



Annual Report 2005

Tuarascáil Bhliantúil 2005

Mission Statement:

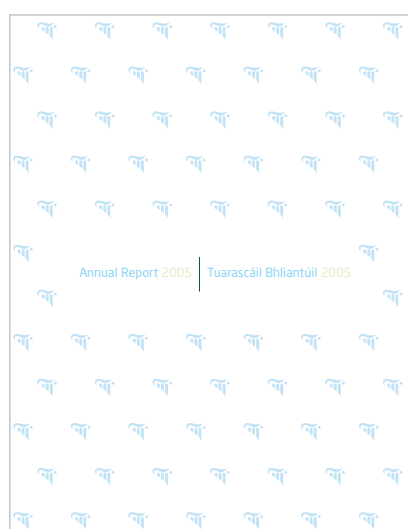
To manage the courts, support the judiciary and provide a high quality and professional service to all users of the courts.



COURTS SERVICE
An tSeirbhís Chúirteanna



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Foreword

by the Chairperson of the Board

John L. Murray
Chief Justice of Ireland



The Board of the Courts Service determines the policy for an organisation which at the end of 2005 was six years in existence and which has achieved great success.

That success has resulted in greatly improved court buildings and facilities, an IT infrastructure which could not have been dreamt of ten years ago and services for the judiciary and court users which have been built on a great tradition of public service amongst the staff of the courts together with a commitment to change. Greater focus has also been placed on facilitating the public as prime users of the courts.

Throughout this Report you will find examples of improvements to the organisation and operation of the courts and court offices during what was another busy year.

I am mindful of the great effort which goes into achieving the changes and progress highlighted throughout the Report. It is due to a dedication which is present every day throughout the Service so as to ensure that judges sitting across every county and district of the State do so with the support of a system which is organised and conscious of its service to the public and the national interest.

I am grateful to Mr P.J. Fitzpatrick our C.E.O., the management and the staff of the Courts Service for another year of effort and energy

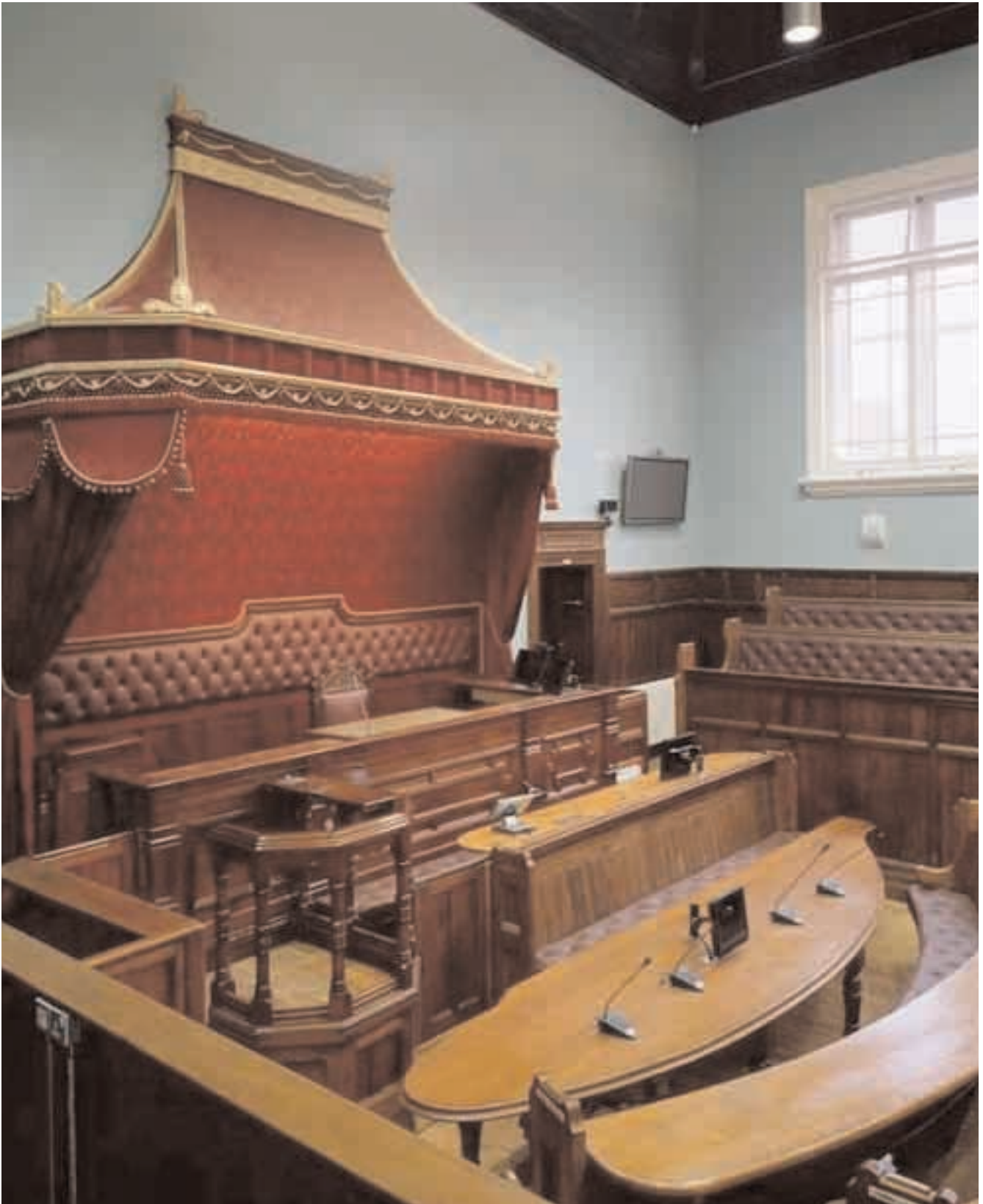
in making our Courts Service a first class public body. I am also grateful to all those who sit and work on the Board and its committees, knowing that their expertise and wisdom has a major influence on the success of the organisation. I extend my thanks to all in the legal community for their continued assistance, given at every opportunity or request, and from which we have greatly benefited.

On behalf of the Board I acknowledge the continuous support of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Secretary General and staff of his Department for our work and in particular the progress with our major information technology and building programmes. The appreciation of the Board is also due to the Government, in particular the Minister for Finance, for the budgetary support given to its strategies and programmes in recent years.

Finally, I commend this Report to you as an insight into the expanse of the operations of our courts, as a source of new and extended statistics on the work of the courts

and as a catalogue of a series of successes, which together tell the story of a dynamic, creative and progressive public service body.

John L. Murray
Chief Justice of Ireland and Chairperson of
the Courts Service Board



Introduction

by the Chief Executive Officer

P.J. Fitzpatrick
Chief Executive Officer



This is our sixth Annual Report. It relays the story of the continued modernisation and development of an organisation which supports, organises and provides the administration for all of our courts nationwide.

We are a large, busy and dynamic organisation as a result of the efforts and continued commitment of our staff to change and modernisation. Partnership with our staff continues to provide a solid basis at all levels of the organisation. As Chairperson of the Central Partnership Committee I have witnessed the enthusiasm, energy and determination of our staff at all levels to make a real difference. We continue to promote a learning culture – to create an environment where innovation is both encouraged and rewarded and where staff are afforded a genuine involvement.

The *Strategic Plan 2002-2005*, our second three year plan, continued to guide our work in 2005. The Plan contains some 128 objectives linked to our mandates. This Report details progress in 2005 to deliver on these objectives by reference to our mandates: manage the courts; provide support services for the judges; provide information on the courts system for the public; provide, manage and maintain court buildings and provide facilities for court users.

We continue to support the policy promoted by the Government that

well drafted, easily understood and accessible regulation can reduce the difficulties and costs of compliance for both business and citizens alike. We continue to identify areas where, by achieving improvements particularly in the area of court procedures, we can maximise the benefits to court users.

An examination of this Report will show that we have been involved in ongoing, extensive organisation-wide reviews of processes and court rules and an examination of process improvement opportunities in many offices.

Our information technology programme continued to assist in the provision of more efficient delivery of services. Our capital building programme continued to provide high quality facilities all around the country.

I would like to extend my thanks to all our staff for their tireless work and willingness to adapt and change. My gratitude also goes to our Board, the judiciary, the legal professions and to all the agencies within the justice community – all of whom have been of great assistance to us. I extend my thanks and appreciation to the

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform for his ongoing and enthusiastic support for our work. His efforts and those of the Secretary General of his Department and his staff have made much of our success possible.

I would also like to thank the Chairman and staff of the Office of Public Works for the tremendous assistance they have given us with our building and maintenance programmes nationwide. I would also like to thank those local authorities who continue to provide maintenance services on a contract basis for us.

I am pleased to recommend this Report to you as an insight into structured and focused activity and effort towards a world class Courts Service.

P.J. Fitzpatrick
Chief Executive Officer



Chapter One

Structure and Governance

Structure

The Board consists of a Chairperson and 16 members. Its functions are:

- to consider and determine policy in relation to the Service and
- to oversee the implementation of policy by the Chief Executive Officer.

PROFILE OF THE COURTS SERVICE IN 2005

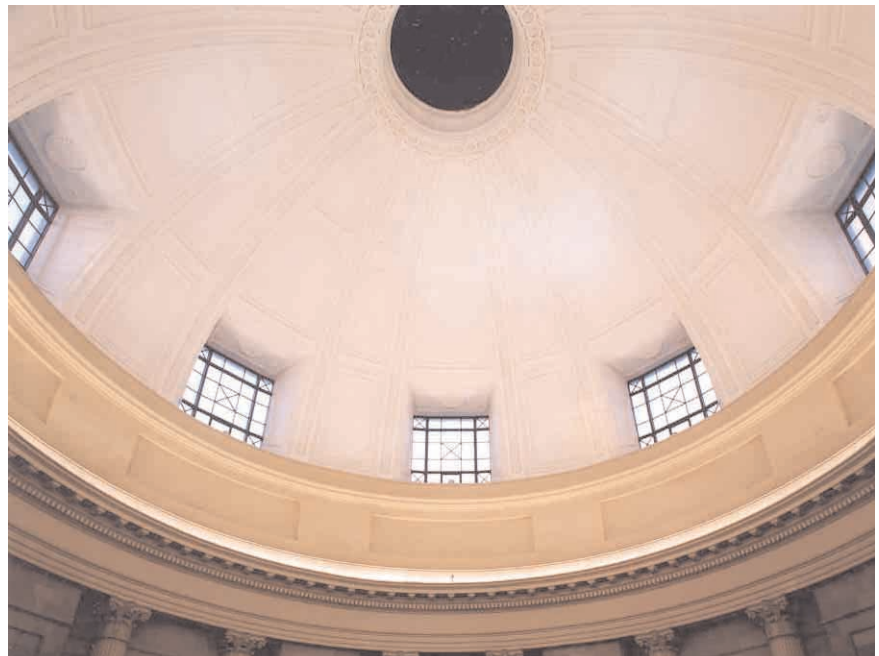
Number of staff:	1026.20
Budget:	€104m
Funds managed in a trustee capacity:	€985.5m
Court generated revenues (fines, bail, fees, family law maintenance, poor box):	€82.7m
Staff ratio of 60:	40 Dublin to provinces
Regional Offices:	5
Courts sit in over	250 locations

Functions of the Courts Service

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

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

The functions of the Service do not include the administration of justice nor is the Service accountable for judicial decisions. Judges act as members of the Board or Committees of the Board in an administrative capacity. Many participate as members of the Board, Committees of the Board, project teams and a variety of other activities.



The Board of the Courts Service



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



The Hon. Mr.
Justice **Joseph Finnegan**

*President of the
High Court*



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

*Elected by the
ordinary judges of
the Supreme Court*



The Hon. Mr.
Justice **John Quirke**,
Judge of the High
Court

*Elected by the
ordinary judges of
the High Court*



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

*Elected by the
ordinary judges of
the High Court*



The Hon. Mr.
Justice **Matthew
Deery**

*President of the
Circuit Court*



His Honour Judge
Patrick Moran
Judge of the
Circuit Court

*Elected by the
ordinary judges of
the Circuit Court*



Her Honour Judge
Miriam Malone

*President of the
District Court*



Judge **Flann
Brennan**, Judge of
the District Court

*Elected by the
ordinary judges of
the District Court*



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



Mr. **Hugh Mohan**,
Chairman of the
Bar Council

*Nominated by the
Chairman of the
Council of the Bar
of Ireland*



Mr. **Owen Binchy**,
solicitor

*Nominated by the
President of the
Law Society of
Ireland*



Mr. **Kevin
Fidgeon**, Dublin
Circuit Court

*Elected by the staff
of the Service*



Mr. **James Martin**,
Assistant Secretary,
Department of
Justice, Equality &
Law Reform.

*An officer of the
Minister nominated
by the Minister*



Ms. **Olive Braiden**

*Nominated by the
Minister to
represent
consumers of the
services provided
by the courts*



Ms. **Paula Carey**

*Nominated by the
Irish Congress of
Trade Unions*



Mr. **Gerry
McCaughy**,
Chief Executive,
Century Homes

*Nominated by the
Minister for
relevant
knowledge and
experience in
commerce, finance
or administration*

Committees of the Board

The Board may establish and authorise Committees to perform many of its functions. During 2005, the following Committees dealt with a range of issues:

FINANCE COMMITTEE

- The Hon. Mr. Justice John L. Murray, Chairperson
- The Hon. Mr. Justice Joseph Finnegan
- The Hon. Mr. Justice Matthew Deery
- Her Honour Judge Miriam Malone
- Mr. James Martin
- Mr. Gerry McCaughey
- Mr. P.J. Fitzpatrick

REMUNERATION COMMITTEE

- The Hon. Mr. Justice John L. Murray, Chairperson
- The Hon. Mr. Justice Joseph Finnegan

- The Hon. Mr. Justice Matthew Deery
- Her Honour Judge Miriam Malone
- Mr. James Martin
- Mr. Gerry McCaughey
- Mr. P.J. Fitzpatrick

AUDIT COMMITTEE

- The Hon. Mr. Justice Joseph Finnegan, Chairperson
- The Hon. Mr. Justice Seán O'Leary, Judge of the High Court
- Mr. Gerry McCaughey
- Mr. Tom O'Higgins, Chartered Accountant, external member
- Mr. Jim Farrell, former Director of the National Treasury Management Agency, external member

BUILDING COMMITTEE

- The Hon. Mr. Justice John Quirke, Chairperson
- The Hon. Mr. Justice Iarfhlaith O'Neill
- His Honour Judge Patrick Moran
- His Honour Judge Michael White, Judge of the Circuit Court
- Judge Catherine Murphy, Judge of the District Court
- Mr. Patrick James McCarthy S.C., nominee of the Bar Council of Ireland
- Mr. Gerard Griffin, solicitor, nominee of the Law Society of Ireland
- Mr. Gerry McCaughey
- Ms. Olive Braiden
- Mr. Shay Kirk, Courts Service
- Mr. Brendan Ryan, Courts Service
- Mr. Kevin Fidgeon
- Mr. Michael Haugh, Office of Public Works,

FAMILY LAW COURT DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

- The Hon. Mrs. Justice Catherine McGuinness, President of the Law Reform Commission, Chairperson
- The Hon. Mr. Justice Liam McKechnie, Judge of the High Court
- Her Honour Judge Mary Faherty, Judge of the Circuit Court
- His Honour Judge Gerard Haughton, Judge of the District Court
- Ms. Olive Braiden
- Mr. David Bergin, solicitor, nominee of the Law Society of Ireland
- Mr. Kevin Fidgeon
- Ms. Catherine Forde B.L., nominee of the Bar Council of Ireland
- Ms. Nuala McLoughlin, Chief Registrar and Director of Operations, Supreme & High Courts
- Mr. Diarmaid MacDiarmada, Director of Operations, Circuit & District Courts



STEERING COMMITTEE TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ON SENTENCING

- The Hon. Mrs. Justice Susan Denham, Chairperson
- The Hon. Mr. Justice Kevin O' Higgins, Judge of the High Court
- The Hon. Mr. Justice Esmond Smyth, Judge of the Circuit Court
- Her Honour Judge Miriam Malone
- Professor Thomas O'Malley, Senior Lecturer in Law, National University of Ireland

Organisational Structure



P.J. Fitzpatrick,
Chief Executive
Officer



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



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



Sean Quigley,
Director of Finance



Brendan Ryan,
Director of
Corporate Services



Noel Rubotham,
Director of Reform &
Development



John Glennon,
Director of Human
Resources

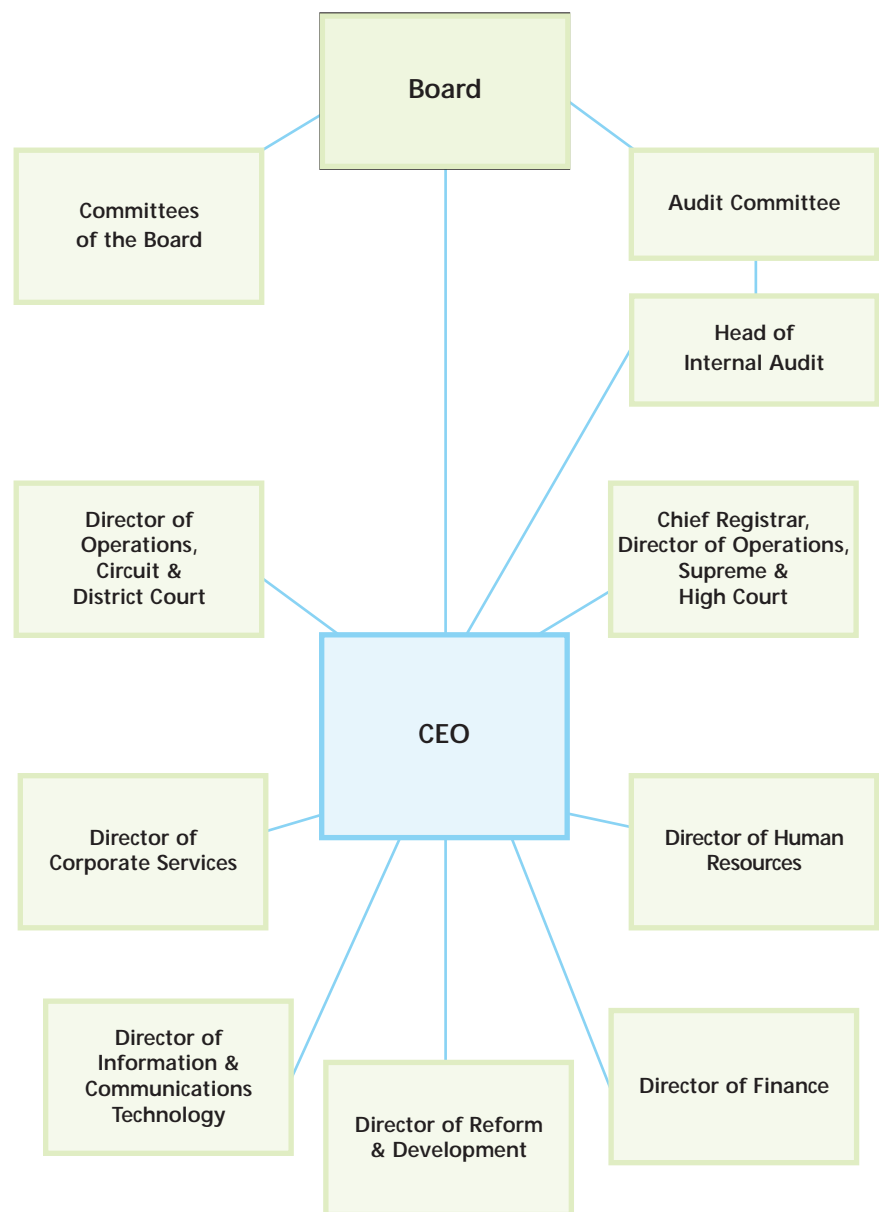


John Coyle,
Director of
Information &
Communications
Technology

ORGANISATIONAL / MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

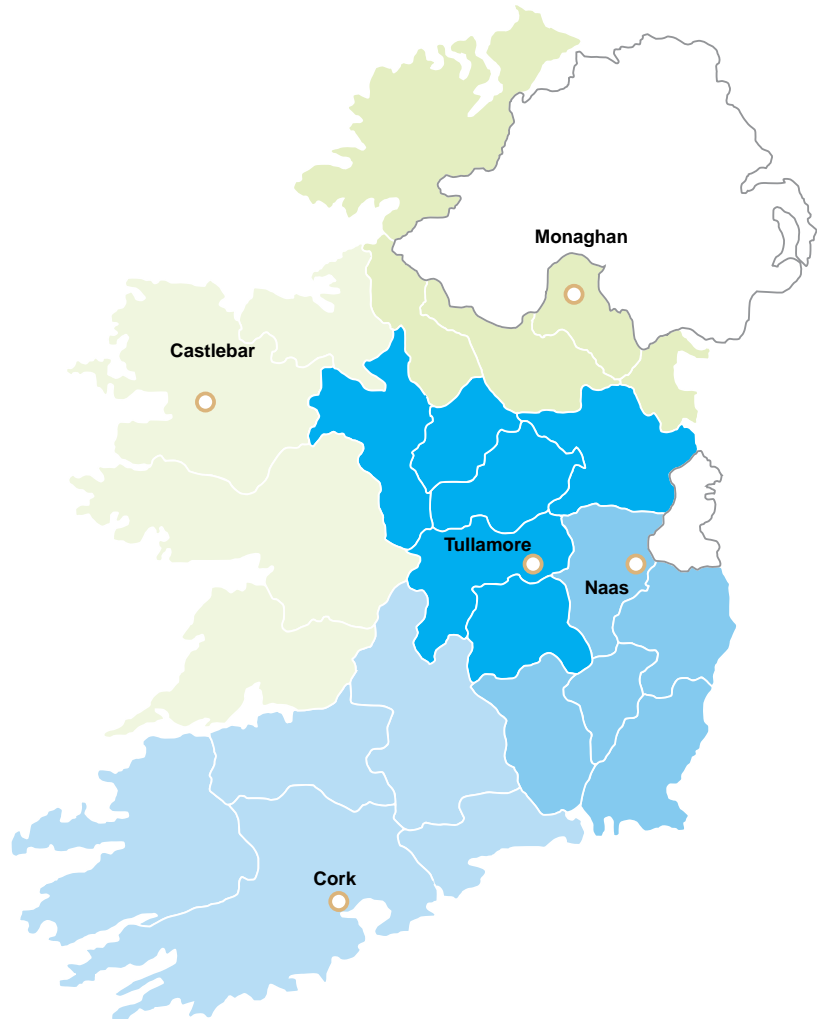
The Senior Management Team

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



Regional Offices

There are regional offices in five locations outside Dublin: Monaghan, Naas, Tullamore, Cork and Castlebar.



NORTHERN REGION



Olive Caulfield
Regional Manager

Office location -
Monaghan

Counties covered -
Monaghan, Cavan,
Leitrim, Donegal,
Louth

EASTERN REGION



Gerry Nugent
Regional Manager

Office location -
Naas, Co. Kildare

Counties covered -
Kildare, Wicklow,
Carlow, Kilkenny,
Wexford

MIDLAND REGION



Anne Price
Regional Manager

Office location -
Tullamore, Co. Offaly

Counties covered -
Laois, Longford,
Offaly, Roscommon,
Westmeath, Meath

SOUTHERN REGION



Eamonn Kiely
Regional Manager

Office location -
Cork City

Counties covered -
Cork, Kerry,
Limerick, Waterford,
Tipperary

WESTERN REGION

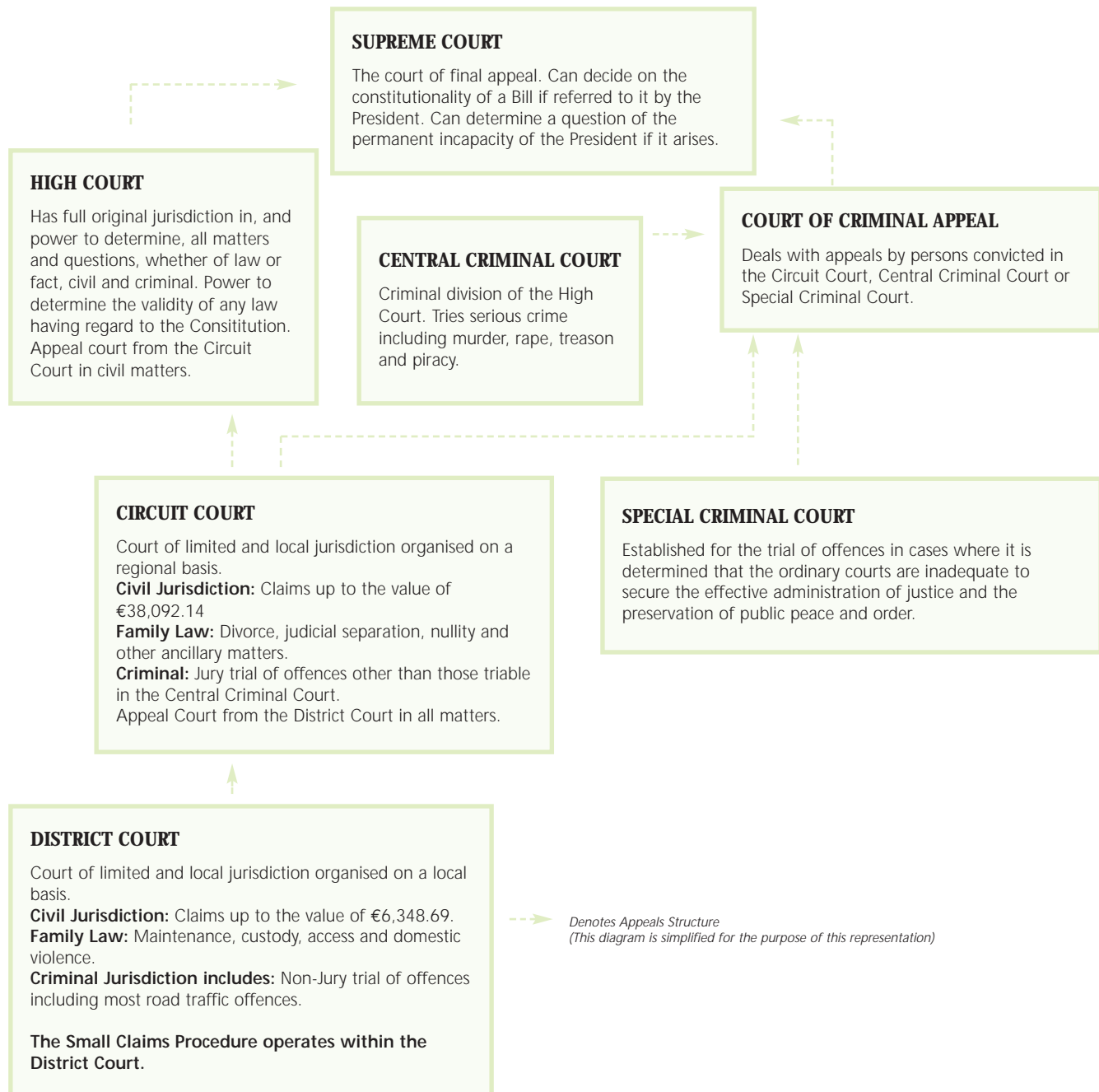


Brendan J. McDonald
Regional Manager

Office location -
Castlebar, Co. Mayo

Counties covered -
Galway, Mayo, Sligo,
Clare

Structure of the Courts



Governance

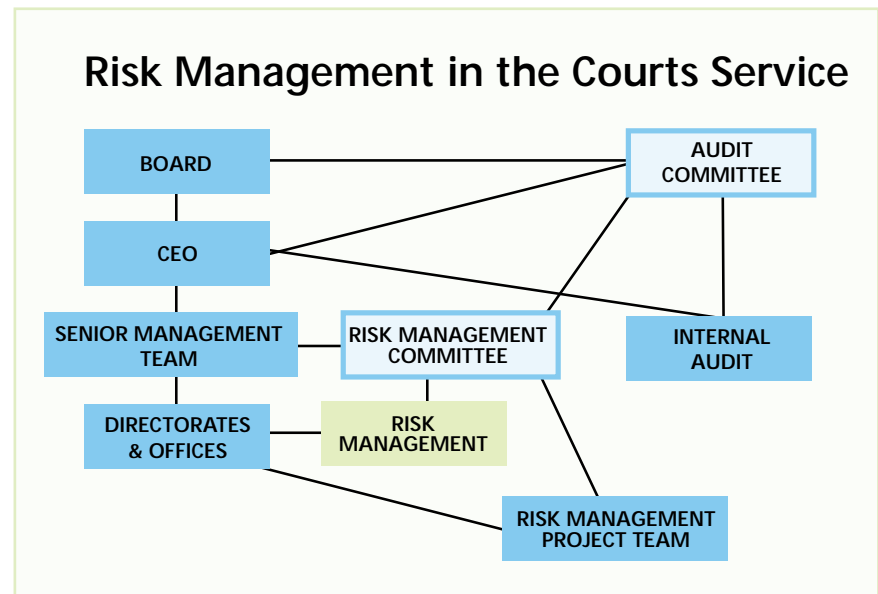
The Service continues to implement the recommendations of the Working Group on the Accountability of Secretaries General and Heads of Offices (the *Mullarkey Report*). The following initiatives were implemented by the end of 2005:

Audit Committee

The Audit Committee which includes two suitably qualified external members continued to meet at regular intervals during the year.

Internal Audit Unit

Significant progress was made during the year in upgrading the Internal Audit Unit. The Head of Internal Audit post was upgraded to principal officer level and a qualified accountant was appointed to the position. Additional resources were allocated. External auditors were engaged to provide elements of the internal audit programme. This enables the Unit carry out a broader range of audits particularly in specialised areas such as information technology, investment of court funds, value



for money and public private partnership projects. It also facilitates the transfer of skills and knowledge to the staff of the Unit. All Audit Reports are submitted directly to the Audit Committee and to the Chief Executive /Accounting Officer.

The Service continues to ensure that the skills and knowledge of staff within the Unit are regularly updated. All staff attended a number of training courses throughout the year. A total of 40 training days were provided. The courses ranged from basic auditing skills to specialised areas such as fraud and procurement.

Risk Management

Excellent progress was made during 2005 in establishing a risk management framework. A risk management policy and guidelines were prepared and issued to all offices. A risk management committee was established. Some 125 managers from across the

Service attended a series of workshops at which key risks were identified. Reports on the management of major risks were reported to the Audit Committee at regular intervals during the year. By the end of the year very good progress was made in establishing a risk management database, which will be fully operational in 2006. Risk management was also embedded in the business planning process for all offices.

Procurement

The procurement function was upgraded during the year. A Procurement Manager was appointed to coordinate procurement on an organisation wide basis. Several major procurements were undertaken. These included interpretation and translation services, security and cleaning of court buildings nationwide.



Chapter Two

Performance Summary

Performance Summary

The Service continues to operate in a rapidly changing environment. Economic, social, technological, demographic and political developments continue to impact on the day to day operation of the courts system.

Changes in demographics

In 2005 a major influence was the changing demographics of 21st century Ireland. The Central Statistics Office estimated in April 2005 that the population exceeded four million. The continued increase in the population can be attributed to a number of factors including an increase in the number of births and an increase in immigration both of returning Irish nationals and of foreign nationals from within and outside the European Union. The resultant demands for facilities such as living accommodation, schools and infrastructural developments was reflected in the workload of the courts. This included an increase in litigation and changing demands for court facilities to deal with changing population centres. In addition, the diverse nature of the population interacting with the courts and court offices necessitated a re-evaluation of

interpretation and translation services and the provision of information in a variety of languages.

Legislative provisions

New legislation continued to impact on the work of the courts. Examples in 2005 included:

- The Disability Act, 2005 which provides that application may be made to the Circuit Court for an order directing the Health Service Executive or head of education service providers to implement determinations of appeals officers, to give effect to resolutions reached by mediation, or to implement recommendations of complaints officers
- The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (Amendment) Act, 2005 which provides that a determination or decision of the Commission may only be challenged by an application for judicial review to the High Court. The Act also provides for the payment of an award of

the Education (Former Residents of Certain Institutions for Children) Finance Board into court in certain circumstances

- The Proceeds of Crime (Amendment) Act, 2005 amends the Proceeds of Crime Act, 1996, the Criminal Assets Bureau Act, 1996, the Criminal Justice Act, 1994 and the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2001. It also covers foreign criminality where proceeds of that criminality are within the State. Among the measures introduced in the Act is the authority for a member of an Garda Síochána to seize a gift or consideration which is suspected to be a bribe. An application to detain the seized property for more than 48 hours must be made to the Circuit Court.

The primary function of the Service is to support the work of the courts. In this Chapter a summary of the work of the courts in 2005 is provided. Details of initiatives undertaken to support the work of the courts are summarised in Chapter 3. Comprehensive court statistics are contained in Chapter 5. The waiting times for cases to be heard are summarised in Appendix IV.

THE SUPREME COURT

The number of appeals lodged in the Supreme Court was 446 in 2005 compared with 531 in 2004 (the highest number ever recorded). The number of certificates of readiness lodged (confirmation that appeals were ready for hearing) increased from 205 in 2004 to 213 in 2005.

The authentication of notaries' and commissioners' signatures is an important service provided by the Supreme Court Office. The registrar's Certificate of Authentication is required for many purposes, including company documents, marriage certificates and the adoption of children from abroad. 7,996 registrar's certificates were issued

in 2005. This was an increase of 28% compared with 2004 when 6,218 certificates were issued.

CRIMINAL

Court of Criminal Appeal

The number of new appeals lodged in 2005 was 257, the same as in 2004. The court dealt with 290 appeals, a 9% increase on 2004. By the end of the year, the court had reduced the number of cases on hand to 273, or 10% fewer than at the end of 2004. The number of new appeals lodged by the Director of Public Prosecutions in 2005 was 37, compared to 21 in 2004.

High Court (Bail)

There were 2,592 applications for bail to the High Court in 2005. This represented a 10% reduction on the 2004 total of 2,862 applications. The High Court granted bail, on the applicant's own bond or with a surety, in 899 cases, or 34.5% of cases. This was a marginal increase on the 2004 rate of 29.9%. The court refused bail in 210 cases - 7.3% of the total number of cases in 2005,

compared with 310 refusals, or 11.6% of the total number in 2004. In 2005, 18 applications were refused under the terms of the Bail Act, 1997, as compared with 29 refusals in 2004. In 2005, the High Court revoked bail orders in 112 cases, a 26% increase on the figure for revocations in 2004 which was 76.

Central Criminal Court

The court received 83 new cases in 2005. This was an increase of just over 15% on the 2004 number of 72. There was a 10% increase in the number of rape cases and a 25% increase in the number of murder cases compared with 2004. The court dealt with 121 cases in 2005, an 11% reduction on the 2004 figure of 135, continuing the trend of disposing of more cases than it received for the fourth successive year. As a result, the court continued to reduce the backlog and waiting times, which is now less than 6 months for cases returned to the court in November and December 2005. The court has achieved these outcomes by applying a strict policy with regard to adjournments, case management and case scheduling.



Circuit Criminal Court

The number of jury trials in 2005 was significantly higher than in 2004, up from 355 to 389, or an increase of 10%. Almost 67% or 827 defendants pleaded guilty in provincial Circuit Criminal Courts compared with 85% or 1,015 in Dublin. Jury trials accounted for 124 or almost 10% of all defendants convicted in the provincial Circuit Criminal Courts. In Dublin the corresponding figure was 75 defendants or 6%. 142 or 11% of all defendants were acquitted by a jury outside Dublin while 4% or a total of 48 were acquitted following jury trials in Dublin. Almost 65% of all criminal cases related to robbery (including larceny) and assaults. In the provinces, of those convicted, 43% or 408, were given suspended sentences and 56% or 532, received custodial sentences of up to 5 years. In Dublin, 31% or 348 of convictions were dealt with by suspended sentences. 16% or 176, received sentences of up to 2 years with a further 43% or 467 being sentenced to terms of between 2 and 10 years.

Appeals from the District Court were broadly comparable to 2004 at 6,545. During the year some 6,387 District Court appeals were dealt with

District Court

In the District Court the overall number of cases, both summary and indictable, decreased. Summary cases decreased from 312,152 in 2004 to 302,134 in 2005. Indictable cases dealt with summarily decreased from 45,645 in 2004 to 41,374 in 2005. Road traffic cases at 198,412 comprised 66% of all summary cases. Larceny and related matters made up just over 50% of indictable cases.

Juvenile Crime

A total of 2,434 children were brought before juvenile courts in 2005. Of those, 558 or 23% had their cases struck out while in 288 or 12% of cases the charges were withdrawn or dismissed. 441 or 18% of defendants were sentenced to detentions and 131 or 5% were sent for trial to the Circuit or Central Criminal Court. 28 children were committed to special schools.

CIVIL

High Court Personal Injury

There was a substantial reduction in the number of High Court personal injury cases initiated in 2005. 10,480 summonses were issued in 2000. The number increased to 12,335 in 2001. In 2002, the number decreased to 10,641. 2003 saw an increase to 11,245. The number peaked in 2004 with over 800 summonses per day being issued during July. The total number of personal injuries summonses issued in 2004 was 15,293. The total number issued in 2005 was 746. By the end of 2005, no cases initiated under the new rules for personal injuries claims had reached trial in the High Court.

Circuit Court Personal Injury

Some personal injury cases came to the courts having been through the Personal Injuries Assessment Board process. Personal injuries cases initiated before the establishment of the Board are still being heard by the courts although the number is declining.

PERSONAL INJURY

The Personal Injuries Assessment Board Act, 2003 came into effect for claims for compensation in cases involving employers' liability on 1st June 2004, and for claims arising from motor accidents on 22nd July 2004. All claims for personal injury (excluding medical negligence) must now be submitted to the Personal Injuries Assessment Board for assessment.

Personal injury cases now initially come into the courts system where the nature of the claim excludes it from the jurisdiction of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board or when the Personal Injuries Assessment Board issues an authorisation or release. The Personal Injuries Assessment Board will issue such authorisations if the respondent declines to allow the claim proceed to assessment from the outset or if the assessment is rejected by either the claimant or the respondent.

The Civil Liability and Courts Act, 2004 introduced many important changes in the way in which personal injuries actions are prepared for trial and the pace of such litigation. Section 10 of the Act requires plaintiffs to use a new application form when issuing personal injuries claims which include a detailed endorsement of claim verified by affidavit. New rules of court provide model forms for the assistance of claimants. The Act requires persons making allegations or assertions in their pleadings to verify them on oath. It also provides for mediation and pre-trial hearings to identify issues in dispute with a view to early settlement in part or in full. It introduces mandatory exchanges of final offers by plaintiffs and defendants and places limits on the Court's discretion to extend time limits. These changes will impact on trials from 2006 onwards.

High Court

Summonses

There was a total of 4,580 plenary summonses issued in 2005, a 77% reduction on the 2004 figure of 19,942. Cases brought by way of summary summons increased by 7%, from 1,668 in 2004 to 1,782 in 2005. The number of special summonses increased by 18%, from 540 in 2004 to 639 in 2005.

Extradition

Applications for extradition, which are now all initiated in the High Court and which include applications under the European Arrest Warrant Act, 2003 increased by 51% from 50 in 2004 to 69 in 2005.

Judicial review

Applications for judicial review totalled 1,205 in 2004. This increased to 1,419 in 2005 which was more than double the number of such applications in 2000 when there were 679 such applications. This increase is partly due to the appointment of many new independent regulators whose decisions are open to judicial review and an increasing number of reviews of District Court decisions.

Asylum and immigration

In 2005, a total of 1,863 asylum and immigrations applications were made to the High Court. This is an increase of 35% on the 2004 figure of 1,381.

Miscellaneous common law applications

There was a 90% increase in the number of miscellaneous common law applications. There were 59 such applications in 2004 and 113 in 2005. This category includes applications under section 160 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (unauthorised developments), appeals under the Freedom of Information Acts, applications for the transfer of sentenced prisoners, applications under section 12 of the Personal Injuries Assessment Act, 2003 for the retention of evidence or an accident location and appeals against determinations of the Labour Court.



Commercial List

106 cases were entered into the Commercial List in 2005. 18 applications were refused admission. This represented a 246% increase on the figure of 43 for 2004, the first year of the list. 53 cases were disposed of during 2005 or a 96% increase on the 2004 figure of 27 cases. An analysis of disposals indicates that 3 were disposed of following interim motions, 39 were settled between parties and 11 following full hearings. The average waiting time from admission to the list to a hearing date was 8 - 9 weeks. Cases generally were concluded within 11 weeks.

Competition List

In April 2005, amended Rules of the Superior Courts provided for the creation of a Competition List modelled on the Commercial List. Applications for admission to the List were made in 7 cases, all of which were admitted. By the end of 2005, 4 cases had been disposed of, 1 of them following a full hearing. The parties settled 3 cases

Pre-hearing activity

Notwithstanding that the number of personal injuries summonses decreased, the reduction in pre-hearing activity from 2004 to 2005 in the High Court was less than 2%. In 2004, 90,850 pre-hearing documents were registered in the Central Office. The corresponding figure for 2005 was 89,100 which is marginally higher than the 2003 figure of 88,853.

Examiner's Office

In 2005, 81 new cases were received – 55 company liquidations and 26 mortgage suits - an increase of 60% compared with 2004 when 50 new cases were received. During the year, 57 cases were disposed of, comprising 47 company liquidations and 10 mortgage suits.

Office of the Taxing Masters

In 2005, 525 bills of costs were certified. This was a 6% reduction on the 2004 figure of 560. There were 2,031 bills lodged for taxation. Almost 45% of bills lodged were for personal injury cases including road traffic accident, employers' liability and accidents in the workplace. 15-20% of bills lodged were for judicial review cases (criminal, civil and planning related reviews). 10-15% of the bills were for non-jury and chancery actions, 5% related to appearances before tribunals and the remainder comprised solicitor and client bills and bills relating to cases arising from professional and medical negligence.

During the final two quarters of 2005 there was a reduction in the number of bills lodged relating to personal injury cases and an increase in the number of solicitor/client and tribunal bills lodged.



Circuit Court

Civil Bills

The number of civil bills issued in the Circuit Court has declined gradually since 2001, when 44,965 were issued, to 42,384 in 2002, 41,181 in 2003 and 40,178 in 2004, a cumulative decrease over the four year period of just over 10%. In 2005, the number of civil bills issued was 22,692 or a decrease of 43% on the 2004 figure.

Pre-hearing activity

The increased powers provided for County Registrars in the Civil Liability and Courts Act, 2004 were reflected in an increase in the number of motions dealt with by County Registrars in 2005. While the overall number of motions dealt with in the Circuit Court decreased in 2005 to 21,497 from 24,032 in 2004, the number dealt with by County Registrars increased from 15,741 in 2004 to 16,801 in 2005 or an increase of almost 7%. County Registrars dealt with 78% of all motions thereby providing additional time for judges to deal with full hearings.

District Court

General

The amount of civil business in the District Court continued to decrease. The number of civil applications dealt with, including civil processes and other summonses of a civil nature, decreased from 71,669 in 2004 to 59,750 in 2005 a 16% reduction.

Summary Judgment

The summary judgment process continues to be an important part of the civil work of the District Court. In 2005, there was a decline in the number of summary judgments granted. 30,138 such judgments were granted in 2004 compared with 22,929 in 2005.

Enforcement

Under the Enforcement of Court Orders Acts, 1926 to 1940, the District Court has unlimited jurisdiction to enforce a debts due on foot of judgments, orders or decrees of a competent court. Examination, committal and instalment orders reduced in 2005 to 21,608 from 23,405 in 2004 (An 8% decrease).

Small Claims Procedure

The number of new small claims decreased from 3,007 in 2004 to 2,705 in 2005. This was mainly due to the establishment of the Private Residential Tenancies Board which took over responsibility for disputes about key money. Claims under this heading decreased from 553 in 2004 to 75 in 2005. Almost 55% of all claims dealt with were resolved by the Small Claims Registrars without recourse to court proceedings. This was up from 48% in 2004.

FAMILY LAW

High Court

There was a 23% increase overall in High Court family law business in 2005. The total number of new cases was 228 compared with 193 in 2004. There was an increase of 32% in appeals from the Circuit Court, from 62 in 2004 to 82 in 2005. There were 30 applications for divorce, a slight reduction on the 2004 figure of 34. Applications for judicial separation showed little change, up one to 49 from 48 in 2004. There was one application for nullity. Guardianship of Infants Act applications more than doubled, increasing from 10 in 2004 to 21 in 2005.

The High Court prioritises Child Abduction cases under the Hague Convention. In 2005, 31 summonses were issued compared with 27 in 2004. Of these, 3 were procedurally deficient and struck out, 1 related to parental responsibility, 1 was pending and 26 were disposed of. During 2005, the country of origin of applications was recorded for the first time. Of the 26 applications that came before the court, 12 originated in England and Wales, 3 in Northern Ireland, 1 in Scotland, 3 in the USA and 7 in various European countries

(Denmark, Finland, Switzerland, France, Cyprus and Slovakia). 43 children were the subject of these applications of whom 20 were aged under 5 years, 18 aged 5-10 years and 5 aged 10 years or over. Children were returned voluntarily in 14 applications. 9 applications were dealt with in less than 7 weeks, a further 4 within 12 weeks, 5 within 20 weeks, 6 within 25 weeks and 2 within 30 weeks. Where children are being returned voluntarily the court frequently allows a longer time for processing the case to avoid interrupting the child's attendance at school.

Circuit Court

The number of applications for divorce in 2005 was 4,096 a slight increase over the 2004 figure of 3,880. Judicial separation applications were almost identical at 1,658 compared with 1,654 in 2004. The number of nullity applications fell by one, from 51 in 2004 to 50 in 2005. Applications granted for exemptions from section 33 of the Family Law Act, 1995 increased to 870 in 2005, having declined to 761 in 2004. The number of District Court appeals increased to 561, an increase of 13.5% over 2004.

An analysis of applications to Dublin Circuit Court by gender disclosed a divide across all applications of 58% female to 42% male. Divorce and nullity applications were evenly divided between female and male applicants. Applications for judicial separation were initiated by more than twice as many females as males or a ratio of 70 to 30.

District Court

Domestic violence

The decline in the number of barring and protection orders sought continued. The number of applications for barring orders decreased from 3,210 in 2004 to 3,183 in 2005, a reduction of almost 1%. The number of barring orders granted decreased from 1,295 in 2004 to 1,265 in 2005, a decrease of just over 2%. The number of safety order applications increased from 2,611 in 2004 to 2,866 in 2005 (an increase of 10 %). The number granted was up from 987 in 2004 to 1,037 in 2005 (an increase of 5%). Interim barring orders also decreased by 11% from 698 in 2004 to 622 in 2005. There were 550 applications granted, a 9% decrease on the 2004 figure of 604

In a project to obtain more qualitative statistics, the High Court Central Office requested practitioners issuing family law proceedings to complete a questionnaire agreed with the Law Society of Ireland. Completion of this questionnaire is voluntary. 23 practitioners responded. In 14 of the cases, the applicant's main reason for bringing proceedings was to obtain a judicial separation, 8 were seeking divorce and one sought a nullity.

For 2005, the statistical value of the information is limited. The data received indicates that the plaintiff/applicant in 22 of the cases was female. Ancillary orders dealing with property and maintenance were sought in 21 cases. Orders relating to pension rights were sought in 13 cases and financial compensation in 12 cases. Custody was applied for in 8 cases, joint custody in 4 cases and access in 7 cases. None of the applications sought safety or protection orders. In 8 cases, there were no minor children. There was 1 minor child in 4 cases, 2 minor children in 7 cases and 3 minor children in 4 cases.

Data on the age of the parties was not supplied in all returns. Where it was given, 80% of the female parties and 72% of the male parties were in the 40-60 age range. The dates of marriage ranged over a period of 45 years, with 3 dating from the 1960's, 7 from the 1970's, 6 each from the 1980's and 1990's and 1 on or after 2000. In 16 of the cases there was no previous judicial separation order. In 3 cases there was a judicial separation and a separation order in a further 3. None of the parties who responded to the questionnaire had obtained a foreign divorce order.

This was the first year in which information of this nature had been requested. As a result of amendments to family law legislation the Service will commence a project in 2006 to improve the collection of family law information in all courts.

Guardianship of Children

Applications for guardianship by unmarried fathers increased by 40% from 1,237 in 2004 to 1,734 in 2005. Successful applications increased by 47%, up from 862 in 2004 to 1,266 in 2005.

Custody and access

Applications for custody, access or both increased in 2005. The total figure increased by almost 8% from 4,265 in 2004 to 4,598 in 2005. Applications for both custody and access increased from 715 in 2004 to 829 in 2005 or an increase of 16%. Applications for custody fell to 749 in 2005 from 792 in 2004, a decrease of 5%. The number of applications for access only increased to 3,020 in 2005. This represented an increase of almost 10% over the 2004 figure of 2,758.



Maintenance of spouses and children

The number of maintenance applications from married persons decreased slightly in 2005 to 1,566 from 1,574 in 2004. However, the number of applications for maintenance from unmarried persons increased by 11%, from 2,307 in 2004 to 2,562 in 2005.

Child Care

There was an increase in the number of supervision and care orders granted in 2005. The number of supervision orders granted was 372 in 2005 an increase of 36% from 273 in 2004. Full care orders granted in the same period increased from 411 to 975.

LICENSING

Circuit Court

The total number of liquor licenses granted by the Circuit Court increased to 475 in 2005 from 441 in 2004. The biggest increase was for hotel licenses which were up by 73% and special restaurant licenses which were up by 72%.

District Court

Special exemption orders accounted for 71,179 or 86% of licensing applications dealt with by the District Court in 2005. There was an increase of 33% in the number of restaurant certificates granted by the District Court in 2005, up from 832 in 2004 to 1,106 in 2005. Annual dance licence applications also increased from 1,355 in 2004 to 1,609 in 2005. Temporary licence applications decreased from 1,465 in 2004 to 1,342 in 2005.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT, 1992

There was a significant decline in the number of applications to the District Court under sections 107 and 108 of the Environmental Protection Act, 1992. The number of applications under section 107, which gives powers to local authorities in relation to noise pollution, decreased from 24 in 2004 to 13 in 2005. Of these, 12 were successful. The decline in applications under section 108, which allows individuals to bring applications in relation to noise levels, was even greater. Applications fell by 55% from 81 in 2004 to 36 in 2005. Of these, 26 were successful.

Chapter Three

Implementing our Mandates

Mandate 1 - Managing the Courts

ADVANCING THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The *Strategic Plan 2002-2005* continued to guide the activities of the Service during 2005. It is structured around the five mandates contained in the Courts Service Act, 1998:

- manage the courts;
- support the judiciary;
- provide information on the courts system for the public;
- provide and maintain court buildings and
- provide facilities for users of the courts.

The Strategic Plan is the vision and guidance for an extensive business planning process. During 2005 this included the preparation and implementation of detailed business plans by all Directorates and individual offices. Delivery of the strategies and business plans was further supported by the alignment of individual staff performance through the continued implementation of the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS).

Roles were revised during the year to provide greater clarity for individuals, promote employee involvement, highlight individual performance and support the achievement of overall strategies. A review of the operation of PMDS was undertaken during 2005. The recommendations of the review were approved for implementation.

The Senior Management Team continued to monitor progress on the implementation of the Strategic Plan during the year through a process of regular reviews of Directorate and office business plans. The Annual Report 2004 included a progress report on the implementation of the objectives in the Strategic Plan.

A new Strategic Plan for the years 2005-2008 was prepared during 2005. With a focus on operations, partnership, people, processes, purpose and performance, the Service engaged in a wide ranging and extensive consultation programme involving the judiciary, staff and a wide range of external stakeholders. Advertisements were published in the daily newspapers inviting members of the public to make submissions. Facilitated staff workshops were held in Dublin and in each of the five regional bases. The new Strategic Plan was

approved by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform before the year end.

SUPPORTING THE MODERNISATION OF THE SERVICE

In addition to alignment to the Strategic Plan, the annual business plans reflect the active support of the Service for the government's public service modernisation programme. During 2005, substantial progress was made with the implementation of a range of initiatives including improved customer service, increased flexibility, eGovernment and new technology, efficient use of resources, improved human resource management, training and development, partnership and employee involvement, equality, information for the public and better regulation.

Many of these initiatives were included in the action plan for the modernisation agenda under *Sustaining Progress*, the social partnership agreement for 2003-2006. The vast majority of targets set out in the plan were met. Many were surpassed. Regular detailed progress reports were

submitted to the Performance Verification Group. The Group reviewed progress achieved in relation to the commitments in *Sustaining Progress* on a range of issues including stable industrial relations, co-operation with flexibility and ongoing change, as well as satisfactory implementation of the agenda for modernisation. It commended the Service on the progress made.

TRAINING

Developing a competency framework

The delivery of the targets set out in the new *Strategic Plan 2005-2008* will require a sustained effort on the part of all staff. The need to have a comprehensive development programme in place for managers at all levels was recognised in a review of training and development needs carried out in 2005. A detailed development programme supported by a competency framework for all senior grades will be rolled out during 2006. This will set out clear performance targets for managers at principal and assistant principal officer level and upwards. It will also identify training and development gaps

which will need to be addressed by training and development programmes and assist in succession planning for the future.

Technical training

Technical training is particularly important in areas experiencing high levels of staff turnover. One of the main objectives of technical training is to capture business knowledge and provide staff with key pieces of knowledge to enable them provide an efficient and effective customer service. The need to cultivate knowledge management techniques has become increasingly significant in offices where staff have applied for decentralisation.

A technical training initiative commenced in the District Court in August 2005. A procedures manual was prepared by an experienced member of staff detailing the criminal court work of the District Court offices. The manual was complemented by an electronic presentation and formed the basis of a number of two day training courses offered to all staff grades. The courses, initially offered to staff based in Dublin, will be extended to the regions in 2006.

Staff of the Probate Office agreed, as part of an overall review of office processes, to participate in their own time in a training weekend assisted by an external facilitator. The purpose of the exercise was to review processes and identify opportunities for improvements in all business processes. The initiative was successful both at a business level and as a team building exercise.

By year end, additional technical training courses were being prepared for a number of other areas of work – criminal, civil and family law work in Circuit Court offices and family law in District Court offices. A manual outlining procedures in the Circuit Court had been drafted. The manual will be discussed in detail with experienced staff of the Circuit Court following which a training programme will be finalised. A manual outlining procedures in family law in the District Court had also been prepared by an experienced member of staff. A training programme based on the manual was also being finalised at year end.

Technical training making a difference in the District Court

The work involved in processing criminal cases in the District Court affects not only the staff of District Court offices but staff of many other areas including offices of the Circuit Court, the Circuit and District Court Operations Directorate, units within the Information and Communications Technology Directorate and units within the Finance and Human Resource Directorates. Technical training was provided not only to staff of the District Court but to staff in these other areas. In this way staff supporting the work of the District Court but who may never have worked there acquired a knowledge of the procedures operated by the District Court thereby enabling them to provide more informed support.

This new initiative featured the role of the Registrar, bail procedure, remand in custody procedure and the completion of warrants, bail bonds and probation bonds.



The electronic version of the staff manual and job guide for staff of the Central Office of the High Court was expanded and improved during 2005 with additions to incorporate new tasks coming on stream.

The technical training programme was complemented during the year by another initiative which afforded staff from support Directorates the opportunity to spend time in operational offices. An example was in the Human Resources Directorate where staff were assigned to the Dublin Metropolitan District Court and a regional circuit court office.

Training in the regions

The Service continued to utilise the improved facilities in regional and other court offices around the country to provide training courses. Disruption to office activity is greatly reduced with local training. It also reduces costs.

Work was completed during the year on the provision of a

dedicated training centre in the Western Regional Office in Castlebar. Facilities available include information technology and presentation equipment. The first course in the new centre was held in November 2005.

In the Northern Region information technology training was provided by a specialised provider in local offices in Letterkenny, Donegal, Carrick-on-Shannon, Monaghan, Dundalk and Drogheda.

DEVELOPING A HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY

Work commenced in 2005 to develop a new Human Resources Strategy to support the implementation of the new Strategic Plan. The new Strategy will be completed in 2006. It will include a review of the existing performance management and development system and the development of a new training strategy.

BETTER REGULATION

The Service supports the policy promoted by the Government that well-drafted, easily understood and accessible regulation can reduce the difficulties and costs of compliance for both business and individuals alike. Work continued during the year identifying areas where, by achieving improvements in certain areas and in particular in court procedures, the Service can maximise the benefits to court users:

Reviewing business processes

During 2005 the Service commenced a number of process reviews of varying degrees of scale:

● District Court

An extensive review of processes within the family law offices of the Dublin Metropolitan District Court was undertaken in 2005. The recommendations made cover all aspects of the work of the family area including the interaction between judges, staff and customers and all aspects of office processes and practices.

● Circuit Court

Templates for use in the drafting of orders were developed in consultation with County Registrars for use in family law matters. The regional offices engaged nationwide support for the new templates.

● High Court

The Official Assignee in Bankruptcy identified a number of process improvement opportunities to improve the accessibility of the Register of Foreign Judgments and the external audit of the funds under the control of the Official Assignee's office. Work will continue into 2006 to secure the necessary changes to legislation and court rules to support these improvements.

Changes in work practices in the Office of Wards of Court were effected following a series of workshops involving all staff during the year. Guideline notes were produced for legal practitioners on all areas of wardship procedure.

A review of the Rules of the Superior Courts which apply to probate procedures was undertaken by the Probate Office. As part of an initiative to ensure consistency of approach across all probate registries, the office organised seminars for those county registrars who are probate officers for their regions.

● All courts

By year end arrangements had been finalised for a full review of the processes and practices for the administration of civil business. This will be undertaken in 2006 prior to the development of a Service wide computerised civil case management system.

Improving interaction between Circuit and District Court offices

The Service continued to promote cooperation, integration and greater flexibility between provincial Circuit and District Court Offices during the year. Staff transferred between jurisdictions according to need.

The Service will amalgamate the criminal offices of the different jurisdictions (High, Circuit and District) in the new Criminal Courts Complex (see page 63). This amalgamation will be a pilot project for multi-jurisdictional single-function offices. Plans were underway for the first of a series of cross-jurisdictional staff seminars to allow staff participate in the planning process for the move to a unified court office in the new complex.

Central processing of bulk documents within District Court offices

A new processing unit was established to provide a central office for the processing of summons applications received electronically from An Garda Síochána. In 2005, over 20,000 summonses per month were printed, sorted and dispatched to garda stations. These included all summons applications received from An Garda Síochána for Dublin, Cork and Limerick. It also included summonses relating only to penalty points for pilot sites in Trim, Dundalk, Naas, Bray and Cork. This volume will increase dramatically with the expansion of the penalty points system and the rollout of the arrangements nationwide in 2006.

RECORD MANAGEMENT

The maintenance of consistent, accurate and up to date filing and data entry is of major strategic importance to the Service. In 2005 a Record Management Project Group was established to review records management and develop a policy in this area. The review encompassed records

management practices for court and administrative records in electronic and hard copy format. By year end a progress report was being prepared for consideration by the Senior Management Team.

Initiatives undertaken in individual offices during the year included an overhaul of the inventory of records and materials held in several locations by the Central Office of the High Court. This project will be completed in 2006.

PARTICIPATING IN WIDER GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

The Service continued to be represented on a number of cross organisational working groups including the Legal Costs Working Group and the Company Law Review Group. Other groups with a Service representative included a Law Reform Commission working group to consider proposed new legislation governing the protection of vulnerable individuals.

Under existing legislation, the Probate Office is required to notify the Commissioners for Charitable Donations and Bequests of any charitable bequests made in a will admitted to probate. The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs invited the Probate Officer to assist in devising legislation for a proposed new framework for charitable bequests and donations. By year end proposed legislation was with the legal draftsman.

The scheme to reimburse hospital charges will impact on the work of a number of offices, including the Probate Office, where the person entitled to the refund is now deceased. In such cases, the Probate Office will have a duty to ensure that the correct person receives the refund on behalf of the deceased person's estate. Any person applying for repayment on behalf of a deceased person will be required to prove that he or she is the personal representative of the estate of that person by providing a copy of the grant of probate or the letters of administration in respect of the estate of the deceased person. Normally the family of a deceased person only applies for a grant of probate or administration if that person was the owner of assets at the date of death. This would have been unnecessary in the estates of many people who died in nursing homes. Now that their estates are entitled to apply for reimbursement, the position required to be reviewed.

In order to avoid unnecessary expense in these cases both for the next of kin of the deceased person and for the State in so far as is legally and equitably possible, the Probate Office had, at the end of 2005, made a submission to the Department of Finance, the Department of Health and Children and the Revenue Commissioners to address situations where no grant had previously issued.

SUPPORTING THE PARTNERSHIP PROCESS

The Central Partnership Committee, chaired by the Chief Executive Officer, continued to drive the partnership initiative during the year. Issues addressed by the Committee in 2005 included reviews of progress reports under the *Sustaining Progress* Action Plan, customer service, waste management, health and safety, car parking, teleworking, exceptional performance awards, performance management and development, equality and diversity, training and development, staff deployment and childcare. The Committee also reviewed the operation of partnership arrangements in the Service for the years 2001 to 2005 and received presentations on a number of major initiatives from directors and other senior managers.

Regional partnership committees continued to deal with local issues including maintenance, information technology, internal communication, assistance for lay litigants, code of conduct, business plans, energy requirements, waste management and staff mobility. All regional committees are represented on the Central Partnership Committee.



The Service continued to support the '*Workplace of the Future*' promoted by the National Centre for Partnership and Performance. In 2005 the Centre promoted the Service's partnership model as an example of best practice at a number of conferences and as a case study in its publication '*Building Learning Organisations through Networking*'. The partnership model was also used as part of a feature on 'Partnership in the Workplace' in a national newspaper during the year

CUSTOMER SERVICE

The development of an organisation where procedures, practices and customer services meet the needs of users remained a very high priority for the Service. The implementation of the Customer Service Action Plan continued during the year. A number of offices published customer charters to complement the customer charter of the Service. This initiative will be extended to all offices in 2006.

Five court-user groups were established in Dublin and are, where possible, cross-jurisdictional. Each group met 3 times during the year. Managers and staff from relevant directorates and offices attended the meetings. Users were represented by a wide variety of agencies including the Law Society of Ireland, the Bar Council of Ireland, the Dublin Solicitors' Bar Association, the Association of Family Lawyers, the Office of the Chief State Solicitor, the Office of the Chief Prosecution Solicitor, An Garda Síochána, the Probation Service, the Forensic Science Laboratory, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Victim Support and AdVic.

Issues addressed included waiting times in offices, availability of court orders and improving communication. As a result the Service has piloted and introduced a number of changes to business procedures, including the extended use of email for queries, requisitioning copy documents, and direct contact with court registrars.

Regular meetings were also held with user groups in regional venues around the country. Local user groups enable regional managers deal with a range of issues both local and national in a

User group meetings afforded the Service the opportunity to develop a customer-centred approach to service delivery and to seek feedback from groups who use Court offices. They also provided managers and staff with an opportunity to suggest to users ways in which they could assist in improving service delivery.

targeted and focussed way and provide a forum for court users to discuss matters of a local nature.

PROBATE OFFICE - SPEEDING UP THE PROCESS OF LODGING PAPERS

Obtaining a grant of probate or administration is often a key ingredient in the conveyancing process. An average of 300 sets of papers are presented in the Probate Office each week, 200 of which are rejected because they are incomplete. A revised form intended as an aide memoir for solicitors lodging papers in the office was devised during the year with the assistance of the Probate Office User Group. The form will be introduced on a pilot basis in 2006.

The service to customers was often improved by making relatively minor adjustments. Some examples from during the year illustrate the point:

Court of Criminal Appeal

During 2005 the office completed a project to track and collate judgments for certain key areas of interest namely murder, manslaughter and section 15A Misuse of Drugs Act, 1977 for the benefit of practitioners and trial court judges.

Due to the increasing use and benefits of technology in all aspects of court work, in 2005



arrangements were made for transcripts in all cases under appeal to be provided in electronic format.

High Court

The ticketing system in the Central Office of the High Court became fully operational in 2005. Each day 160 - 200 customers visit the office. This system is essential for fairness and to assist in the assignment of staff to on-counter and off-counter tasks.

Customer Service Action Plan

The Central Customer Service Implementation Committee will review the operation of the Customer Service Action Plan in 2006. The plan will be updated in the light of this review. The Service will take account of the impact on the customer of all its activities, continue to target customer services and meet the needs of the wider user groups.

Customer User Groups were established in 2005 for the following Dublin offices:

- Dublin Civil Offices (Supreme Court Office, Central Office and the Dublin Circuit Civil Office)
- Dublin Family Law Offices (Circuit and High Court)
- The Principal Probate Registry
- Insolvency (Examiner's and Official Assignee's Office)
- Dublin Criminal Offices

HIGHLIGHTING IRELAND'S ETHNIC DIVERSITY

In common with other public bodies, the Service is providing facilities and services which reflect the increasingly diverse ethnic make up of the population. The increase in the use of interpreters is one example of this development. For those coming before the courts, and for whom English is not their first language, the court process can be difficult and sometimes unintelligible. The courts can direct that interpreters be provided to assist with the efficient management of cases. Common languages interpreted include Irish, Russian, Polish, Lithuanian, Spanish, French, Mandarin Chinese, Czech, Romanian and Latvian.

During the year the Service commenced a rationalisation of the management of interpretation services to provide an improved, managed service to the courts while at the same time improving the quality of the service. A new provider will be engaged by mid 2006. The Service spent €1,257,000 on interpreters' fees in 2005. This contrasts with €103,000 in 2000, €232,000 in 2001, €461,000 in 2002, €631,000 in 2003 and €554,000 in 2004.

DEVELOPING FAMILY LAW COURT SERVICES

Initiatives continued during the year to improve the quality of service provided to those involved in sensitive and difficult family law cases:

Circuit Court

A third family law court was established to deal with family law business in Dublin. Judges assigned to family law were presented with information on the practice and procedures operating in the court office. This was supplemented by a series of information meetings to discuss issues arising and take steps to deal with them.

Access to information about family law cases listed for hearing before the Circuit Court was improved by the availability on the website of court lists for a number of counties. See *page 58*. for further details. Court forms were standardised for use in the Circuit Court offices. Work commenced on the development of an interim case management system for family law cases around the country. All provincial circuit courts set aside specific days for family law hearings during their scheduled sittings. Additional sittings exclusively for family law hearings were also arranged. Dedicated full-time family law courts are available in Dublin and Cork.

District Court

There are now dedicated days for hearing family law cases in 45 District Court venues nationwide. Efforts continued during the year to provide additional dedicated family law days. New dedicated days were introduced in Monaghan and Cavan. In Galway plans were advanced by year end for an extra sitting day each month. The transfer of the business of Muine Bheag courthouse to Carlow court in September allowed for the redeployment of that court day to Wexford for dedicated family law sittings.



DISTRICT COURT VENUES WITH SITTINGS DEDICATED TO FAMILY LAW

DISTRICT	COURT NUMBER	VENUE	DISTRICT	COURT NUMBER	VENUE
13	Abbeyfeale	Monthly	9	Mullingar	Monthly
8	Athlone	Four times a month	16	Naas	Monthly*
3	Ballina	Monthly	10	Navan	Monthly
16	Bray	Monthly	8	Nenagh	Monthly
13	Bruff	Monthly	13	Newcastlewest	Monthly
15	Carlow	Monthly	15	Portlaoise	Monthly
3	Castlebar	Monthly*	2	Sligo	Monthly
5	Cavan	Monthly	14	Thurles	Monthly
21	Clonmel	Monthly*	17	Tralee/ Killarney	Monthly
20	Cobh	Monthly	10	Trim	Monthly
19	Cork	Twice weekly	9	Tullamore	Monthly
1	Donegal	Monthly	22	Waterford	Monthly
6	Drogheda	Monthly	3	Westport	Monthly*
	Dublin	Daily	23	Wexford	Monthly
6	Dundalk	Monthly	21	Youghal	Twice monthly*
10	Dunshaughlin	Twice monthly			
12	Ennis	Monthly			
20	Fermoy	Monthly			
7	Galway	Twice monthly			
10	Kells	Thrice monthly			
22	Kilkenny	Monthly			
13	Kilmallock	Monthly			
1	Letterkenny	Monthly			
14	Limerick	Weekly			
13	Listowel	Monthly			
9	Longford	Weekly			
20	Mallow	Monthly			
20	Midleton	Monthly*			
5	Monaghan	Monthly			

* In certain venues, while the day is not entirely dedicated to family matters, arrangements are made to hear family lists separately.

IMPLEMENTING THE INFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY STRATEGY

During 2005 a review of the new financial fund management, human resource management and interim civil case management systems was undertaken. The review took account of the significant technological developments that have taken place generally in courts worldwide and addressed the new business priorities that were emerging.

By year end a new information & communications technology strategy for 2006 to 2010 had been completed. The strategy, which is aligned with the new Strategic Plan referred to on *page 30* re-iterates the commitment of the Service to maximise the use of technology in the delivery of services while at the same time maintaining a system of justice which is fair, equitable and accessible to all regardless of technological skill, education or background.

A new integrated civil case management system will be provided across all court jurisdictions. This will incorporate



The Service is aware that significant elements of the information it possesses are essential for the daily work activity of legal practitioners and are also of interest to researchers, policy makers and the public in general. The new information technology strategy places an emphasis on the electronic delivery and availability of this information.

the use of modern technology with the potential to introduce major efficiencies within the civil justice system. Planning for a major review of the processing of civil business across all court jurisdictions will be undertaken in 2006 to ensure that the business potential of the new system is maximised.

By the end of 2005 a programme had commenced to make various registers maintained by the Service available online. These include registers in the Probate Office, the Office of the Official Assignee and the Central Office of the High Court. During the course of the strategy a customer portal will be developed and implemented where information specifically tailored to the needs of customers will be available over the internet.

Developing modern information systems

During 2005, the Service continued to further develop and provide modern information systems to meet the requirements of those who use the courts and to assist with the delivery of overall government policy.

Criminal Case Management System (CCMS)

This system was implemented in all District Court offices nationwide. It enabled the Service to introduce an automated penalty points system. During the year the reporting capability of the system was substantially improved to

provide more meaningful management and statistical reports. A programme of work was also commenced during the year to integrate the CCMS with the internal accounting systems.

The CCMS helpdesk continued to provide centralised maintenance and support for all users during the year. The helpdesk dealt with an average of 100 calls per week and provided training for CCMS users, both new and experienced. It also provided on site assistance in various offices and continued to monitor the quality of data in the system.

Civil Case Management System

During the year work continued to enhance the interim civil case management systems which had been implemented in all jurisdictions pending the development of a new strategic civil case management system.

Small Claims on-line

During the year work continued on the development of a Small Claims online system. By year end

the implementation of the first phase to provincial District Court offices had commenced. Development of the second phase of the system - lodgement of claims online by members of the public - was completed by year end.

Integration of Criminal Justice systems

Progress was made during the year, in co-operation with An Garda Síochána, on a further programme of integration with the Garda PULSE system. This will form the foundation for future integration across the criminal justice system. Phase 1 of the overall programme involved a pilot project to facilitate the electronic transfer of summons application data from An Garda Síochána PULSE system to the CCMS, court hearing dates from the CCMS to the PULSE system and court outcomes from the CCMS to the PULSE system. By year end work had commenced on the design of the technical platform to facilitate the electronic transfer of information between the two systems.

Video conferencing

During the year the Committee on Video Conferencing established by the Minister for Justice, Equality & Law Reform published its final report on the introduction of video conferencing between courts and prisons. The Committee recommended the use of videoconferencing technology stating that it had the potential to significantly improve the efficiency and effectiveness of criminal and civil trials. It further recommended that a pilot project be established in five courtrooms: two in the High Court in Dublin, one in Cloverhill courthouse, one in the Circuit Court in Dublin and one in the District Court in Cork. During the year significant progress was made in designing a technical solution for the proposed arrangements. By year end discussions and consultation were ongoing with the Prison Service for the introduction of the system on a pilot basis.

eRegisters

During the year, the Service commenced a feasibility study to provide certain court registers online. The project to provide court registers, for example the Lis

Pendens Register and the Probate Register is related to a project, sponsored by the Law Reform Commission, to deliver an online conveyancing process.



Maintenance payments online

A pilot project for the introduction of the electronic transfer of maintenance payments was commenced in the Dublin Metropolitan District Court office during the year.

Videolink facilities

The Service continued to provide facilities to enable evidence to be presented to the courts by video link. Tenders for major expansion of video link and video display facilities to all major courthouses were being evaluated by the year end.

In April 2005 parties made use of the video link facilities in the commercial list in the High Court for the first time. Witnesses gave evidence by video link from the United States.

Video viewing

During the year the Service commenced the procurement of fixed equipment for viewing videotape of interviews in Garda stations for criminal trials in the Circuit Criminal Courts.

High Court Central Office

During 2005 many enhancements were made to the computerised case tracking system to improve the listing arrangements for cases in the asylum and judicial review lists. Further enhancements were also made to capture improved statistical information.

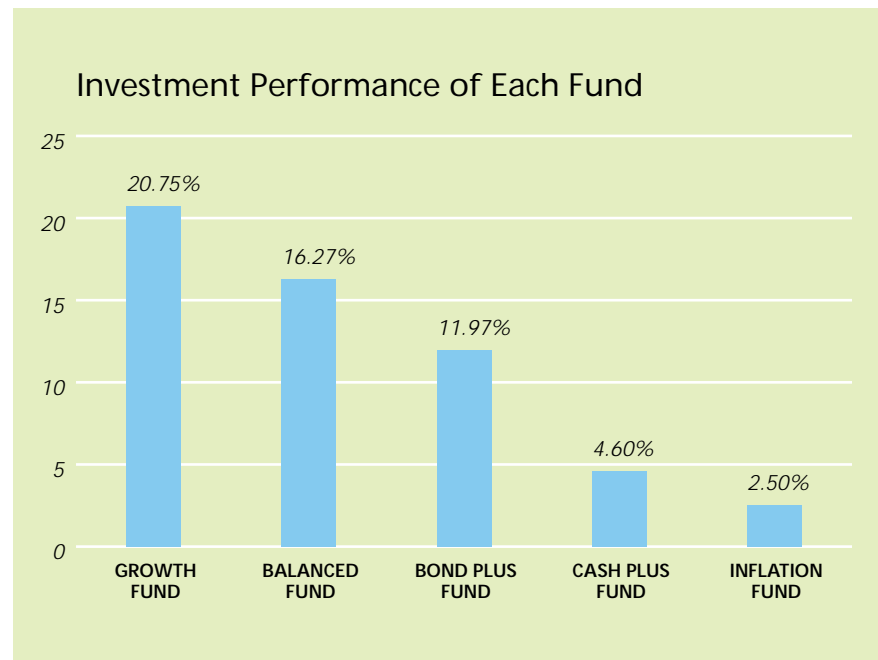
IMPROVING QUALITY OF SERVICE USING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Supreme Court

During 2005 access to the High Court computerised case tracking system was extended to the Supreme Court office. Details of High Court orders and particulars of High Court filings and listings can now be readily accessed by the Supreme Court office.

Funds invested in each fund

Cash Plus	€274m
Bond Plus	€409m
Balanced	€30m
Growth	€30m



MANAGEMENT AND INVESTMENT OF COURT FUNDS

Total funds managed by the Office of the Accountant of the Courts of Justice increased to €848.6m at the end of September 2005 with €73.4m of this increase due to investment performance. This represents an average performance across the investment strategies used of 13.4%. Investment performance for each strategy is shown in the Table above.

Central Funds Office

Significant progress was made during the year in establishing a central office for the management of all wards of court and minors' funds. Changes to the Circuit and District Court Rules Making Committees enabled the Office of the Accountant of the Courts of

Justice (the Accountant's Office) manage and invest funds on behalf of Circuit and District Court offices. By year end work was underway to transfer these funds. This will be completed in 2006. All of the other changes in terms of new technology, investment advisors, fund managers, new processes and publication of audited financial statements are now well established. The one outstanding matter is legislation to provide a coordinated legal framework for the management of all court funds together with provision for the audit of those funds by the Comptroller and Auditor General. Proposals for such legislation were submitted to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

During the year work commenced on a project to transfer accounting functions from the General Solicitor for Minors and Wards of Court to the Accountant's Office. This work will be completed in 2006.

The first electronic payment issued from the Accountant's Office during the year, with the transfer of funds for recurring payments.

IMPROVING COURTS ACCOUNTING ACTIVITIES

Plans for the establishment of a central courts accounting office were progressed during the year. The office will process all accounting functions associated with financial transactions in all District Court offices. This includes fines, bail, family law maintenance, poor box and fees. A range of options will be available to those conducting financial transactions with court offices including credit card, direct debit, credits, billpay and the internet. The project will also achieve significant economies of scale and result in more efficient and effective use of existing resources. The design for the

office was completed in 2005. A pilot office will commence in 2006.

DEPLOYING RESOURCES TO OPTIMAL BENEFIT

The Service remains committed to ensuring that all resources are deployed to optimal benefit. The production of timely and meaningful financial information for the Board, Finance Committee and all levels of management is key to the successful implementation of this strategy. The existing financial reports were reviewed and significantly improved during the year. Reviews of major areas of expenditure are part of the financial strategy. A review of expenditure on training was well advanced by year end.

PARTICIPATING IN INTERNATIONAL FORA

The Service continued to encourage staff to support initiatives outside Ireland of relevance to the work of the courts and the support Directorates as the following examples illustrate:

Wardship conference

Staff of the Office of Wards of Court participated in a conference of the court offices and public agencies responsible for guardianship, protection and wardship in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland held in Belfast and hosted by the Northern Ireland Office of Care and Protection in April 2005.

Ireland and Great Britain Courts Service Conference

The Service participated in the 4th Annual Ireland and Great Britain Courts Service Conference held in Manchester in October 2005. Representatives from the Scottish Courts Service, the Jersey Courts Service, the Northern Ireland

Courts Service, the Isle of Man Courts of Justice, Greff (Channel Islands Courts Service) and the Courts Service from England and Wales all participated. The theme of the Conference was '*Sharing Innovation and Practice*'. The 2006 Conference will be held in Ireland.

Bureau of the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice

During the year the Principal Registrar of the High Court was elected to the Bureau of the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ), a four member Bureau drawn from the representatives of the member states. The Commission, established by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in September 2002, is made up of qualified experts from the 46 Council of Europe member states. It aims to improve the efficiency and the functioning of the justice system of member states and enable a better implementation of the international legal instruments of the Council of Europe concerning efficiency and fairness of justice.

International Association For Court Administration

International Association for Court Administration

The Service is represented on this Association, an organisation of professionals who share a common interest in promoting improved administration and management in court systems. The Association was established in September 2004 by agreement of over 90 participants representing court administrators and members of the judiciary from 24 countries at a meeting in Ljubljana, Slovenia.



Mandate 2 - Providing support services for the judges

The Service continued to provide administrative support to the judiciary during 2005 through the Judicial Support Unit. It also provided administrative support for the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board and the Judicial Studies Institute.

ASSISTING THE JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS ADVISORY BOARD

Advertisements for judicial vacancies were published in national newspapers and legal publications during the year. Newly appointed judges were introduced to and briefed on the administrative functions of the Service.

The total number of serving judges in all four court jurisdictions - Supreme Court, High Court, Circuit Court and District Court - as of 31st December 2005 was 128 with 3 vacancies.

ASSISTING THE JUDICIAL STUDIES INSTITUTE

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

SUPPORTING THE COURT RULES MAKING COMMITTEES

The Service continued to provide on a non-statutory basis a Rules Committee Support Unit located within the Reform and Development Directorate. This unit provided support, including research and drafting resources for the three court rules making committees. This continues to promote the introduction of consistent terminology, procedures and rules across all court jurisdictions. By year end draft heads of a bill for the establishment of statutory arrangements for this support including the integration of the rules committees' secretaryships had been incorporated in the *Civil Law Reform (Miscellaneous) Provisions Bill* for submission to Government.

In 2005, the Unit was involved in the preparation of practice directions and rules for the Superior, the Circuit and the District Courts to meet the requirements of the Civil Liability and Courts Act, 2005 in respect of personal injuries proceedings and court proceedings heard otherwise than in public. Rules were also prepared to facilitate the operation

Jurisdiction	Legislative position	Number of judges serving
Supreme Court	9 including the Chief Justice*	9
High Court	33 including the President	31
Circuit Court	34 including the President	33
District Court	55 including the President	55
Total	131	128

* 9 when the President of the Law Reform Commission is a Supreme Court judge as was the case at the 31st December 2005

of E.U. Regulation 805 of 2004 which creates a European Enforcement Order for uncontested claims, and to regulate the procedure in the Superior Courts in cases concerning elections. Detailed reports of the work of the three rules making committees and of the full extent of the court rules approved by those committees are in Chapter 7.

REFORMING COURT PROCEDURES

Staff were encouraged to submit suggestions for improvements in court rules and office procedures or court forms during the year.

This included simplifying the procedure for a court application, reducing the number of forms needed or amending court rules to take account of court decisions or changes in legislation. An electronic suggestion box was set up to facilitate staff make suggestions. Court users were also encouraged to make suggestions at the regular meetings with the various court user groups. A number of suggestions were being considered at year end.

JUDICIAL SUPPORT UNIT

The Unit continued to provide wide ranging support to the judiciary during the year. In addition to providing support for judges in Ireland, the Unit facilitated visits by foreign delegations from many countries including Norway, Scotland, United States, France, China, Iceland, Finland, Spain, and Romania.

By year end, work was almost finalised on the preparation of a booklet for judges containing information on a range of matters. The booklet is being prepared in cooperation with the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform, the Department of Finance and the Presidents of each court jurisdiction.

ASSISTING THE JUDICIARY TO REDUCE WAITING TIMES

Supreme Court

The interval between the lodgment of the certificates of readiness and the hearing dates at the end of 2005 was fourteen months. Early hearing dates were

allocated in cases of urgency, such as appeals from the Commercial List and under the European Arrest Warrant Act, 2003. Taking into account appeals which were granted an earlier hearing date, the average waiting time was seven months.

Court of Criminal Appeal

As a result of increased sittings, the Court of Criminal Appeal continued to make progress in reducing waiting times during 2005. The trend established since 2003 of hearing more cases than the number of new cases lodged continued. By the end of 2005 waiting times had been reduced to 7-9 months for appeal of conviction cases and 6-8 months for appeal of sentence cases.

High Court

Judicial Review

By the end of 2005, the President of the High Court had made arrangements to deal with judicial review applications in venues outside Dublin for the first time. Parties will be invited to identify cases that can be dealt with in

other venues. This arrangement will provide an improved service to practitioners and litigants by bringing the court to a more convenient location. It will also shorten the waiting time for judicial reviews generally and increase the number of courts available in Dublin.

Common Law Motion List

By the end of November 2005 the number of notices of motion listed for the Monday common law motion list exceeded 400 per week. This necessitated the creation of a third common law motion list. This arrangement will continue into 2006 and will remain in place to assist in the disposal of pre-trial issues. Approximately one third of all common law motions sought an order giving the plaintiff judgment in default of appearance or defence. To make best use of judicial resources, certain applications in respect of these motions may now be made to the registrar in the court to which the lists are assigned.

Circuit Court

Additional sittings in the Circuit Court allowed the court deal with more cases. In Dublin twelve courts sat continuously - five dealt with crime, three with family law, three with civil work and one with District Court appeals and licensing. In Cork three judges sat and a fourth judge was assigned on a part time basis. Four of the provincial circuits had two judges assigned full-time. For the first time, the South Eastern Circuit had three full-time judges for the entire Michaelmas Term. It is intended to continue this arrangement in 2006.

Dublin Metropolitan District Court

By constantly reviewing the progress of cases in Dublin, monitoring court lists and hearing dates and analysing the usage of court time, significant improvements were made during the year. Additional cases were listed in the summons court. In August, September and October, additional sittings were held to deal with drink driving cases. An additional court was provided on an ongoing basis to deal with hearings and reduce waiting times.

The Dublin Metropolitan District Court sits every Saturday and Bank Holiday to deal with emergency applications. There is also a late sitting every evening to deal with matters which cannot be held over until the following day. These arrangements also apply during the court recess in August. In the rest of the country the District Court sits outside of normal sitting hours to deal with emergencies as required.

28 days of extra sittings were held in September 2005 in courtrooms normally used by the Circuit Court. During these sittings 430 cases were disposed of.

Provincial District Court

Additional sittings continued to be scheduled during the year to deal with backlogs in venues around the country. An example was in Donegal where 112 additional or special sittings were held in 2005 to deal with a large backlog of contested cases. A total of 1,139 cases were disposed of during these special sittings.

SUPPORTING INITIATIVES IN RELATION TO CASE MANAGEMENT

The Service continued to assist the judiciary develop and promote case management systems for appropriate categories of litigation. The following are some such examples:

Court of Criminal Appeal

The registrar, in conjunction with the presiding judge, monitored all cases on a monthly basis. By the end of 2005, there were only 26 cases still pending where appeals had been lodged prior to 2004. These cases were before the court with a view to having them either allocated hearing dates or struck out of the list during the first term of 2006. By the end of 2005 trial dates for the first term of 2006 were available for all cases in the list to fix dates that were ready to proceed.

High Court Commercial List

The Commercial List generally deals with business disputes where the claim or counterclaim is more than €1 million. It can also deal with intellectual property disputes and judicial review cases. A feature of the list is the application of rigorous case management including timetables for the exchange of documents and written evidence. The list offers litigants the opportunity to have their cases dealt with speedily in a forum familiar with commercial law practices. The average waiting time from entering the list to a hearing date was 8-9 weeks. Cases are generally concluded within 11 weeks.

High Court Competition List

New court rules provided for the introduction of a dedicated list to accommodate cases brought under the provisions of the Competition Act, 2002 and/or Article 81 or 82 of the EC Treaty which came into effect in March 2005. The new list can also deal with appeals against declarations or determinations of the Competition Authority, judicial reviews in respect of decisions of the Authority, and proceedings for

relief at common law in respect of an agreement alleged to be unreasonably in restraint of trade.

The new rules also provide for documentary and evidentiary exchanges, rigorous case management and pre-trial conferences and questionnaires. They contain details as to when and how the Competition Authority can be asked to make observations and deal with the appointment of assessors, the form and content of bills of costs for cases in the list and the electronic filing and service of documents.

High Court Family Law

Since October 2005, family law proceedings in the High Court are governed by a new practice direction which is designed to introduce an element of case management into family law cases.

High Court Examiner's Office

The introduction of a proactive approach to case management in the Examiner's Office meant that cases commenced within a shorter time and in a uniform manner. The requirement that certain documents be made available to the court helped identify issues at an early stage in the proceedings thus saving court time and costs.

Circuit Court

An examination of the potential for extending county registrars' functions commenced in 2005 with family law. By year end a draft scheme of rules for case management of family law proceedings by county registrars had been completed.

SUPPORTING THE JUDICIARY IN ITS WORK

Reports in family law cases

The Service supported an initiative by the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform to improve the provision of reports to the family law courts.



Improving library and research facilities

The Judges' Library continued to provide a range of information and research facilities for judges and court staff during the year. Library services include:

- a comprehensive hardcopy collection including reference works, textbooks, periodicals, Oireachtas debates and official publications
- study areas with information technology facilities
- subscriptions to various online electronic legal services
- inter library loan or document supply services for materials not held in the collection
- information services by email, fax or post and on the premises
- training in online searching and legal information skills in general
- provision of publications for offices

Library services were often made available during evening hours. A traditional role of libraries is to identify, evaluate, select and organise appropriate information resources and increasingly this involves electronic services. Progress was made during 2005 in improving the range of electronic subscriptions and in facilitating access to those services by judges and staff. A programme designed to promote the use of these services was commenced. Continuing professional development and training for staff of the library ensured that staff remain familiar with current trends and practices.

Technology in the courts

During the year work was completed on the development of a scheduling and diarying system for judges of the Supreme Court. The system will assist the Chief Justice and the registrar to schedule cases for hearing and will also assist the Chief Justice scheduling judges to hear them.

During the year significant research was undertaken in



relation to the development of an integrated approach to the electronic filing of documents and the presentation of documents within the Supreme Court. By year end, a number of possible products had been identified. During 2006 these products will be further examined in the context of their technical suitability and a strategy will be developed for implementation.

Work commenced during the year to deliver a range of new services to the judges in the areas of secure communication and the use of modern mobile devices utilising a range of communication platforms.

Digital Audio Recording

In January 2005, digital audio recording was implemented in the Supreme Court and the Court of Criminal Appeal. Work continued during the year to introduce a strategic digital audio recording system across all court jurisdictions. By year end work was well advanced to provide a range of recording and associated services on a fully managed service basis. The Service intends to proceed to full procurement during 2006.

Digital Dictation System

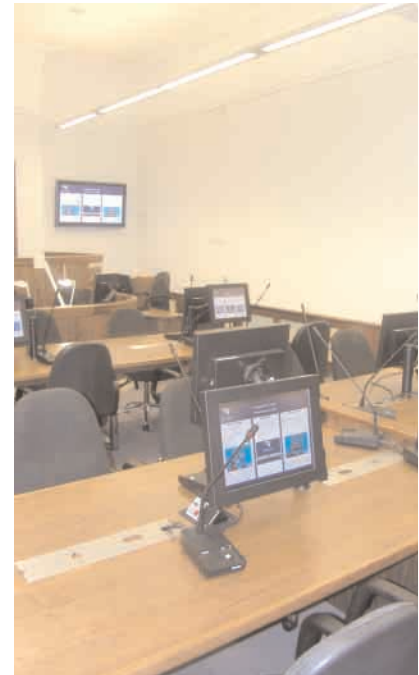
Following a successful pilot project in 2005 involving a number of High Court judges the Service will proceed to procure a full strategic digital dictation system in 2006.

Drug Treatment Court

The Drug Treatment Court in Dublin was placed on a permanent footing during the year with plans to extend it citywide on a phased basis. The court operates with the assistance of a team which includes the judge, a probation and welfare offices, an addiction nurse, a garda liaison officer, an education/training representative and counsellors.

Central Criminal Court list

Sittings of the Central Criminal Court in provincial venues continued in 2005. During the year the Court sat in Castlebar, Ennis, Sligo, Cork and Cloverhill. As a result of the extensive court building refurbishment programme most major town venues are now suitable locations for trials of the type dealt with by the Central Criminal Court. Many victims,



defendants, witnesses, relatives and friends no longer have to travel to Dublin with attendant accommodation requirements and absences from work. Jurors can be called from the area where the Court sits affording them an opportunity to further participate in the criminal justice system. There are also very significant cost and resource savings for An Garda Síochána and the Prison Service in particular.

Register of judgments

A register to record the dates on which judgments of the Supreme Court and High Court are reserved and subsequently delivered was established during the year as provided for by the Courts and Court Officers Act, 2002 as amended by the Civil Liability and Courts Act, 2004.

High Court Commercial List

The Commercial Court, which is the Commercial List of the High Court, was nominated for a number of awards during the year. The Attorney General nominated the court for *the Crystal Scales of Justice* award in the framework of the European Day for Civil Justice. The award is made by the Council of Europe and the European Commission to reward innovative practices contributing to the quality of civil justice.

The Court was also selected for a *Public Service Excellence Award*. The purpose of this biennial initiative, organised by the Public Sector Modernisation Section of the Department of An Taoiseach, is the reward of initiatives across the public service which have improved the quality of services or administration.



Mandate 3

Provide information on the courts system to the public

The work of the courts continues to be of major interest to the general public whether or not they are actively involved in the process itself. From interacting with the system as litigants, victims, witnesses or jurors to receiving reports of court cases in the print media or on television and radio the courts are an ever present feature of life for most people.

Understanding the system continues to pose problems for many members of the public. An obvious block is the language that remains a feature of the legal system. Few can find their way around the rules that dictate the practice and procedure of all courts. The challenge for the Service is to produce information on the operation of the system that is easy to understand without diminishing the solemn and serious nature of the cases in any way. The Service continues to work closely with organisations such as the National Adult Literacy Agency and the Plain English Campaign to produce information that enables all court users interact meaningfully with the system.

Leaflets and booklets published or updated during the year included:

- *Setting a Case Down for Trial in the High Court*

An updated version of the leaflet outlining the procedure for getting a case into a High Court list for hearing.

- *Who's Who in the Courtroom*

A poster version of this most popular of the publications of the Service to help identify the main participants in a criminal court case.

- *Heritage*

A leaflet highlighting the contribution made by a particular family to the Irish judiciary.

- *Supreme Court*

A revised version of the leaflet entitled 'A guide to appealing in the Supreme Court from the High Court'.

- *District Court Civil*

(i) An information guide for customers of the Dublin Metropolitan District Court civil office setting out the type of business dealt with and providing useful tips to assist service.

(ii) Charts explaining the procedure involved in civil proceedings and enforcement proceedings.

- *Drug Treatment Court*

A leaflet explaining the origins of this unique and innovative programme which aims to rehabilitate rather than to imprison non-violent offenders. Details of the phased structure of the specialised programme and the representatives of different agencies who make up its core team are also included. This leaflet was awarded the crystal mark for clarity by the Plain English Campaign during the year.

AS GAEILGE

The Service continues to put arrangements in place to ensure that the volume and standard of service provided through Irish is increased. A Scheme was prepared under section 11 of the Official Languages Act, 2003 during the year outlining the policy the Service will adopt over the next number of years. The general theme is that every service relating to Gaeltacht areas will be available in Irish and an interpretation service will be provided in all courts where the litigants wish to speak in Irish.

Material published in 2005 was simultaneously published in English and Irish. Publications made available initially in English prior to 2005 were made available in Irish where reprints or updates were arranged during 2005.

OTHER LANGUAGES

The Service continued to pursue its policy of providing information in a range of languages. *The Small Claims* leaflet was published in French increasing the number of languages in which this leaflet is available to six. The other languages are English, Irish,



Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese) and Spanish. By year end arrangements were being made to have the leaflet translated into Russian and Polish.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The Service continues to emphasise the link between the provision of information in written and electronic form and the need for quality customer service. The most important interaction is that which takes place between staff and court users in an office or court setting. The Service is aware that the effectiveness of customer service initiatives such as charters and action plans will be judged for the most part by users' experience of interacting with staff. Customer service training has been incorporated into many grade training programmes during the year.

DEVELOPING AN OUTREACH PROGRAMME

Second level schools

The Service continues to place a major emphasis on introducing young people to the operation of the court system as part of their general education. This ensures that their first interaction with the system is as an observer rather than as a litigant, witness, accused, victim or juror.

The education programme for second level students continued to offer tours of court buildings in Dublin and in many venues around the country during the year including Cork, Sligo, Letterkenny, Trim, Naas, Mullingar and Cavan. The work being carried out to implement the Capital Building Programme (*see page 61.*) continues to provide the Service with a ready source of impressive buildings for students to visit. In 2005, some 4,358 students and 295 teachers visited the Four Courts in Dublin alone.

“When the law is brought into the lives of people, they can truly take ownership of it for their benefit and the benefit of all the community” Participant in Outreach Programme

Organised visits to the Four Courts

Year	2005	2004	2003
Number of schools/colleges	155	148	132
Number of tours	185	179	150
Number of students	4,358 <i>(plus 295 teachers)</i>	4,303 <i>(plus 291 teachers)</i>	3,321 <i>(plus 250 teachers)</i>

The Service supported the National Mock Trial Competition held in the Four Courts in April 2005. Over 500 students competed in this most successful transition year school competition.

Work on the development of material for use as part of the Civil, Social and Political Education curriculum for second level students was nearing completion by the year end. The Service will produce an information pack as part of this initiative in early 2006. The pack will comprise a teacher's handbook, student's notes and DVD and provide a comprehensive introduction to the court system by facilitating the organisation of mock trial in the classroom.

Over 50 second level students completed work experience in the Four Courts during the year in both operational and

administrative offices. Students were also afforded opportunities to experience the work of the courts in regional offices including Trim and Mullingar.

Other groups

The interest in learning about the court system was not confined to second level students. During 2005 the Service saw a major increase in the number of community groups, trainee journalists, foreign students and foreign lawyers availing of the improved visitor programme. Advance booking allowed the Service tailor visitor programmes to suit the needs of particular groups. Features of some of the programmes during the year included meetings with judges, court staff and stenographers.

The Service continues to administer a placement programme in association with University College Cork for students undertaking the BSc Government and Public Policy Degree and the BCL (Law and Irish) Degree. The programme provides a paid contract of employment for four students for fourteen weeks. The placements complement the course of study being undertaken by the students by providing them with valuable practical experience. They are also given the opportunity to experience the working environment of a public sector organisation at first hand. In 2006 the Service will expand the placement programme to include students from the University of Limerick's Law and Public Administration Degree courses.

PRESENTATIONS ON THE WORK OF THE COURTS

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

Examiner's Office

The Examiner of the High Court was among the speakers at the Annual Insolvency Conference of the Consultative Committee of Accountancy Bodies in March. They included experienced insolvency practitioners and representatives from the public service. Topics covered included developments in the European Union, recent case law in Ireland and prospects for the Irish economy.

Wards of Court

The Director of Reform & Development outlined the current law and practice in relation to Wards of Court at a conference in November. He was one of a panel of speakers at the event organised by 'Namhi', a national voluntary organisation working to promote the rights of people with intellectual disability in Ireland.

The Office of Wards of Court participated in a conference organised by the Law Reform Commission on the subject of '*Guardianship: A New Structure for Vulnerable Adults*' at which the Director of Reform & Development delivered a paper

'From Wardship to Guardianship: Preparing for Change'.

**SUPPORTING INITIATIVES
BY OUTSIDE AGENCIES*****Irish agencies***

The Service continues to promote a range of information produced by many community groups, support organisations and other Government agencies. During 2005 these included a publication by the Money Advice and Budgetary Service (MABS) to assist people coping with money or debt problems.

European agencies

Support continued during the year for European Union initiatives. Posters and information material to highlight the European day of civil justice in October were distributed and the Service organised an exhibition in the Four Courts. The day was coordinated across the European Union by the European Judicial Network. The Network is designed to promote and enhance judicial cooperation between member states and acts

as a forum for sharing information and experience between them. The Service continues to be represented on the Network and, in addition to attending meetings, supports the comprehensive Network website which aims to provide an overview of member states legal systems in civil and commercial law.

The Service provided a work experience opportunity for a third level facilities management student from a university in the Netherlands.

IMPROVING STATISTICS

The Service concluded work on the procurement of an electronic reporting tool to produce improved statistics on the work of the courts. A comprehensive programme to train staff in the use of the new product was underway by year end. The range, type and quality of material available will be further improved for 2006.

The Service acknowledges that a vital aspect of the drive to improve the quality of statistical information is the accuracy of the data entered into the various information technology systems.

Many offices introduced data checking quality control initiatives during the year.

Statistics continued to be published on the website during the year with the Service offering a support facility via a dedicated Statistics Unit to deal with requests for additional material. An example of this assistance in 2005 was the provision of information for the National Crime Council on cases disposed of in the Central Criminal Court. This facility offers a central point of contact for a variety of organisations and individuals including academics, researchers, support and interest groups and various government departments and agencies.

DEVELOPING A HIGH QUALITY MEDIA SERVICE

The Media Relations Service continues to provide a central liaison between all court offices and the media. This involves the provision of accurate and timely information on court proceedings, judgments and the work of the courts. It also disseminates information on the operations, advances and achievements of the Service through the media.



Dealing with the media

The Media Relations Advisor held a number of press briefings during the year to promote several initiatives including the Commercial List, the opening of refurbished or new court buildings, plans for future developments and the launch of the Annual Report 2004.

Media releases were issued throughout the year on a broad range of topics including clarification of issues of debate in the public sphere, updates on building projects and details of the completion of major developments in the information technology and financial areas.

Enquiries about a variety of matters including daily court sittings, upcoming judgments, process and procedural questions, statistics on court work, historical research, and background to our civic and court system were fielded during the year. By dealing with policy and less than routine questions, the Media Relations Service frees up frontline staff and offices to continue with core work. Over 7,500 media queries were dealt with in 2005.

The Media Relations Service was involved in several documentaries relating to legal matters during the year by way of providing information, organising facilities and seeking permission for filming. It further liaised with the makers of a television series on behalf of the Service and the judiciary.

Improving facilities for the media

The provision of improved media facilities in courthouses continued during 2005. A new media room and accommodation was provided in Áras Uí Dhálaigh to provide 14 additional workspaces for the media. This facility includes personal storage space, work space, telephone lines and internet connections. Media facilities have also been provided in county town courthouses as part of refurbishment works. Examples include Sligo, Cork, Ennis and Dundalk. In Cork, a wireless, high speed broadband connection is in operation throughout the courthouse. It is of particular assistance to members of the media seeking to transmit voice, data and sound files via the internet.

Additional facilities and special once off arrangements were organised for high profile cases, where, given the proliferation of media in recent years, there are major demands for space, information, judgments and facilities.

Educating young journalists

Universities and other third level institutions availed of the services of the Media Relations Adviser during the year to inform journalism students about the operation of the courts in relation to reporting. In 2005 the Adviser delivered lectures on this and other court and media related topics to Dublin City University, Dublin Institute of Technology, Griffith College, Dublin Business School, Rathmines College and other centres of education at under graduate and post graduate level. The service extended to organising tours of the Four Courts for journalism students and arranging for them to attend criminal trials.

DEVELOPING THE WEBSITE

The Service continued to use the internet as a means of disseminating a wide range of information to the public on the operation of the court system in Ireland in 2005. Content on the site, which runs to some 16,000 pages, was enhanced to include judgments of the High Court from 2004, improved court rules and a

dedicated section for those called for jury service. The addition of a 'Latest News' feature on the homepage during the year allows users access specific information without having to search the entire site.

The site continues to be managed using a customised content management tool. The benefits of this system include the ability of court staff around the country to access the site remotely to update content particularly the *Legal Diary*. By year end some thirteen Circuit Court offices were accessing the site remotely and posting details of their court lists. An exercise to provide the remaining Circuit Court offices with the necessary training to participate in this initiative will continue in 2006. A further initiative designed to provide details of sittings in the District Court will commence on a pilot basis in 2006.

PROMOTING THE WEBSITE

The Service continued to promote the website as a valuable source of information on the work of the courts in Ireland. Presentations to visiting groups from Ireland and abroad, including many school

groups and outside agencies such as the Law Society facilitated a raising of awareness of the range and type of information available.

AWARDS FOR WEBSITE

National

The web site was the winner of the 'Best State Body' category of the Irish eGovernment awards for 2005. The awards, run by Public Sector Times and Elucidate and sponsored by the Institute of Public Administration and REACH, attracted some 240 entries in seven categories.

At the end of the year the site was shortlisted for a *Public Service Excellence Award 2006* (see page 52.) as part of the biennial initiative organised by the Public Service Modernisation Division of the Department of the Taoiseach.

International

The site was placed seventh in the website competition which formed part of the Ninth Courts Technology Conference organised by the United States National Center for State Courts in

September. The Conference held every two years is the only conference in the world dedicated exclusively to court technology. The National Center provides information and assistance to courts organisations using original research, consulting services, publications and solutions to enhance court operations. It promotes the use of latest technology and provides information on proven best practices for improving court operations in many areas.



ACCESSING THE WEBSITE



Increased access to the Courts Service website was provided as a result of an initiative in the Central Office of the High Court during the year. Customers can now access the website on all Central Office public search terminals.

WEBSITE STATISTICS 2005

MONTH	TOTAL MONTHLY VISITS
January	49,067
February	52,112
March	50,154
April	54,498
May	53,441
June	51,681
July	49,691
August	41,463
September	46,996
October	69,339
November	77,122
December	56,150

Freedom of Information Acts

	2005	2004
Requests received	21	31
Access granted/part granted	15	1
Request refused or records restricted under section 46(1)(b)		
Freedom of Information Act, 1997	2	6
Requests handled outside the Freedom of Information Act, 1997 or withdrawn	3	24
Requests transferred	1	0

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

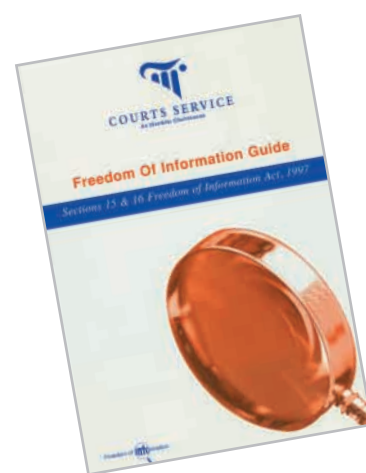
The Service remains committed to the full implementation of the Freedom of Information Acts and continues to maintain a high standard of decision making in responding to all requests for information. During the year deciding officers and appeals officers continued to attend on going training to enable them maintain that high standard.

Many of the records held by the Service are available outside of the Freedom of Information Acts, and for this reason the number of formal requests continues to decrease. However the Freedom of Information Officer continued to receive and deal with a large number of queries by telephone, e-mail and post relating to the courts and court records.

The Freedom of Information Officer continues to participate in the Public Service Users Network Group (PSUN), a group of Freedom of Information Officers in public service bodies who exchange information in relation to requests

made under the Freedom of Information Acts.

In addition the Freedom of Information Officer dealt with 75 written requests outside the Freedom of Information Act and approximately 50 requests by e-mail and telephone.



Mandate 4

Provide, manage and maintain court buildings

The major programme to refurbish and restore the court buildings of Ireland continued at pace during the year. In excess of €150 million has been spent since the establishment of the Service on the construction of new and the refurbishment of existing court buildings nationwide. The emphasis on county towns where the majority of court business is conducted continued in 2005 with the commencement of the restoration of courthouses in Longford, Nenagh and Tullamore. The Service continued to collaborate with other agencies to promote the use of court buildings for wider community use as demonstrated by the facility completed during the year in Lismore.

The Building Committee continued to oversee the implementation of the Capital Building Programme, not least in planning for the future. The Committee commenced a review of the seven year building programme which will be completed by the end of 2006. With the refurbishment of buildings in county towns almost complete the review will concentrate on the refurbishment of the remaining courthouses and identification of locations where new courthouses are required. Examples of such locations include

Blanchardstown, North Kildare, Swords and Tallaght – areas that have experienced population increases in recent years. The review will prioritise buildings for refurbishment or construction based on specific criteria including number of court sittings, annual caseload and location of court offices.

Consultation with a broad range of court users continued for all new and refurbishment projects. A standard design brief was finalised in 2005 to ensure that all new and refurbished court buildings have the appropriate facilities in terms of accommodation and technology to meet future needs. This design brief which will be implemented in 2006 will ensure that all new projects provide for modern and appropriate accommodation to meet the needs of the judiciary, staff and all other court users. A mock up of a courtroom was set up to assist in identifying the optimum courtroom layout.

PROGRESSING THE CAPITAL BUILDING PROGRAMME

Projects completed in 2005:

- Work was completed on a new courthouse in Ballyshannon
- A joint project with Waterford County Council to provide modern court facilities combined with a theatre was completed in Lismore
- Improvement works were completed on the courthouse in Clifden
- Refurbishment works were carried out at Dún Laoghaire courthouse
- Refurbishment works were carried out at Dunshaughlin courthouse
- Refurbishment works were carried out at Strokestown courthouse

Additional facilities provided in 2005:

- The Service procured a court facility in Drogheda pending the provision of a new court facility as part of the public private partnership initiative referred to on page XX

Projects in progress in 2005:

- Major refurbishment of courthouse in Nenagh, which will be completed in March 2006
- Construction of a new courthouse in Bray, which will be completed in April 2006
- Major refurbishment and extension of the courthouse in Longford town which will be completed in May 2006
- Major refurbishment of the courthouse in Tullamore, which will be completed in October 2006
- A joint project with Mayo County Council to accommodate modern court facilities, a library and

civic offices, an arts centre and theatre in Belmullet which will be completed in October 2006

- A new courthouse in Blanchardstown which will be completed in early 2007.
- Refurbishment of Tallaght courthouse damaged in an arson attack which will be completed in April 2006.
- A joint development with Cork County Council to provide modern court facilities in the existing courthouse in Fermoy and to provide new civic offices at the rear of the courthouse is due for completion by April 2007.

Projects to commence construction in 2006:

- Kilkenny
- Monaghan
- Ardee
- Thurles

At the planning stage:

- Mullingar
- Wexford
- Tralee
- Wicklow
- Killarney
- Boyle
- Manorhamilton
- Swinford
- Kilmallock
- Youghal

SECURITY***Four Courts***

Security pavilions with scanning equipment formed part of a range of new security measures introduced in the Four Courts complex during the year. The pavilions together with restrictions on vehicular access are designed to ensure improved safety and security for all who use the complex.



Letterkenny, Cork District Court and Limerick.

Other buildings

The Service will commence reviews of security arrangements in other court venues in conjunction with An Garda Síochána in 2006.

PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Criminal Court Complex

The new Criminal Courts Complex will be a state of the art criminal justice facility suited to the administration of criminal justice in twenty first century Ireland. It will comprise 22 new courtrooms with modern facilities for all court users including the public, jurors, victims, witnesses and professionals. The building will accommodate all central Dublin criminal business in one location. It will overcome the current security, service delivery and logistical problems of managing criminal trials in a number of locations within or adjacent to the Four Courts complex. This project will be delivered by way of a Public

Private Partnership.

Ten expressions of interest were received from consortia to deliver the project. Three consortia were short listed and detailed tender documentation was dispatched to them at the end of September 2005. Consultation and clarification meetings were held with each of the three tenderers during December. Tenders are to be submitted by early February 2006. It is anticipated that a preferred tenderer will be appointed by the end of April 2006. Construction of the complex is expected to begin during the second half of 2006.

Additional Public Private Partnership projects

During 2005 work commenced on the preparation of business cases of an additional bundle of courts projects to be delivered by way of a Public Private Partnership. Venues under consideration include Drogheda, Swords, Tallaght, North Kildare,

AWARDS FOR REFURBISHED PROJECTS

Ennis

The refurbishment of Ennis courthouse was acknowledged in an award from Clare County Council for 'Best Conservation Project' as part of its Clare Design and Conservation Awards. The award scheme, the first by a local authority in Ireland, seeks to foster and reward excellence in the built environment and raise public awareness of good design and conservation. The jury for the awards complimented the work carried out noting that it had been done "without any significant compromise of the building fabric".

Castlebar - art comes to the courthouse

The installation of a specially commissioned piece of art in Castlebar courthouse during the year emphasised that the courthouses of Ireland are more than just the backdrop to legal arguments and lengthy trials. The tress on Castlebar Mall provided the inspiration for the 'Witness Tree', a sculptural model in white marble, which according to the artist are "recurring background stalwarts through the different generations and folklore of the town". The 'Witness Tree' was commissioned by Mayo County Council on behalf of the Service under the per cent for art scheme.

Tubbercurry

In areas where the courts sit infrequently the Service continues to pursue a policy of joining with other organisations and agencies to develop facilities for wider community use. This policy was rewarded in 2005 when the Tubbercurry Library and Civic Centre was highly commended in the 'Heart of the Community' section of the Public Library Awards 2005. The awards recognise the highest level of new and refurbished library development across the UK and Ireland.



MAINTAINING COURT BUILDINGS

The responsibility of the Service for the provision of court buildings is not confined to the refurbishment of buildings and does not end with the completion of capital or refurbished building projects. The maintenance of buildings is a major element of the Capital Building programme. During 2005 a comprehensive maintenance programme continued in Dublin and around the country.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

The Service continued to give a high priority to health and safety issues. These relate both to the physical environment in which court business is conducted and the well being of judges, staff and all who use the courts. Following the enactment of the Safety Health & Welfare at Work Act, 2005 the Service commenced a review of its health and safety policy. Radon gas measurements were carried out and results at year end indicated no problems in any location.

Selected members of staff will be trained in various health and safety procedures including the

provision of first aid to persons who become ill or suffer injury. This initiative will also include the installation of defibrillators in the Four Courts and other larger venues in Dublin and around the country.

Mandate 5

Provide facilities for users of the courts

COURT BUILDINGS AND TECHNOLOGY

The refurbishment programme for court buildings continued to include the provision of modern information technology facilities. The facilities provided are determined by a number of factors including user demand which is identified as part of the 'consultation with users' process (referred to on *page 39*) and the level of business conducted in the building.

Cork Courthouse

In February 2005 the refurbished courthouse at Washington Street, Cork was formally re-opened. As part of the refurbishment extensive information technology systems were installed including the following:

- a full technology courtroom enabling the electronic display of evidence in various formats within the courthouse
- two video courtrooms providing facilities for the taking of evidence by video conferencing link together with the facility to display video evidence within the courtroom

- a public information display system throughout the courthouse
- the capability within the courthouse for legal practitioners and the public in general to access the internet and their own email systems using wireless technology.

The courthouse in Washington Street is the most technologically advanced courthouse in the country.

FACILITIES FOR FAMILY LAW

The improvements in family law sitting days (referred to on *page 39*) were complemented by improvements in the physical environment in which family law cases are dealt with. The facilities in the High Court in Dublin were upgraded and refurbished to include an improved waiting area and better consultation facilities for litigants and their advisers.

Dedicated family law courts and associated facilities including consultation rooms have been included in all major refurbishments and new buildings.

FACILITIES FOR ACCUSED PERSONS

By improving facilities for the movement of accused persons within court buildings the Service can accommodate the needs of such persons while at the same time separate them from other court users. Examples of improvements in this area in 2005 included: the provision of integrated access from the holding cells in Dublin's Chancery Place courthouse to the Four Courts main building and the upgrading and refurbishing of holding cell accommodation in the Four Courts.

FACILITIES FOR VICTIMS

Arrangements were put in place during the year to provide reserved seating for the families of victims and defendants in homicides cases in the Circuit and Central Criminal Courts.

PROVIDING FACILITIES FOR DISABLED COURT USERS

Through the Capital Building Programme the Service continues to ensure that all persons can physically access all courthouses and offices. Refurbished court buildings provide facilities including barrier free access, ramps, toilets and induction loops for those with hearing difficulties. Lifts are provided either externally or internally where required to give access to courtrooms and other areas such as jury boxes and witness boxes. Public toilet facilities including wheelchair accessible toilets are available in 48 court buildings which have been refurbished or constructed to date. While public toilets are generally available in all of the other buildings, most of these buildings require substantial refurbishment and wheelchair accessible toilets will be provided as part of this refurbishment work. The Service expects that all courthouses will have modern public toilet facilities including wheelchair accessible toilets by 2010.

During the year the Service concluded an audit of disabled facilities at the Four Courts



complex in Dublin. By year end a programme had been initiated throughout the complex to improve access.

Signage continues to be upgraded in all courthouses and offices as part of the refurbishment programme. The Service provides signage accessible to all including signage in Braille in a format approved by the National Council for the Blind of Ireland.

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

Portlaoise
Buncrana
Baltinglass
Templemore
Mallow
Athy
Cloverhill
Trim
Carlow
Carrickmacross
Westport

Limerick Circuit Court
Arva
Dundalk
Borrisokane
Sligo
Navan
Kilrush
Tubbercurry
Castlerea Remand Court
Smithfield Family Law
Roscrea
Doire an Fhéich
Loughrea
Listowel
Portarlinton
Rathdowney
Commercial Court
Chancery Place, Four Courts
East Wing, Four Courts
Ennis
Castlebar
Cork Circuit Court
Clifden
Ballyshannon
Lismore

Chapter Four

Our Staff

Our Staff

Developing a learning culture is the key which unlocks the potential to meet the challenges we face in a changing and dynamic society which has become more demanding of the providers of public services. In doing this, we have set ourselves the task of facilitating the creation of an organisation which is efficient and effective as well as flexible at every level.

CEO P.J. Fitzpatrick

BUILDING A LEARNING ORGANISATION

The challenge for the Service is to deliver a speedy, accessible and efficient service at minimum cost to all users while at the same time maintaining public trust and confidence. Creating a well motivated, knowledgeable and flexible workforce continues to be critical for our success. A key enabling factor is the creation of a culture which supports both our mission and strategy.

Creating a learning culture requires a shift away from the traditional approach to the development of people within organisations. The ownership of the development of a learning organisation is the responsibility of all managers and not just the training department. A key ingredient is the ability to share knowledge, experiences and learning. In a learning organisation the ability of an organisation and its managers is not measured by what it knows but rather by how it learns. In such an environment management encourages, recognises and rewards with a high value placed on openness, integrity, creativity, innovation and a culture of staff or employee involvement.

There are a number of guiding principles which underpin the approach of the Service to the development of our staff:

- at all levels staff are encouraged to value learning and to develop themselves
- opportunities are provided to staff to enhance their knowledge and skills to assist them to meet the challenges of a changing work environment
- systems are developed to capture business knowledge and disseminate this throughout the organisation
- training and development has a business focus which assists the organisation achieve its mandates
- learning and knowledge management assists in meeting the challenges of a constantly changing work environment

The Service continued to support the development of a learning culture during 2005. This approach was the subject of a case study in best practice by the

National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCP). The case study was part of a project, supported by FÁS, to identify and promote effective learning in public and private sector organisations. The objective of the project was to establish insights into how organisations learn, how they use learning to improve their processes to meet challenging business needs and how organisations can achieve greater value from learning interventions. A critical element of the project was the establishment of a network to facilitate a new understanding and awareness of the potential of learning in the workplace. The NCP complimented the Service on the progress made in building a learning organisation.

SUPPORTING OUR STAFF

The Service continues to support an environment which guarantees dignity at work for all our staff. There are many factors involved in this including supporting managers and staff in the effective operation of offices, ensuring that performance is managed and developed in a structured and consistent fashion and rewarding creativity and initiative.



Code of conduct and behaviour

The Code, issued to all government departments was implemented for all staff in 2005.

Rewarding innovation

The Merit Pay Scheme was used in 2005 to reward innovation and flexibility. Staff and/or managers can nominate another member or a team for an award. Individuals and team awards are assessed by a sub committee of the Central Partnership Committee who submit recommendations to the Chief Executive Officer. Arrangements for a review of the merit pay scheme were agreed by the Central Partnership Committee in November 2005. The review will commence in early 2006.

Human Resources Helpdesk

The provision of a dedicated helpdesk to deal with queries relating to human resource issues continued to support our staff in a structured fashion. In 2005, the helpdesk dealt with some 2,500 queries on a range of issues including leave, work sharing and travel.

Retirement

In April 2005 the Department of Finance introduced a cost neutral early retirement scheme. This allowed staff aged 50 and over apply for early retirement with immediate payment of an actuarially reduced pension and lump sum.

Work/life balance

Over 200 work sharing applications were received during the year. By the end of 2005, 221 staff were availing of work sharing – 94 in Dublin and 127 in the regions. By the end of 2005, 32 staff were availing of term time arrangements – 9 in Dublin and 25 in the regions.

Conciliation and Arbitration

The Conciliation and Arbitration process continued to deal with many staff issues during the year. They included health and safety, teleworking, car parking, claims for upgrades, provision of allowances and facilities and issues associated with staffing, recruitment and training.



Stable Industrial Relations

The Service continues to enjoy a very constructive and productive working relationship with the staff trade unions. Through the combined use of the Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme and the partnership process a very positive industrial relations climate has been maintained.

Travel support

Travel passes continued to be arranged for staff in 2005. Staff can claim a refund from the Revenue Commissioners in respect of part of the cost of a travel pass in line with guidelines issued by the Department of Finance. The passes purchased for over 100 staff are valid for travel with Bus Éireann, LUAS, Dublin Bus and Iarnróid Éireann.

Assisting staff with disabilities

The Service continued to adopt a proactive approach to meet the needs of staff with a disability during the year. The enactment of the Disability Act, 2005 afforded an opportunity to reassess the many initiatives underway in this

area. The Service employs in excess of the 3% target set out in the Act for the employment of persons with disabilities. The necessary organisational and technical supports are in place to facilitate the employment of persons with a disability and to support existing employees who have disabilities. These supports include a Disability Officer, the provision of training tailored to the needs of staff with disability on an ongoing basis and the provision of suitable facilities and equipment. A Disability Awareness Training Programme was initiated during the year to increase awareness and understanding of the contribution that people with a disability make to our organisation.

Retired staff and judges

Retired staff and judges were welcomed back to meet former colleagues and enjoy refreshments and entertainment at social events in May and November.

Employee Assistance Officer

The appointment of an Employee Assistance Officer on a full time basis during the year allowed the Service offer a better quality and more proactive service to our staff. Prior to 2005 the service was only available on a shared basis.

STAFF TALENTS OUTSIDE THE WORKPLACE

The talents displayed by many of our staff in a variety of groups, organisations and associations outside the workplace continue to fuel a strong work ethic based on high standards and commitment to excellence when transferred to the work environment:

Educational achievements

Staff continued to display commendable enthusiasm in and about the furtherance of their education. Many engaged in courses outside of working hours across a wide range of academic fields. The European Community Driving Licence (ECDL) remained a popular choice with staff from all parts of the country completing courses. Certificate, diploma and degree courses in law (including employment law, management law and Irish law) management (including human resource management, business management and personnel management), accounting and Irish were among the wide range of third level courses pursued by staff during the year.



'Lunch & Learn'

A new initiative was commenced during the year aimed at using the lunch break to engage staff and judges in a sharing of information, expertise and experience on a wide range of topics. They include health and welfare topics, work related topics and other general interest topics. The monthly events also afford staff and judges an opportunity to meet on a regular and informal basis to learn something new or of interest to them.

Social events

Team building of another variety was evident from the many social activities enjoyed by staff during the year. These events some of which were organised by our social club and others which are organised at a more local level, provide an environment where staff can meet outside of work hours in a relaxed atmosphere. Many were organised for charity. Activities included race nights, quiz nights, summer barbeques, chess competitions, snooker competitions, golf outings,

themed nights and Christmas functions.

Our soccer team joined teams from Northern Ireland, England and Wales for the inaugural inter Courts Service football tournament hosted by the Northern Ireland Court Service in Belfast in May 2005. The tournament will take place in Dublin in 2006.



Speechcraft

Staff continued to improve their presentation skills by attending meetings of the 'Speechcraft' group. The group, which is modelled on the worldwide 'Toastmasters' concept, meets before the commencement of the working day with staff preparing and delivering speeches on a rota basis. Membership of the group had increased by the end of the year.



Choir

Our choir enjoyed another successful year with performances at a number of events including the reception for retired staff and judges in May and the Mass for the opening of the Legal Year in Dublin in October.

