

2001 – 2004

Customer Service Action Plan



DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, EQUALITY AND LAW REFORM
AN ROINN DLÍ AGUS CIRT, COMHIONANNAIS AGUS ATHCHÓIRITHE DLÍ

THIS BOOKLET IS FOR THE GUIDANCE OF THE STAFF OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, EQUALITY AND LAW REFORM
AND FOR THE INFORMATION OF MEMBERS OF THE
WIDER COMMUNITY THEY SERVE.

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CUSTOMER SERVICE ACTION PLAN

2001 – 2004

Introduction	2
Customer Service Mission Statement	4
Principal Functions of the Department	6
Customer Service Commitment	7
Valuing the Customer	9
Customer Service Consultation	12
Role of our Staff	15
Setting Standards	17
Service Delivery and Presentation	18
Dealing with Complaints	19
An Overview of our Customers	20
Services Provided by the Department	21
Offices and Agencies Associated With/ Supported by the Department	31
Important Contact Points/Phone Nos.	32



INTRODUCTION

by Tim Dalton, Secretary General, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

The Government commitment to the delivery of a quality customer service brought about the publication of the first Customer Action Plans by Government Departments and their associated bodies in 1997. In July 2000, the Government decided that Quality Customer Service should be further embedded as an integral part of public service administration. The decision included the requirements that Government Departments and their associated Offices should update, refine and publish Customer Action Plans for the period 2001 - 2004 by the first quarter of 2001 and should look to improve their plans in relation to Internal Customers, Equality/Diversity and Irish Language Equality.

In our desire to deliver a quality customer service we in the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform focused initially on the needs of our external customers. This approach was necessary to establish from the outset the overall context of quality customer service, which is to provide an excellent service to the public. Our staff are also of course customers of the Department and unless the needs of staff are properly addressed, an organisation cannot expect to provide its customers as a whole with an optimum level of service. Accordingly, during the second phase of quality customer service, greater emphasis will be placed on the needs of our staff. As part of the Performance Management initiative staff training needs in relation to delivery of a quality customer service will be identified and appropriate training will be provided.

Given our role, Equality/Diversity is a core value of our Department. Much has already been achieved in this area, in particular, the enactment by this Department of legislation to provide support and assistance to people who suffer various forms of discrimination. However, notwithstanding the law in this area, we believe that, as a matter of principle, we must make every effort to ensure that we are fair and impartial in all our dealings and that no person suffers any hurt or embarrassment as a result of their dealings with the Department.

Tá gach iarracht déanta ag an Roinn seo cuidiú le h-aon daoine is mian leo a gnó a dheanamh tríd an teanga gaeilge. I rith saol an Plean Gnímh do Chustaiméirí seo leanfaimid ar adhaigh agus deanfaimid gach iarracht chun seirbhís a chuir ar fáil tríd ár dteanga náisiúnta.

We have always endeavoured to accommodate people who wish to conduct their business with us through Irish. During the life of this Customer Action Plan efforts will continue to further develop our capacity to deliver a quality service through our native tongue.

Customer consultation is a key feature underlying current planning in the public service. The Government has placed great emphasis on the need to consult customers, both internal and external, as part of the service delivery development process.

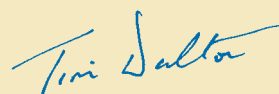
We are committed to engaging in consultation and will take particular care to ensure that groups representing the interests of people who are marginalised in society are included on an equal footing as part of the consultative process.

Individual customers will also be given the opportunity to comment on the quality of service that they have received. A comment card has already been posted to our website and hard copies will shortly be available at points of service delivery. A comprehensive and straightforward policy for dealing with complaints is outlined in this Customer Action Plan.

In our overall approach we will seek to deal with our customers in a manner that is prompt, fair and impartial. We will be sensitive to their needs, by having regard to their age, their capacity to understand rules and procedures which may be complex, to any disability they may have and to their feelings, their rights to privacy and reasonable convenience. We seek to be helpful, by simplifying procedures, forms and information.

The work of the Department has, to a greater or lesser degree, an impact on the lives of most people. Members of the public who come into personal contact with the Department, either directly or through its associated bodies, would in some cases prefer that the need for such contact had not arisen in the first place because quite often the contact arises because the person concerned is in some difficulty or other. It is important that, in our dealings with customers, we do our business in a way which does not disimprove their situation and in a way that is fair.

This Action Plan is challenging, but by continuing to work together in serving the public to the best of our ability, we will meet the challenge. The provision of high quality services to the general public – of whom each of us is a part – is something we see as a privilege and a duty and not as a burden.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tim Dalton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

MISSION STATEMENT

During the period 2001 – 2004, our commitment to Customer Service will be strengthened through

PARTNERSHIP

Management and Staff Representatives will continue to work together to ensure that the needs of the Department's customers are met through adequately supported customer care procedures. The Customer Action Plan 2001 – 2004 will be endorsed by the Department's Partnership Committee.

CONSULTATION WITH INTERNAL CUSTOMERS

The Staff Customer Liaison Panel will draw up procedures for internal consultation which will ensure that staff are given the opportunity to participate in developing procedures that enable the Department to continue to observe the highest standards of courtesy and professionalism when dealing with people who contact the Department.

CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL CUSTOMERS

The Customer Liaison Panel, established under the previous Customer Action Plan, will, during the life of this Plan, continue to meet on a regular basis, to provide a means for customers to play an active role in informing the Department as to the delivery of its services.

EQUALITY/DIVERSITY

The Department will ensure that staff are fully informed of the need to ensure that quality service delivery includes the groups covered by the equality legislation and those socially excluded due to socio-economic and geographic factors.

IRISH LANGUAGE

The Department will seek to ensure that persons who wish to conduct their business through the medium of Irish are facilitated.

THE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT INITIATIVE

The Department will continue to monitor the training needs of staff and to provide access to relevant courses in relation to customer service, as required.

THE CUSTOMER LIAISON OFFICER

The Customer Liaison Officer will report on developments under this Plan to the Staff Customer Liaison Panel.

STRATEGY STATEMENT

The initiatives outlined in this Action Plan will seek to complement and support the achievement by the times specified of the Performance Indicators contained in the Department's Strategy Statement.

ANNUAL REPORT

Developments under this Plan will be linked to the Performance Indicators contained in the Strategy Statement and will be included in the Department's Annual Report.

PRINCIPAL FUNCTIONS

OF THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, EQUALITY AND LAW REFORM

The Department's principal functions can be summarised as follows:

- The preservation of **Law and Order** and the **security of the State** through its support for the workings of the Courts, Prisons and Garda Síochána.
- Promoting and implementing **Law Reform**, both Criminal and Civil.
- Reforming **Family Law**.
- **Promoting and implementing equality** through the Equality Authority/Director of Investigations.
- Promoting **Equal Opportunities** on a wide range of grounds.
- Funding and providing for the administration of **Legal Aid Schemes** for both Criminal and Civil matters.
- Providing for proper registration of ownership of land (**Land Registry** and **Registry of Deeds**).
- Providing for **Film Censorship, Censorship of Publications, Criminal Injuries Compensation, Garda Síochána Complaints** and **Data Protection Law** through its associated Boards and Tribunals.
- Processing applications from non-nationals in relation to admission, residence, **Citizenship and Asylum**.
- Operation of **Central Authority for International Child Abductions**.
- Operation of **Central Authority for International Maintenance Recovery**.
- [The Department is also responsible for matters relating to Auctioneers and House Agents, certain regulatory aspects of the Betting Act, 1931, Coroners, Dance halls, Explosives, Firearms, Gaming and Lotteries, Intoxicating Liquor, Landlord and Tenant matters, Moneylending, Peace Commissioners and Standard Time].

CUSTOMER SERVICE

COMMITMENT

We in the **Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform** are committed to serving the community and the individual citizen through policies of

QUALITY SERVICE STANDARDS

Publish a statement that outlines the nature and quality of service which customers can expect and display it prominently at points of service delivery.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Ensure the rights to equal treatment established by equality legislation, and accommodate diversity, so as to contribute to equality for all of the Department's customers, including the groups covered by equality legislation (under the grounds of gender, marital status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller Community).

Identify and work to eliminate barriers to services for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and for those facing geographic barriers to services.

PHYSICAL ACCESS

Provide clean, accessible public offices that ensure privacy, comply with occupational and safety standards and, as part of this, facilitate access for people with disabilities and others with specific needs.

INFORMATION

Take a proactive approach in providing information that is easily accessible, timely and accurate, is available at all points of contact, and meets the requirements of people with specific needs.

Continue the drive for simplification of rules, regulations, forms, information leaflets and procedures.

Ensure that the potential offered by Information Technology is fully availed of and that the information available on public service websites follows the guidelines on web publication including accessibility.

TIMELINESS AND COURTESY

Deliver quality services with courtesy, sensitivity and the minimum of delay, fostering a climate of mutual respect between provider and customer.

Give contact names in all communications to ensure ease of ongoing transactions.

COMPLAINTS

Maintain an accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of dealing with complaints about the quality of service provided.

APPEALS

Similarly maintain a formalised, well publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of appeal/review for customers who are dissatisfied with decisions in relation to services provided by the Department.

CONSULTATION AND EVALUATION

Provide a structured approach to meaningful consultation with, and participation by, the customer in relation to the development, delivery and review of services. Ensure meaningful evaluation of service delivery.

CHOICE

Provide choice, where feasible, in service delivery, such as payment methods, location of contact points, opening hours and delivery times. Use available and emerging technologies to ensure maximum access and choice, and quality of delivery.

VALUING THE CUSTOMER

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, as the title implies, is entrusted with what is arguably the State's most important and basic functions, supporting a civilised society in this country by drafting and administering legislation and overseeing the operation of the law and order system and supporting, through legislation and the operations of its Associated Bodies, the marginalised in Irish society. In addition, through the Land Registry and the Registry of Deeds, the Department is the guarantor of registered property ownership in the State.

Such responsibility imposes an obligation that the Department would adopt a totally professional approach to providing an efficient and user friendly service to its customers. In this regard senior management will demonstrate, in an on-going and active manner, their own personal commitment to Customer Service, and help create among staff an awareness of the importance of the customer to the continued success of the organisation. The Department will continue, through the **Staff Customer Service Panel**, to identify and remedy any deficiencies in customer relations procedures.

Among our principal contacts are people seeking information, including representatives of the media. In order to meet the needs of people seeking information we will continue to develop a communications policy that is user friendly and will **give as much information as required, except in situations where legal, security or other such considerations do not allow**. If for any of these reasons we cannot provide information we will do our best to explain the nature of the impediment.

PRINCIPLES FOR DEALING WITH CUSTOMERS:

To help ensure a consistently high standard of service, we will continue to develop the following **principles for dealing with customers**:

Telephone

- A "Lo-Call" number is now available to allow members of the public to contact the Department from any part of the country. The number is 1890 221 227.
- All calls will be answered **promptly and courteously**. Staff will, save in very exceptional circumstances, identify themselves to the caller.
- Voice mail will be used with discretion - its purpose is to allow callers to leave a message outside normal office hours or if staff are unavoidably absent.
- If a staff member is **unable to deal with a telephone query**, he/she will attempt to **transfer the call to someone who can**. If this is not possible, arrangements will be made to have the call returned by the relevant member of staff.

Correspondence (including e-mail and fax messages)

We will reply to all letters courteously and as soon as possible and we will work towards achieving the following standards:

- **Acknowledging all correspondence**/e-mail/fax messages within 7 working days of receipt.
- **Issuing a substantive response** to all correspondence, requiring a detailed reply, within 20 working days of receipt of the information where the information required is available. We will, however, always receive some correspondence which will require consultation with offices/agencies associated with the Department and/or considerable research of a legal nature before a full response can be issued.
- **Issuing an interim response** if it appears likely that more than 20 working days will be required for a substantive response.
- Arrangements are in place to **ensure that correspondence does not go unanswered** when individual staff members are absent.
- Written communications issuing from the Department will normally **include the staff member's name**, Division and telephone extension, and e-mail address (where relevant).

- All correspondence will be written in **plain language**, using technical and official terms only where this is absolutely necessary.
- Requirements for **alternative formats of communication**, will be met to the greatest extent possible.

Note: These commitments cannot be taken to apply to correspondence received in organised "write-in" campaigns.

Personal Callers

- **Reception and waiting room facilities** will be maintained to acceptable standards of cleanliness and comfort.
- Existing buildings will be made as **accessible** as possible to people with disabilities and new/refurbished buildings will be designed on this basis.
- When personal callers arrive by prior appointment, an appropriate staff member will **greet them punctually**.
- **Private** office accommodation will be made available where callers may consult staff.
- The Department already facilitates staff in the purchase of **corporate wear** through deduction at source arrangements. We will take further steps in consultation with staff representatives to encourage and assist our staff in this respect.

Seirbhís trí Ghaeilge

- **Tabharfar freagra i nGaeilge ar chomhfreagras a gheofar i nGaeilge.**
- Déanfar **gach iarracht** freastal ar fhiafraithe teileafóin i nGaeilge agus freastal ar dhaoine a thagann i láthair ar mian leo a ngnó a dhéanamh trí Ghaeilge.

Service through Irish

- **Correspondence received in Irish will be answered in Irish.**
- **Every effort** will be made to accommodate telephone callers and personal callers who wish to conduct their business through Irish.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

CONSULTATION

It is vitally important that services are and remain relevant and responsive to the changing needs of the Department's customers. Consultation is the key to understanding the needs and expectations of individuals and groups – internal and external to the organisation.

The Customer Liaison Panel, established under the previous Customer Action Plan, has met on a regular basis. However, we recognise that much more needs to be done in this area, particularly, in relation to our internal customers.

This Department, in consultation with the Staff Customer Liaison Panel, will seek to further develop procedures for the creation of a more integrated approach to customer service, which will be guided by internal and external consultation to measure and, where necessary, improve on the quality of service we provide.

EXISTING CONSULTATION PROCEDURES

Formal Consultation

A Customer Liaison Panel was established under the 1997 Customer Action Plan to examine and comment on such issues as:

- range and quality of services
- accuracy of information supplied
- standard of presentation
- suitability of delivery methods
- any deficiencies/omissions
- proposed new services.

The Panel has met twice yearly and is chaired by Steve Magner, Assistant Secretary. It's membership is drawn from representative segments of the Department's "customer base". Heads of the Department's line divisions have been invited to attend meetings, as required, by the chairperson.

The Panel has become a **key mechanism for consultation between the Department and its contacts**. Senior management will continue to ensure that the views of the Panel are circulated throughout the organisation and incorporated into the overall planning process. They will also give regular feedback to the Panel as to how the Department has responded to its recommendations.

Internet

The Department has continued to develop our World Wide Web site (www.gov.ie/justice). Views and comments can be left by visitors to the site or mailed direct to pagemaster@justice.ie. In addition, a customer comment card has been included on the web site. Replies are directed to the Customer Liaison Officer who is responsible for follow-up action.

Representative Groups

The Department will continue to improve the existing liaison arrangements with key contact and representative groups – (for example, Victim Support, Women's Aid and the Media).

Informal Consultation

Staff

All staff will be encouraged to listen to customer comments, note any perceived deficiencies in service delivery, and provide feedback to the Customer Liaison Officer and to the appropriate Head of Division.

Information

The Department is committed to the provision and dissemination of information on its services and programmes. Published material and information leaflets in this regard will be made available from the Department's offices while reports, programme documents etc. are already available to buy from the Government Publications Sales Office. The Department's Internet web site already includes details of the Department, its role and services, its agencies and full text or extracts from its reports, leaflets and regular publications.

Further steps will be taken to expand the range of information services including:

- continuous review and **updating of publications** to ensure they are comprehensive, accurate, written in plain language and are available at all points of contact.

- For those services provided direct by the Department, a **detailed information leaflet**, setting out eligibility criteria and general information on the scheme or service **will be provided to every applicant**.

ROLE OF OUR STAFF

Delivering Better Government (1996) emphasised the importance of Departments/Offices addressing the needs of internal and external customers alike. In the first phase of the Quality Customer Service Initiative, the focus was on improving service delivery to customers external to the organisation. However, having begun to make significant progress in service delivery to external customers, it is now imperative that this Customer Action Plan also address in a meaningful way the needs of internal customers, i.e. Staff.

The Department considers that the needs of internal customers must be met with similar standards of timeliness, courtesy, consultation etc.

The Staff Customer Liaison Panel, which was established under the previous Customer Action Plan, and chaired by Noel Synnott, Principal Officer, will continue to meet on a quarterly basis to further develop the Department's customer consultation procedures, both internal and external, and also to further develop the evaluative criteria that will be used to measure customer care standards in the Department.

CUSTOMER SERVICE TRAINING

The Performance Management Initiative will be used to determine staff training needs in the area of customer care. Priority will be given to further developing the ethos of customer care that has been created amongst staff of the Department during the course of the previous Customer Action Plan, with the following priorities:

- to heighten awareness among all staff of the need for quality Customer Service and the diversity of customer needs
- to strengthen staff motivation by continued engagement in **meaningful consultation**
- to consider **new strategies** for enhanced service
- to **challenge values and assumptions** which may be inhibiting quality service

- to suggest **changes in organisational behaviour/practices** which would contribute to improved customer service
- to embed the three additional principles in the work of the Department

STAFF REWARD SCHEMES

Within the context of existing reward schemes (the Merit awards scheme and the Staff Suggestion scheme) **particular recognition will be given to instances of quality/improved Customer Service.**

SETTING STANDARDS

To ensure consistent delivery of high-quality service, the Department will establish **clear measurable standards by which performance can be assessed** on an on-going basis.

STANDARDS FOR DELIVERY OF A QUALITY SERVICE

The Department are committed to ensuring the provision of high-quality services consistently to all customers and clients across the entire range of its activities. Moreover, it is our policy to ensure, as far as is practicable, the safety, health and welfare of our employees and those who visit the Department.

The Department accepts that focusing on customer satisfaction, on quality, on timeliness and the cost of delivering the services involved will provide the basis on which to measure the standards of performance. The Customer Liaison Panel and the Staff Customer Service Panel will be consulted regarding the development, monitoring and review of these standards.

Our customer service approach will be based on the following principles:

- **clear quality standards;**
- **regular consultation** with customers on a structured basis;
- provision for **effective complaints and redress mechanisms.**

SERVICE DELIVERY AND PRESENTATION

Through the Customer and Staff Liaison Panels, the Department will explore with its principal contacts their particular service and delivery requirements, and will, as far as possible, commit the necessary resources to **match service delivery output to meet customer needs**.

KEY PRINCIPLES TO AN EXCELLENT SERVICE

- providing **timely and accurate information**
- **personal respect**
- **prompt attention**
- **efficiency**
- **clarity** of decision
- **issue resolution**/responsibility taking at point of contact
- **easy access to officials**
- good physical **facilities** for people with disabilities
- **courtesy**
- **professionalism**
- observing **confidentiality** where appropriate
- **fairness**
- a high **quality information service**
- **formal complaints procedures**
- **effective methods of redress**

Different individuals may have special requirements which arise from the nature of their particular relationship with the Department's service with which they are in contact. The Department will strive to recognise these particular needs and integrate them into a planned programme.

DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

As befits a customer-oriented organisation we will adopt a **positive attitude towards all comments/complaints**, treating them as an extension to the customer consultation process.

The scope for customer dissatisfaction will be reduced as far as possible by maintaining excellent standards, by well-focused staff training programmes and by **openly acknowledging the limitations as well as the benefits of available services**.

The Department will also put in place a formal system to ensure that complaints are dealt with in a consistent, open and fair manner.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

- The Department has nominated **Mr. David Hickey, Assistant Principal as its Customer Liaison Officer**, and he is the contact person to whom individuals will be directed if they have a complaint or grievance. The Customer Liaison Officer will also arrange to process complaints/comments which may be received, whether formally or informally, by other staff members.
- When a complaint is received by the Customer Liaison Officer a formal acknowledgement should normally be issued within 5 working days.
- The Customer Liaison Officer will ask the Head of the relevant Line Division to investigate the details of the complaint.
- A reply should normally be sent by the Customer Liaison Officer to the complainant within 20 working days.
- Where investigations show that a complaint has arisen from faulty processes or procedures, these will be remedied as quickly as possible.
- All complaints will be promptly investigated and brought to the attention of senior management.
- All complaints will be logged and analysed by the Customer Liaison Officer, and the results disseminated throughout the organisation.
- Information regarding the complaints procedure will be circulated widely to people and organisations in regular contact with the Department, and access to the **procedure will be kept as simple as possible**.

AN OVERVIEW OF OUR CUSTOMERS

Our customer base is very broad. In upholding law and order in the Country our main "customers" are the general public. In this respect most of our customers, the law abiding public, do not come into direct contact with the Department.

People who do come into contact with the Department would include:

- members of the Oireachtas (**approximately 2,000 Parliamentary Questions are dealt with each year alone**),
- the Judiciary,
- staff of the offices and Agencies associated with the Department,
- Gardaí,
- Prison Officers,
- retired staff,
- members of the legal professions,
- the media,
- crime victims,
- prisoners and their families,
- non-nationals applying for admission, residence, citizenship and asylum,
- staff representatives,
- other Government Departments and Offices,
- Health Boards and Local Authorities,
- students,
- commercial organisations,
- community and voluntary organisations and the social partners,
- Regional Assemblies,
- Childcare Service Providers,
- County Development Boards.

In addition, the Department has a customer base from its international contacts and obligations:

- E.U. Institutions,
- United Nations Institutions,
- Council of Europe,
- Hague Conference on Private International Law, and
- other International interest groups.

SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE DEPARTMENT

We provide a comprehensive range of services across the span of the Department's responsibilities. These services are "delivered" by the Divisions/Sections of the Department, each of which has a particular responsibility for its own area of operation. The Divisions concerned, and the services they manage, are set out on the following pages.

GARDA DIVISION

Garda (Administration) Division is responsible for administration of policy in areas such as Garda recruitment, training, discipline, promotion and deployment. The Division also deals with Garda estimates, transport, equipment, United Nations Service and community policing. The Division co-ordinates the processing of certain civil actions taken by members of the public or the Gardai against the Minister. The Division also monitors developments in relation to EU police co-operation generally.

Garda Planning Division is responsible for policy and implementation in relation to Garda computerisation and telecommunications, as well as the Garda Building and Stations Maintenance Programme(s). It provides support for the administration of the Garda Síochána Complaints Board, which is independent in the discharge of its functions.

Garda C&A Division is responsible for the administration of the Garda Síochána Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme. This involves dealing with claims relating to the pay and conditions of employment of members of the Garda Síochána, and the Administration of the Garda Compensation Acts.

Garda SMI Division is responsible for the development and implementation of the programme of change arising from the recommendations of the Report on the Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Garda Síochána. Garda SMI Division was established in 1998 to assist a Steering Group in developing and implementing the various recommendations contained in the Report.

CRIME DIVISION

Crime Division is responsible for policy matters relating to the enforcement of the criminal law and the development of crime prevention initiatives. It also provides Irish participation in the relevant EU, UN and Council of Europe working groups dealing with crime matters. It also deals with policy relating to explosives and firearms control, drugs and organised crime and similarly deals with policy issues on road traffic related matters. It is a focal point for significant Inter Departmental co-operation in relation to issues which impact on crime.

It participates in the multi-agency Initiatives on the National Drugs Strategy and the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund which are aimed at providing an effective and integrated response to the problems posed by drug misuse.

SECURITY AND NORTHERN IRELAND DIVISION

The Division has primary responsibility for policies and services which are directed towards the preservation of the security of the State, and Northern Ireland.

The Division is responsible for policy issues concerning the Offences against the State Acts, 1939 - 98. It also has responsibility for the operation of the Interception of Postal Packets and Telecommunications Messages (Regulation) Act, 1993 and for policy issues concerning the Act. Its other functions include the administration of clearance procedures for persons taking up certain Public Service employments and for persons seeking employment in childcare related areas; administrative and policy issues related to the Witness Security Programme; and the development of closer co-operation with the United Kingdom on East-West issues across a range of Departmental functions.

In the context of Northern Ireland, the Division has a role in operating the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement and in providing support to Irish Government participants in the institutions established by the Good Friday Agreement, in particular the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference and the British-Irish Council. The Division is also responsible for all matters relating to the implementation of the Decommissioning Act, 1997 and for matters arising from the report of the Victims' Commission.

MUTUAL ASSISTANCE AND EXTRADITION DIVISION

The Mutual Assistance and Extradition Division discharges the Department's designated role under International Conventions and Agreements in the criminal field

in regard to the processing of incoming and outgoing requests for mutual legal assistance/judicial co-operation. The Division manages and co-ordinates the process in co-operation with other agencies with responsibilities in this area. The Division also participates in initiatives at international level to extend the scope of mutual assistance requests and to facilitate the operation of the relevant Conventions or Agreements. In relation to extradition, the Division carries out the administrative functions associated with the Minister's role under the Extradition Acts. The Division also assists in developing the legislative and administrative framework within which mutual assistance and extradition requests are processed.

COURTS POLICY DIVISION

The role of **Courts Policy Division** is to co-ordinate and integrate the policy objectives of the Minister and the Government across the wider criminal justice system with the courts system. The Division also discharges ministerial functions in relation to the Courts, including all constitutional and legislative matters related to judicial appointments/salaries, the making of Rules of Court and the preparation of material in relation to the Minister's accountability to the Dáil on court issues.

The Division is also responsible for policy underlying Courts related legislation and the Department's liaison with the Courts Service regarding estimates, financial matters, staffing levels and court buildings. The Division also monitors the effectiveness of the Courts Service.

In addition, Courts Policy Division is responsible for the administration of the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme in the areas of policy, preparation of legislation, compilation of Estimates and accountability to the Dáil. It is also responsible for the administration of the Garda Station Legal Advice Scheme.

PRISONS DIVISION

The Prisons and Probation and Welfare Policy Division

This Division has responsibility for the development of policy and overseeing its implementation in relation to the management of offenders in custody in prisons and places of detention and those offenders serving community sanctions under the supervision of the Probation and Welfare Service.

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP DIVISION

Immigration and Citizenship Division is responsible for the development and implementation of policy in relation to the admission and residence of non-nationals in the State. It is responsible for the issue of visas, where appropriate, through the consular services of the Department of Foreign Affairs. It is responsible also for the processing of applications for certificates of naturalisation, and for other matters concerned with the acquisition of citizenship. Reported non-compliance with the law regarding the admission and residence of non-nationals, is one of the matters dealt with in this Division – in co-operation with the Garda Síochána, as appropriate.

ASYLUM POLICY DIVISION

Asylum Policy Division is responsible, inter alia, for the development and implementation of policy (both domestic and Ireland's input at EU/International levels) in relation to asylum seekers.

The Ministerial Decisions Unit (MDU) is responsible for making a decision on behalf of the Minister on each asylum application based on the recommendation of the Refugee Applications Commissioner or the decision of the Refugee Appeals Tribunal. The Ministerial Decisions Unit (MDU) is also responsible for dealing with judicial reviews of Ministerial decisions relating to asylum applications.

INTERNATIONAL POLICY DIVISION

International Policy Division has the responsibility for the co-ordination and formulation of policy on EU matters relating to police and judicial co-operation and asylum and immigration in co-operation with line Divisions in the Department. The Division is responsible for ensuring the representation of that policy in meetings at all levels of the EU up to and including the European Council (Heads of State). This task involves liaison with the European Institutions, with line divisions of the Department on multi-disciplinary or horizontal issues, with other Government Departments on cross-pillar issues and with other national bodies.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES CHILDCARE SECTION

The Equal Opportunities Childcare Section is responsible for developing childcare provision and implementation of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme through Exchequer funding and funding provided from the National Development

Plan, 2000 to 2006. The Section works to increase the quantity and quality of child care services, both in the community and private sectors, as well as developing a co-ordinated approach to childcare provision at local and national level over the course of the National Development Plan.

The Plan enables the Department to provide for the further development and expansion of childcare facilities to address the needs of men and women in reconciling their childcare needs with their participation in employment, training and education.

Enquiries to the Section can be made by way of a dedicated lo-call line as well as a dedicated e-mail address: Childcare_Mail@justice.ie

The customer base of the Section includes the social partners, childcare service providers, national agencies, both statutory and voluntary, working in the area of childcare, parents combining work and family responsibilities, employers and employees, the EU and the Regional Assemblies.

EQUALITY DIVISION

Equality Division is responsible for promoting, monitoring and implementing the right to equal treatment and the accommodation of diversity in society, in particular, having regard to gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community. The Division aims to bring about a more equal society, by outlawing discrimination and by facilitating equality of opportunity, especially for certain groups that have experienced disadvantage, particularly in the areas of employment, decision making, access to goods, facilities and services and family friendly policies. It also does this by supporting the Equality Authority and the Office of Director of Equality Investigations, which were set up under equality legislation in October, 1999. The Equality Division also liaise with the National Disability Authority to promote an equal society. The Equality Division provides funding to the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism.

A number of mechanisms are employed by the Equality Division to advance equality of opportunity including legislation, infrastructural development, initiatives and positive action measures for equality, monitoring committees operating at inter-departmental, inter-agency and partnership level and through EU and other international fora. For example, a programme of initiatives to facilitate equality for women under the National Development Plan is ongoing.

The customer base of the Division includes employees, women, people with disabilities, the Traveller community, parents combining work and family responsibilities, and other groups specified in the equality legislation, as well as the social partners, employers, providers of goods and services, the Houses of the Oireachtas, Government Departments, State agencies and national and international agencies working in the area of equal opportunities. Formalised arrangements for consultation with representative groups in the development and implementation of equality policy are in place.

LAW REFORM

The Law Reform Divisions have the function of preparing laws in the following general areas:

- **criminal law**
- **civil law** in so far as it relates to the functions of the Department (and is not dealt with by any other Department)
- **various other branches of the law** including the law relating to the Courts, the Gardaí, Prisons, the transfer of prisoners, the legal profession, immigration and citizenship, data protection, human rights issues, extradition, war crimes, landlord and tenant, intoxicating liquor, coroners, auctioneering, gaming and lotteries, censorship
- **conversion into Irish law** of European Union and other international conventions and instruments in both civil and criminal areas relevant to the Department and the negotiations pertaining thereto.

The Civil Law Reform Division also has responsibility for the Central Authorities on International Child Abductions and Foreign Maintenance Recovery.

PERSONNEL DIVISION

Personnel Division is responsible for all aspects of personnel management and the implementation of Civil Service personnel policy in the Department. It has overall responsibility for staff in the Department's Headquarters and associated offices, the Finance Division in Killarney, the Probation & Welfare Service, Civilian clerical staff in Garda stations/offices and staff in the Land Registry/Registry of Deeds.

Personnel Division also provides for the training needs of staff and administers the

Civil Service Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme in relation to Departmental matters. The **Employee Assistance Service** provides a confidential support service for all staff in the Department.

FINANCE DIVISION

Finance Division in Killarney is responsible for providing financial services for the Department and its associated offices, An Garda Síochána, the Irish Prison Service, the Courts Service and the Land Registry and Registry of Deeds. The services provided include, payment of salaries, allowances and certain pension payments, payment for goods, services and expenses, co-ordination of the annual expenditure estimates and the annual appropriation accounts. Under the Government-approved Shared Services Centre initiative Killarney has commenced a process to implement improved financial management systems and to establish Service Level Agreements with its client organisations to facilitate the delivery of a quality service.

INTERNAL AUDIT UNIT

The purpose of the **Internal Audit Unit** is to ensure that systems of internal control exist to enable the Department achieve its objectives at maximum economy and efficiency. This unit also covers the audit function in relation to the Courts and Prisons and it is intended that this situation will continue on the establishment of the new Courts and Prisons Agencies.

CORPORATE SERVICES' DIVISION

Corporate Services' Division provides the support services to ensure that the Department and its associated offices operate as efficiently and effectively as possible. In so doing, the Division is responsible for procurement of non-IT. equipment and stationery, provision and maintenance of accommodation, telecommunications etc. for the Headquarters of the Department and some of the associated offices which do not have a local purchasing office of their own. The Division is also responsible for Fire Safety and Health and Safety issues and for the provision of file registry, information resources and messenger services for the Department. The Division also organises the official travel requirements for the Department's staff, including local taxi accounts and makes any arrangements necessary in relation to the visit of Foreign dignitaries or delegations. The Division acts as a central liaison point between the Department and other organisations such as the National Archives and the Office of the Ombudsman.

Corporate Services' Division administers the Minister's and Department's functions and acts as a liaison in relation to the various offices associated with the Department such as the Land Registry and Registry of Deeds, the Office of the Film Censor, the Office of the Censorship of Publications Board, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal, the Data Protection Commissioner's Office, the Legal Aid Board (Civil Legal Aid), the Forensic Science Laboratory and the State Pathology Office.

The Division also co-ordinates the Department's responses to Government memoranda, replies to Parliamentary Questions and to representations and/or correspondence where two or more line Divisions of the Department are involved.

In addition, Corporate Services' Division is responsible for administering the functions of the Minister and the Department contained in a wide range of legislation such as the Betting Act, 1931 (issue of Certificates of Personal Fitness to non-resident Bookmakers), Gaming and Lotteries Act, 1956, the Coroners Act, 1962, the Deeds of Bravery Act, 1947, the Auctioneers and House Agents Acts, 1947-1973 and public order aspects of the Intoxicating Liquor Acts.

The Division also deals with complaints against Solicitors and with the issue of Violence against Women and provides the Secretariat to the National Steering Committee on Violence against Women.

IT DIVISION

I.T. Division is responsible for providing and supporting Information Technology to the other Divisions/Sections of the Department and to the Prisons and associated agencies, with the exception of the Garda Síochána, the Courts Service and the Land Registry/Registry of Deeds.

The Division also has a co-ordination role in progressing e-Government and integration initiatives across all the Agencies/Offices associated with the Department in line with REACH.

The Department recognises that adoption of e-Government best practices will play a central role in improving existing customer services.

PRESS AND INFORMATION OFFICE

Press Office

The Press Office is responsible for all media matters relating to the offices of the

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

Freedom of Information

The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act gives persons the right to access records held by Government Departments and certain public bodies. The following records held by Government Departments or certain public bodies may be requested:

- Any records relating to you personally, whenever created
- All other records created after 21 April, 1998

A 'record' can be a paper document, information held on computer, printouts, maps, plans, microfilm, microfiche, audio-visual material, etc.

Freedom of Information requests, for records held by this Department, should be made in writing to:

Freedom of Information Officer,
Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform,
72/76, St. Stephen's Green,
Dublin 2

stating that the request is made under the Freedom of Information Act **and clearly identifying the records** to which access is being sought.

ORGANISATION DEVELOPMENT UNIT

Organisation Development Unit plays a key role in the development and implementation of the modernisation programme as outlined in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF). The aim of this programme is to improve resource management, organisational responsiveness and service delivery. This work builds and develops on previous initiatives undertaken within the strategic management approach and the extensive programme of organisation change in place in the department since 1997. Key aspects of the modernisation programme for which ODU is responsible – the development of the strategic framework in the Department, the management and implementation of Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) and the operation of the Justice and Equality Sector Steering Group.

Two of the initiatives in which ODU is involved are relevant to the issue of customer service. Both are new developments/initiatives and provide services not previously in place.

Justice and Equality Sector:

A management forum for the Justice and Equality Sector, representing all agencies across the sector was established in September, 2000. The forum provides both a mechanism to advance management and organisation initiatives across the sector as a whole to meet PPF commitments and also enhances the overall coherence of policy planning and implementation across the sector.

This is particularly relevant in terms of quality customer service as the Department is directly supplying a support service to its agencies to assist in meeting modernisation requirements geared to improving resource management, organisational responsiveness and service delivery.

Performance Management and Development System (PMDS):

Training in PMDS commenced in the Department in November, 2000. PMDS is a process which enables job-holders to be clear about what their job is and what is expected of them and provides a means to manage an individual's work performance, career and development needs. This process provides a framework within which individual and organisation performance can be improved and service delivery is enhanced.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

Project Development Division is responsible for the updating and development of policy in relation to specific policy areas. These include the conversion of the Land Registry/Registry of Deeds to commercial semi-State status, illegal and harmful use of the Internet, victim support services, updating the Coroner Service and the review of censorship legislation.

OFFICES AND AGENCIES ASSOCIATED WITH/SUPPORTED BY THE DEPARTMENT

The standards set out in the previous pages apply to all the Department's services and can be expected by all who contact us. There are also a number of Offices and Agencies associated with/supported by the Department and the following organisations are producing their own Customer Action Plan and setting delivery standards and targets for their own organisation.

The Courts Service**

Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal

Data Protection Commissioner's Office

Equality Authority

Film Censor's Office

Forensic Science Laboratory

An Garda Síochána

Garda Síochána Complaints Board

Land Registry/Registry of Deeds

Legal Aid Board/Refugee Legal Service

National Disability Authority

Office of the Censorship of Publications Board

Office of the Director of Equality Investigations**

The Prisons*

Probation and Welfare Service

Refugee Appeals Tribunal

Refugee Applications Commissioner

* A new Agency is being established for the Prison Services.

** Independent statutory agency.

IMPORTANT CONTACT POINTS/PHONE NUMBERS

Website: www.gov.ie/justice

Email: info@justice.ie

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 72-76 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2. (Minister and Secretariat - all Divisions) except	Lo-Call No.1890 221 227 (01) 602 8202
Department's Civil Law Reform and Equality Divisions, 43-49 Mespil Road, Dublin 4.	(01) 6670344 or (01) 602 8202
Department's Finance Division, Deerpark, Killarney, Co. Kerry.	(064) 70300
Central Authority for International Child Abductions, 43 Mespil Road, Dublin 4.	(01) 6670344
Central Authority for Foreign Maintenance Recovery, 43 Mespil Road, Dublin 4.	(01) 6670344
Central Authority for Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 72/76, St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2.	(01) 6028202 Fax: (01) 6028606 E-Mail mutual@justice.ie
The Courts Service, Phoenix Street North, Smithfield, Dublin 7.	(01) 8886000
Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal, 13 Lower Hatch Street, Dublin 2.	(01) 6610604
Data Protection Commissioner's Office, Block 4, Irish Life Centre, Dublin 1.	(01) 8748544
Equal Opportunities Childcare Section, 43-49, Mespil Road, Dublin 4.	1890 20 90 30
Equality Authority, 2, Clonmel Street, Dublin 2.	(01) 4173333
Four Courts, Dublin 7.	(01) 8886000
Garda Síochána (See Telephone Directory for your local station)	(01) 6660000
Film Censors Office, 16 Harcourt Terrace, Dublin 2.	(01) 6761985
Garda Síochána Complaints Board, Block 1, Irish Life Centre, Dublin 1.	(01) 8728666
Land Registry, Chancery Street, Dublin 7.	(01) 6707500
Legal Aid Board, St. Stephens Green House, Dublin 2	(01) 2400900

National Disability Authority, 25, Clyde Road, Dublin 4.	(01) 6080400
Office of the Censorship of Publications Board, 13 Lower Hatch Street, Dublin 2.	(01) 6610553
Office of the Director of Equality Investigations, 3, Clonmel Street, Dublin 2.	(01) 4173300
Office of the Refugee Appeals Tribunal, 6-7, Hanover Street, Dublin 2.	(01) 4748400
Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner, 79-83, Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2.	(01) 6028000
Probation & Welfare Service, Smithfield Chambers, Smithfield, Dublin 7.	(01) 8733722
Refugee Reception and Integration Agency, 94, St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2.	(01) 4183200
Registry of Deeds, Henrietta Street, Dublin 7.	(01) 6707500

NB A full listing of relevant numbers including individual Garda stations, Court Offices, Prisons and Places of Detention is in the current telephone directory.



DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, EQUALITY AND LAW REFORM
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