highlights.

V-SAC is a charity established in 2005 that provides support for victims of all types of crime, their families and prosecution witnesses when they come to court, and is funded by the Department of Justice. We have a permanent presence in the Criminal Courts of Justice and are completing the final phase of our national expansion. V-SAC wants every victim coming to court to have access to support, regardless of location, age, background, etc. to help them navigate the criminal justice system. V-SAC is reaching more victims year on year and has supported over 11,000 people since 2017. Our amazing volunteers provided emotional and practical support to 2,717 people in 2023 – an increase of 37% compared to the previous year – our busiest year on record – and 2024 is looking much the same in terms of the demand from victims for court accompaniment.

Working with the Courts Service



V-SAC was welcomed and accommodated by the staff of Courts Service in the

Southwestern Courts of Cork, Limerick, Kerry and Clare as we started to establish our court accompaniment service for victims of crime in these counties. V-SAC's Cork Office beside the Cork Criminal Courts of Justice (CCJ) was officially opened in September by the Minister for Justice, Helen McEntee, where we also launched our 2025-2027 Strategic Plan.

COVIS Final Conference in Brussels

V-SAC was involved in an EU 2-year project on court-based victim support with victim support organisations from Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Portugal and Victim Support Europe. Ireland was very well represented at the conference by V-SAC staff, volunteers and V-SAC Chairperson, Ian Fleming, representatives from the Irish judiciary, Courts Service, the Department of Justice and other victim support organisations.

The project was a success, and a Handbook on Best Practice on Court-based Victim Support was formally launched at the conference, which will be the benchmark for organisations in delivering support for victims, their families and prosecution witnesses when attending criminal proceedings.

An award-winning year – congratulations Patrick Caldwell!

V-SAC's Patrick Caldwell won the

Volunteer of the Year 2024 award for Monaghan/Cavan area as part of the local Volunteer Centre's awards. This was a phenomenal achievement for Patrick, who was nominated last year in the same category. Patrick represents the fantastic work that all our volunteers do in giving up their personal time to support victims at such a difficult time in their lives. Well done Patrick and thanks to all our excellent volunteers. Keep up the great work!



Interested in volunteering with V-SAC?

Our volunteers are the lifeblood of V-SAC. Their commitment and dedication mean we have been able to reach more victims. If you or someone you know would like to volunteer with V-SAC, please visit our website www.vvac.ie or call us on 01-872-6785.

We would like to wish you a happy, relaxing and peaceful Christmas and best wishes for the new year.



Appointments



The Hon Ms Justice Caroline Costello

Ms. Justice Caroline Costello, Judge of the Court of Appeal, has been appointed as the President of the Court of Appeal. Educated at UCD, the University of Oxford and the King's Inns, she was called to the Bar in 1988 and the Inner Bar in 2010. Appointed as a Judge of the High Court in 2014, she joined the Court of Appeal in 2018.



The Hon Ms Justice Niamh Hyland

Ms. Justice Niamh Hyland has been appointed as a Judge of the Court of Appeal. Educated at Trinity College, the University of Oxford and the King's Inns, she was called to the Bar in 1994 and the Inner Bar in 2012. She was appointed a Judge of the High Court in 2019.



Ms Nessa Cahill, SC

Nessa Cahill, SC, has been appointed as a Judge of the High Court. Educated at Trinity College, the College of Europe, Bruges, and the King's Inns, she was called to the Bar in 1999 and the Inner Bar in 2020. Her legal practice mostly included commercial litigation, judicial review/regulatory/statutory proceedings, and advisory work in the area of financial services.

Emer Darcy

Ms. Emer Darcy has been appointed Head of Strategy and Reform (Assistant Secretary). Emer has been a civil servant for 25 years. In the Courts Service since 2004, she has held roles in the organisation including in Human Resources, Circuit and District Court operations, leading the COVID-19 team and setting up the Family Law Reform. Working in an organisation that interacts with people at some of the most difficult and stressful times of their lives has given Emer a keen interest in designing better public services. As Head of the Strategy and Reform Directorate, keeping a user-centred focus at the centre while developing those changed services will be a key priority. Emer is a fan of life-long learning and has qualifications in areas as diverse as Recreation and Leisure Management, Employment Law, Innovation, Leadership, Trauma Informed Practice and most recently, Service Design. Her personal goals for 2024 included running a 5k for the first time and doing a gardening course, while keeping up yoga classes, baking and super sudoku!



Nina Brennan

Ms. Nina Brennan was appointed as the Head of Circuit and District Court Operations (Assistant Secretary) in September 2024. She returned to the Courts Service in 2022, first working in the High Court as a Registrar of the Commercial Court, then leading a team of High Court Registrars and more recently as the Principal Registrar of the High Court. Between 1997 and 2001 Nina worked in the Central Office of the High Court.



Nina spent most of her career working in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment where she led on a range of Government priorities and policies at national and EU level including: Company Law; Standards; Legal Metrology; SMEs; Entrepreneurship; Access to Finance; Green Economy; Labour Market Activation and Consumers. She has extensive experience in the governance and oversight of State Agencies; and was the Managing Authority for the European Social Fund Equal Community Initiative. She also worked on corporate services areas including Finance, Management Support and Human Resources. She has worked in the Department of Finance where she advised on the European Economy in the context of Ireland's Presidency of the EU. Nina holds a Bachelor of Civil Law Degree, a Postgraduate Diploma in Business Studies, a Masters in Economic Science (Policy Analysis) and is a qualified Barrister. She is a former member of the Board of the National Standards Authority of Ireland.

Retirement:



Judge James McNulty

Judge James McNulty was joined by his wife Betty and three daughters as he donned his judge's robes for the last time following a 23-year career as a judge, 19 of which he spent in West Cork.

District Court president Judge Paul Kelly, on video-link, said the size of the crowd that gathered to wish him well was a testament to the high esteem in which he is held. He said Judge McNulty always showed "compassionate humanity and scrupulous

fairness" and it would be "difficult to find anyone to say a bad word about him".

Judge McNulty thanked his fellow judges, Courts Service staff, his judicial colleagues, members of the legal profession and gardaí. He said that it had been "the greatest honour of my life to serve the people of Ireland as a judge."

Photo: James McNulty with his wife Betty in a packed Clonakilty Courthouse. Picture Andy Gibson



Obituary: Judge Elizabeth McGrath

Judge Elizabeth McGrath left us prematurely after a short illness last July. Her passing evoked deep shock, and even more profound sadness throughout the Irish legal world. A highly regarded, and sought after solicitor in Nenagh, she was diligent on behalf of her clients, humane, considerate and imbued with zeal to see justice done in everything she put her hand to.

Her exceptional legal skills were acknowledged in 2007 when she was appointed a judge of the District Court, and spent five years as a moveable judge, winning admiration from all court users, and making firm friends with her colleagues. In 2012 she achieved the honour of being appointed as the permanent judge in her home District, and for the next 12 years presided over courts in Nenagh and Tipperary town, where her reputation for fairness, courtesy and legal expertise grew by the day.

She threw herself into the work of the Association of Judges of the District

Court, of which she was an energetic and passionate President at the time of her death. She campaigned fearlessly on behalf of her colleagues and was never afraid to challenge the powers that be – the Courts Service, the Department of Justice, and the President of the District Court – on their behalf.

As a dedicated legal scholar she also assisted colleagues by drafting and collaborating on several District Court "Bench Books" – essential guides for judges on points of law and procedure. Indeed, up to the moment of her untimely death she had been working hard on, and had just completed a revised edition of the Bench Book on Intoxicated Driving Offences – the daily diet of District Courts all over the country.

The extent of the regard in which Liz was held can be judged by the stream of emails from judges of all courts expressing shock, sadness and admiration for her in the days following her death. Local and national media



captured the esteem from the legal professions, Courts Service staff, Gardaí and court users. A common theme in all the tributes was her sense of justice, fairness and compassion for the ordinary person in trouble – be it an accused, a party to a family law dispute, or anyone who found themselves in distress before the Court.

The greatest sense of loss however is to her loving husband, and most fervent supporter, Charles Stanley-Smith, her brother Mr. Justice Michael McGrath, and her close family and friends. Ní bheidh a leithéid arís ann. Go ndéana Dia trócaire ar a h-anam.

Paul Kelly
President of the District Court

Remembering Judge John O'Hagan

I felt a deep sense of sadness whilst in conversation with Judge John O'Hagan when he told me he had become ill.

After dedicating many years to his role as a member of the judiciary he leaves behind a legacy of fairness, compassion and a profound respect for the law.

He had contacted me after my nomination to the District Court bench to offer his congratulations and he was delighted for me. I appeared before Judge O'Hagan in the Circuit Court regularly over a 10-year period and he was a remarkable Judge, who remained a friend to the legal profession.

He had a deep commitment to justice and fairness, and every case he presided over received his full attention and respect. He made it a priority to give each matter the time and consideration it deserved. His ability to see each case as unique and his genuine interest in understanding people made him not only an exceptional judge but also an exemplary person.

He took time to learn about the area over which he presided and connect with the people within it. This curiosity for the world around him translated into the courtroom where his empathy and insight into human nature informed his decisions and helped craft his judgements. He particularly enjoyed his time in Donegal.

After his retirement he took time to visit the new Courthouse in Letterkenny and spend time with his successor Judge Aylmer, Courts Service staff and lawyers with whom there was a strong friendship built over many years.

He was immensely proud of his military past serving as an officer in An Fórsa Cosanta Áitiúil and also sitting as a member of the military tribunal.

Off the bench he enjoyed sharing stories of his grandchildren and his hobbies. He placed emphasis on collegiality often taking the time to dine with the bar at the conclusion of a lengthy criminal sitting.



Sadly in March 2024 Judge O'Hagan passed away and he will be dearly missed by his wife Sarah and family, colleagues and friends and by all who had the privilege to know him. His legacy of integrity, kindness and dedication will live on for some time.

Go ndéana Dia trócaire air.

Ciaran Liddy
District Court Judge



Film Review: September 5

September 5 is a gripping thriller that takes us through the events of the famous massacre of 11 Israeli athletes at the Olympic games in Munich back in 1972. This was a defining event that forever changed media coverage and continues to impact live news today.

The film follows an American sports broadcasting team that due to sudden unforeseen events have to jump from sports reporting to live coverage of the Israeli athletes being taken hostage. The film puts fresh eyes on this famous incident and a new perspective on the live broadcast seen globally by an estimated one billion people at the time.

The audience here stays with the broadcaster's team in their busy claustrophobic studio and witnesses much of the action and general movement of events through the now dated 1970s television monitors. This gives a real feeling to the viewer of what it felt like back then. Before social media, before instant reporting.

We have Geoff (John Magaro) a young producer trying to prove his worth to his boss, legendary TV executive Rooney Arledge (Peter Sarsgaard). The team is joined by German interpreter Marianne (Leonie Benesch) and mentor Marvin Bader (Ben Chaplin). Geoff takes centre stage in the reporting when events take a turn for the worse. Through his team's eyes and the studio screens we learn of each terrible happening as the clocks tick minute by minute, hour by hour.

The film is directed by Swiss-born Tim Fehlbauer whom sci-fi fans would be more familiar with for his work on movies like 'Hell' and 'The Colony'. Here

Fehlbauer shows his skills at putting together a white-knuckle ride in the confines of a recording studio.

Integral to this is the intense performances given by the main actors, Magaro, Benesch, Chaplin and Sarsgaard. For those that remember the events of that time there is the famous line spoken by sports broadcaster Jim McKay 'They're all gone' as he announces the deaths of the hostages killed by the Black September group. The brilliant part of this movie is that we have Jim McKay playing himself. This is done using all the TV footage and broadcast recordings of McKay from the events of the time, so he lives in the old recordings. Very clever and again throws the audience back in time into the events like we are witnessing them on YouTube live.

Technically the film is a masterpiece. It flawlessly portrays how a 1970s TV studio would look like right down to the working technology of the time. 1970s monitors were rebuilt and refurbished and made to work again. Everything is realistically retro and believable. Fehlbauer lays on the tension thick and fast, barely giving the audience a chance to breathe as we deal with one moral quandary after another while at the same time reminding ourselves that these events happened. These events



are still happening if you look at it another way but now, we have on-the-spot social media that is a cataclysmic jump from the media coverage of the 1970s.

A highly recommended well-made movie that brilliantly takes us through a window to the past. This is the next big film from Paramount after Gladiator II and both these movies will probably see some deserved success at the Oscars.

September 5 is on general release from 24 January.

Ronan Power



Try our festive Sticky Gingerbread with Butterscotch Sauce Recipe

Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F/gas mark 4). Brush the insides of 8 x 200ml small pudding bowls with some melted butter & then lightly dust with flour



Place the dates in a pan with the water. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat and cook for 5 minutes, until the dates are soft. Add the bicarbonate of soda to the date mixture, which will cause it to foam up, then set aside to cool a little. Once slightly cooled place the date mixture in a food processor and blend for 2 minutes, allow to cool in a bowl

Using an electric hand-held mixer, beat the sugar and butter in a bowl until pale and fluffy. Mix in the eggs one at a time. Add the ground ginger along with the flour, treacle and date mixture and beat until evenly combined. Finally, fold in the walnuts.

Transfer the batter into the greased pudding moulds and bake in the oven for 20-25 minutes, until a skewer inserted into the middle comes out clean. If you think it's becoming too brown close to the end of the cooking time, cover with foil. Remove from the oven and allow to cool for 10 minutes.

For The Butterscotch Sauce

Bring the sugar and 400ml water to the boil, stirring until the sugar has dissolved.

Reduce the heat and simmer for 15-20 minutes, until reduced by a quarter, golden colour and syrupy. Add the butter, cream and rum to the caramel, stirring slowly until combined, then simmer gently for another 5 minutes, until thickened. Leave to cool for 10-15 minutes, until thickened a

little further

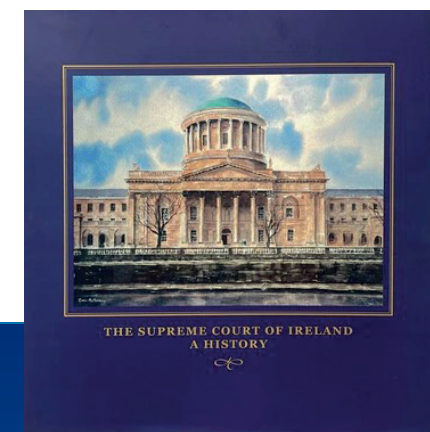
Pour some of the butterscotch sauce over the warm pudding and put the rest into a jug to serve alongside.

Gingerbread Ingredients:

125g pitted dates, chopped
200ml boiling water
half tsp bicarbonate of soda
125g light brown sugar
75g butter, softened, plus extra for greasing
2 large eggs
1 tbsp ground ginger
175g self-raising flour
1 tbsp treacle
50g pecan nuts, roughly chopped

Butterscotch sauce ingredients

200g caster sugar
50g butter, diced
200ml cream
3 tbsp dark rum
1 vanilla pod, split in half and seeds scraped out.



The Supreme Court of Ireland - Book giveaway

We had 10 copies of the brightly illustrated new book on the history of the Supreme Court to give away in the last edition of Courts Service News.

The first 10 entries received were:

Marie-Claire Butler	Dublin
Ann Maria Curtin	Limerick
Gerry Nugent	Kildare
Amanda Kennedy	Dublin
Frank MacGabhann	Dublin
Fred Logue	Dublin
Daniel Leahy	Dublin
Brian Comiskey	Dublin
Mary Drennan	Offaly
Anne O'Neill	Dublin

Your books will be winging their way to you soon.

2024 Christmas Quiz



Question	
1.	He's not quite 007, but his bear was 66 this year after many adventures from P*** to P***** and even a stint in P***** (shot in Kilmainham but made it home).
2.	This word links a musical cameo in The Dead Pool to the Deadpool 3 soundtrack.
3.	Which island had its sovereignty transferred from Singapore to Australia on 1 October 1958?
4.	On how many occasions has the word Christmas appeared in the song title of Irish Christmas No 1s?
5.	How many gifts are given in total in the song the 12 Days of Christmas?
6.	Which Christmas film which turns 40 this year shares a main filming location with Back To The Future?
7.	In what year did the Toy Show first make its appearance on the Late Late Show?
8.	These days, Boxing Day is an important part of the English Premier League calendar, with many matches scheduled. Football used to be played on Christmas Day too. When was the last Christmas Day fixture in the English league?
9.	Which country's postal service has, since 1962, arranged for children to receive postcards from Santa?
10.	Which Christmas song did astronauts broadcast from space in 1965?

Closing date for entries is 31 January 2025. To win a €60 An Post 'One for All' voucher send your answers by email to courtsservicenews@courts.ie or to The Communications and Media Unit, 6th Floor Phoenix House, Smithfield, Dublin 7.



Through the **Lens**



Staff from the Southern Region at the ceremony to receive their 25 Years Service Awards in Cork, July 2024



Staff from the Eastern Region at the ceremony to receive their 25 Years Service Awards in Naas, July 2024



Western Region Staff 25 Year Awards - Carrick-on-Shannon October 2024



North Midlands Region Staff 25 Year Awards - Mullingar October 2024



Dublin Region Staff 25 Year Awards - Dublin December 2024



Office of Wards of Court Staff at the 25 Year Awards - Dublin December 2024

25 Year Service Awards

What better way to mark our 25th anniversary than by honouring the commitment and loyalty of our colleagues who've had at least 25 years of public service, which we did at regional events around the country this year.

We extend a big thank you to all the staff for their remarkable dedication and service.