



# LEGAL AID BOARD

## Corporate Plan 2015 - 2017

### **Foreword by Chief Executive**

I am pleased to present this Corporate Plan for the period 2015 – 2017. While the Plan sets out a number of objectives, there are two that stand out for me in terms of their importance, indeed many of the others seek to support these two. The first is to reduce waiting times at our law centres. I do not want people with serious legal problems and who need the services of lawyers to be waiting long periods of time to get those services. The second is to integrate further, the Board's legal and family mediation services. I want to see those who come to the Board with a family problem, make really well informed choices about how best to seek to resolve the problem and to have good alternatives to a court process where that is appropriate. The Plan may be ambitious but I hope that with the support of staff and other stakeholders we will be able to achieve what we are setting out to do.

John McDaid  
Chief Executive

### **Purpose of Corporate Plan 2015 – 2017**

The purpose of this Plan is to:

- Outline the broad strategic direction for the Legal Aid Board over the period 2015 – 2017; and
- Identify the factors both internal and external to the organisation, and the key organisational priorities that need to be implemented, for the Board to fulfil its statutory mandate.



# LEGAL AID BOARD

## Our Mission, Vision and Values

### Mission

*Our Mission is to facilitate the effective resolution of civil disputes through the delivery of efficient and accessible legal aid and mediation services and to effectively manage and administer the State's criminal legal aid schemes.*

### Vision

*Our vision is to facilitate access to justice through providing for resolution of civil disputes in the most appropriate manner while keeping in mind the dignity of the person, the nature of the dispute and the impact of the dispute on the parties immediately involved and wider society and further to manage the provision of criminal legal aid in an efficient, effective and accountable manner*

## Our Mission, Vision and Values

### What we value

- High professional and ethical standards in the provision of all our services
- Having the client and access to justice as central to our services
- A focus on innovation in the delivery of services
- Responsiveness to an ever-changing legal and social environment
- Effective leadership at all levels
- Providing good value for money
- Transparency
- A culture which promotes a team ethic and respect for the human dignity of the client and the colleague
- Effective governance and accountability relationships and structures with the Department of Justice and Equality, Government and the public.



# LEGAL AID BOARD

## Drivers of Organisational Performance

### Internal drivers:

- Effective leadership at all levels
- An emphasis on an integrated approach to facilitating the resolution of problems experienced by those presenting to the Board
- A culture of professionalism and pride in the quality of service provided
- An organisational desire to assist in ensuring access to justice for the less well off in society
- All elements of legal aid and mediation now coming within the remit of the Board

### External drivers:

- Performance/Service Level Agreements with the Department of Justice and Equality
- Potential for technology to transform and support the delivery of services
- International developments
- Legislative changes and government decisions
- The general justice environment
- Societal change and ensuing demands

## Drivers of Organisational Performance

### Challenges

- Providing an effective and timely service in respect of both legal and mediation services;
- Managing the available resources, both financial and staffing, in a manner which supports the most effective delivery of service to include enabling the Board's staff to develop and fulfil their potential;
- Managing the expectations of stakeholders;
- Responding to the changing composition of the Board's client base;
- Developing the necessary IT infrastructure to support effective service delivery;
- In a dispersed organisation ensuring that staff utilise existing IT to the greatest and most consistent manner possible;
- Placing our focus on the best means of facilitating the early resolution of disputes whether through the legal route or the use of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms with an emphasis on the best outcome for the individual at least cost to the State;
- Making effective use of performance indicators in respect of all aspects of the Board's work;
- Managing the expansion of the Board's remit in such a manner that the cohesiveness of the organisation is not diminished; and
- Being able to respond to new areas of demand.



# LEGAL AID BOARD

## Development of Services 2015-17

- This plan will cover the following main areas:
  - Measures to ensure the efficient and effective delivery of legal aid and mediation services;
  - A focus on integrating family mediation and civil legal aid services to the greatest extent possible;
  - Working with the Department of Justice and Equality to finalise the transfer of responsibility for all elements of legal aid to the Board;
  - Working on a supporting culture to ensure the effective implementation of the initiatives in this Plan.
- **During the lifetime of this Corporate Plan, the Board will therefore build on initiatives already underway and develop new initiatives to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of services provided to include:**
  - Improving the timeliness of service delivery;
  - Ensuring the capacity of the organisation as appropriate in terms of the effective discharge of its remit;
  - Employing new technology to better manage risk and performance and improve the effectiveness of service delivery;
  - Developing more cost effective methods of service delivery, including the full exploitation of the potential to utilise non-legal means of resolving disputes;
  - Seeking to work collaboratively in relevant areas with the Department of Justice and Equality, and other organisations and key players; and
  - Developing the capacity to successfully integrate new areas of work into the organisation's operations.



# LEGAL AID BOARD

## Civil Legal Aid

- **Over the lifetime of this Plan the Board will:**

- Establish a greater transparency in relation to the operation of law centres and the delivery of services generally through, inter alia, publishing more information;
- Enhance the capacity of every staff member to perform their role more effectively;
- Work with staff to maximise the benefits obtainable from the Board's case management system and continue to focus on actual use of technology by staff to ensure that consistency, enhanced efficiency and metrics are generated;
- Improve and optimise the throughput of cases in the law centre network consistent with ensuring the delivery of a quality professional service to every client;
- Ensure that every eligible applicant gets an appointment with a solicitor within a period of six weeks;
- Introduce a more comprehensive requirement that applicants for private family law matters involving the welfare of a child are given information about family mediation and other non court based options to resolve any dispute;
- Introduce further schemes for the use of private solicitors to assist with service delivery including, particularly, public law cases involving the welfare of children;



# LEGAL AID BOARD

## Civil Legal Aid

- **Over the lifetime of this Plan the Board will: (cont'd)**
  - Review the Civil Legal Aid Act and the Civil Legal Aid Regulations with a view to developing proposals that ensure that the Board's resources are targeted at those most in need; such revision to include a more targeted approach to identifying those to whom State funded civil legal aid services should be available to;
  - The review of the Civil Legal Aid Regulations to include a review of the contributions regime for legal aid matters with a view to having a regime that is reflective of the type of case for which legal aid is sought;
  - Proactively engage with the Courts Service and key players to allow Board staff to increase their level of secure e-business and communication;
  - Proactively engage with the Department of Justice and Equality, the Courts Service, TUSLA and other organisations and key players in relevant areas, including the area of child care, with a view to seeking greater efficiencies and effectiveness in the administration of civil justice;
  - Develop and put in place a new website that is inter-active and more informative;
  - Introduce an on-line applications facility.



# LEGAL AID BOARD

## Family Mediation Services

- **Over the lifetime of this Plan the Board will:**
  - Ensure that a professional and high quality mediation service continues to be provided across all locations;
  - Ensure that clients seeking mediation are offered an appointment within two months of registration;
  - Increase the number of court-based mediation initiatives to encourage clients to try to resolve their family disputes through a non-adversarial route;
  - Establish a minimum of 10 additional mediation office / law centre referral initiatives around the country, encouraging mediation and expediting non-adversarial resolution in specific family law matters for the Board's clients;
  - Conduct an annual evaluation of the court-based and law centre initiatives;
  - Develop collaboration where possible between mediators and lawyers in order to progress cases effectively and appropriately;
  - Ensure a greater awareness of mediation across the law centre network;
  - Prioritise co-location of mediation and law centre offices as appropriate;
  - Further develop the training programme for trainee mediators to ensure sufficient professional, high quality mediators are available for mediation services;
  - Engage with and support the Department of Justice and Equality in the development of the proposed mediation legislation;



# LEGAL AID BOARD

## Criminal Legal Aid

- **Over the lifetime of this Plan, the Board will:**
  - Actively manage the process of assuming responsibility for the management and administration of the criminal legal aid schemes not yet within the Board's remit. This will include:
    - Taking responsibility for the District Court (Counsel) Scheme (yet to be transferred to the Board);
    - Supporting the Department of Justice and Equality in finalising the necessary legislation to transfer responsibility for the main criminal legal aid scheme to the Board;
    - Keeping all of the schemes within the Board's responsibility under review with the intention of continuous improvement in terms of efficiencies, effectiveness and governance structures;
    - Putting in place the processes and supports necessary to ensure the effective operation of these schemes. This will include working with the Department and the Courts Service to determine how better use may be made of information technology and, where possible, to develop an integrated and effective information technology infrastructure across all three bodies;
    - Developing and enhancing the Board's capacity to actively manage all of the criminal legal aid schemes; and
    - Placing a particular emphasis on the issue of risk in terms of accountability and probity.





# LEGAL AID BOARD

## Corporate Support Services

- **Over the lifetime of this Plan the Board will:**
- In the area of information technology:
  - Develop and put in place a new website to best international standards;
  - Develop and implement the most suitable ICT structure to support the proposed implementation of the single procedure in the asylum process;
  - Review the capacity / appropriateness of the Board for the digital delivery of services;
  - Develop and finalise the interface to become part of the EU Country of Origin Information portal; and
  - Conduct an external review of IT structures and resources.
- In the area of finance:
  - Together with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) ensure the smooth transfer of the Board's financial management function to the shared services structure; and
  - Engage with the Department of Justice and Equality and DPER to ensure appropriate financing is in place following the adjustment from grant-in-aid to grant funding.



# LEGAL AID BOARD



## Corporate Support Services

- In the area of human resources:
  - Build on and reflect the commitments contained in the Civil Service Renewal Plan relating to the role of the HR function and involving recruitment, promotion, mobility, performance management, staff engagement and motivation and the further professionalising of the function; and
  - Better equip staff to fulfil their existing and future roles to include: the continued development of the adaptive leadership programme for managers; further professionalising support areas (HR, IT, Legal and Corporate Services); further enhancing solicitors' skills in relation to ADR; enhancing IT capacity among all staff.
- In the area of the Board's property portfolio:
  - Ensure that properties acquired or retained maximise the potential for co-location of services both within the Board (for legal and family mediation services) and with external bodies such as the Courts Service.



# LEGAL AID BOARD

## Implementation and Monitoring of Progress

- Organisational priorities will be set out on a yearly basis and will be reviewed by the Board.
- Business plans for each area of the Board, identifying the more detailed elements of each main project reflected in this Plan will be developed, and will underpin monitoring progress with the implementation of the Plan.
- Progress will be monitored quarterly by the Senior Management Team by reference to the main priorities identified above. A quarterly progress report will be prepared for this purpose. The Board will receive and consider a report on progress on a twice yearly basis.
- Key deliverables will be incorporated into the Board's annual Service Level Agreements with the Department of Justice and Equality.