

Corporate Plan 2018 – 2020



Legal Aid Board

An Bord Um Chúnamh Dílíthiúil

Foreword by the Chairperson and Chief Executive

We are pleased to present this Corporate Plan for the period 2018 – 2020. The Board's role is about enabling access to justice. The term 'access to justice' is often used though not always defined. One definition says that access to justice is about the *“enhancement of an individual's ability to resolve the justiciable problems they may face, including through access to relevant services where these are needed in order to assist them in doing so”* and that it should involve the promotion of the early resolution of legal problems, effective access to formal mechanisms of dispute resolution, and social inclusion.

In developing this Corporate Plan the Board has had regard to this definition. The Plan identifies actions the aim of which is to enable persons eligible for services from the Board who have a civil legal problem or a family problem to get advice about the problem and have the problem resolved as quickly as possible.

One issue that the Plan seeks to address is to have those who are experiencing a family problem, use the court system as a last resort rather than as a default option. The reality for many of those experiencing or who have experienced family breakdown is that they continue to have some form of ongoing relationship with their ex partner on account of their children and the more that can be done to have issues arising on foot of a relationship breakdown addressed outside of a court process the better the outcomes are likely to be for all involved. For this reason there is a considerable focus in this Plan on the promotion of family mediation as an option that should often be meaningfully considered before court proceedings are taken.

One other issue identified in the Plan is the transfer of responsibility to the Board for the main criminal legal aid scheme. While the Board is working in tandem with the Department on aspects of criminal legal aid, the transfer is dependent on legislation being enacted. The Board supports the transfer and welcomes the coherence that the transfer will give to the legal aid system in its entirety. More detailed corporate objectives will need to await the enactment of the legislation.

Finally the Plan seeks to recognise that staff are the Board's most valuable asset. There are actions in the Plan that we hope will ensure that the Board is an employer of choice and that staff will be enabled to fulfil their potential for the benefit of the Board's clients.

Philip O'Leary
Chairperson

John McDaid
Chief Executive



Purpose of Corporate Plan 2018 – 2020

The purpose of this Plan is to identify and set out the Board’s Mission and Vision, the broad strategic goals to deliver on its Mission and its Vision, to set out the key actions that need to be fulfilled in order to deliver on its Mission / Vision / statutory mandate, and to identify its core Values.

Mission

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

Vision

Our vision is to provide access to justice by enabling the resolution of disputes and the vindication of people’s rights 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.

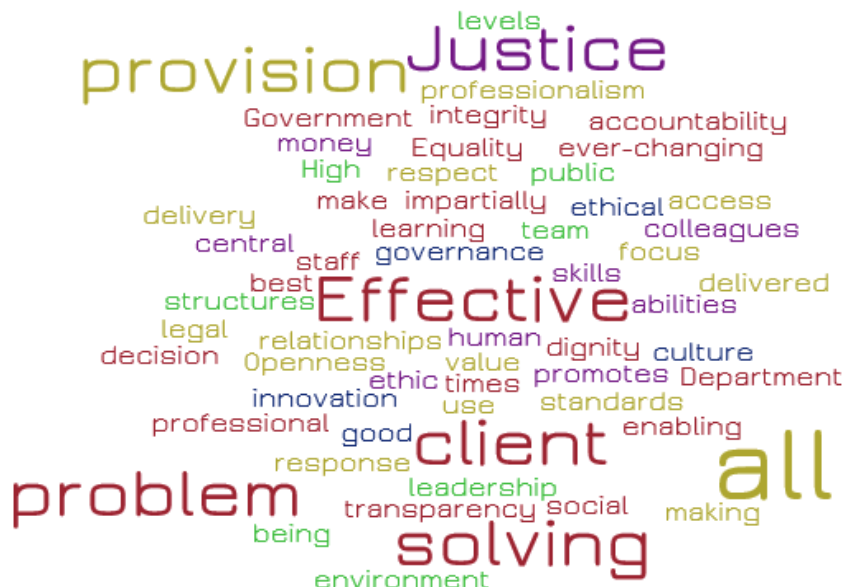


Our vision is reflected in a number of specific goals that we aim to achieve by 2020. These are:

- To provide a cohesive and integrated range of services including legal advice, mediation, and legal representation enables access to justice and family dispute resolution for persons of limited means;
- To ensure that all eligible applicants receive the service appropriate to their needs within a maximum period of three months;
- To ensure that our services are available and accessible to all those in society who need them, with a particular focus on marginalised groups and minorities;
- To become a workplace of choice for people of talent and to support a culture of excellence among all our employees at every level of the organisation;
- To be recognised as an organisation committed to excellence and learning in the areas of civil law and family mediation;
- To support our parent Department in legislative change relevant to our role and to effectively integrate new areas of work arising out of such change;
- To operate to the highest standards of governance as set out in legislation and Government policies.

WHAT WE VALUE

- ✓ The client, access to justice and problem solving being central to our decision making;
- ✓ High professional and ethical standards in the provision of all our services at all times delivered impartially and with professionalism and integrity;
- ✓ A focus on learning, innovation and problem solving in the delivery of services in response to an ever-changing legal and social environment;
- ✓ Effective leadership at all levels and enabling staff to make the best use of their abilities and skills;
- ✓ A culture that promotes a team ethic and respect for the human dignity of the client and that of colleagues;
- ✓ The provision of good value for money;
- ✓ Openness and transparency;
- ✓ Effective governance and accountability relationships and structures with the Department of Justice and Equality, Government and the public.



Specific Actions: Civil Legal Aid and Family Mediation

1. Over the lifetime of this Plan the Board will:

- Ensure that no client waits longer than three months to see a solicitor or a family mediator;
- Develop / improve the Board's on-line applications facility and the availability of information through its website and other forms of interactive technology;
- Improve the levels of management information available in relation to the work of the Board and in relation to the experience of the client, to include costing individual cases, costing services in specific areas of work, and establishing or refining value for money criteria with a view also to having a greater evidence basis when deciding on policy matters;
- Optimise the throughput of cases in the law centre network and the family mediation network consistent with ensuring the delivery of a quality professional service to every client;
- Develop a strategy for ensuring that the client has meaningful choices in terms of resolving family disputes, the strategy to have regard particularly to the provisions of the Mediation Act 2017;
- Take a more proactive approach to promoting the benefits of family mediation and ensuring a better understanding among the public of what mediation is;
- Noting that the Board has a number of family mediation related initiatives including mediator court attendance, develop a clear strategy for the use of the family mediation resources that are available to the Board;
- Complete a consideration of the merits or otherwise of introducing financial eligibility criteria and / or a contributions regime for family mediation cases;
- Put a case to the Minister for Justice and Equality to provide information sessions on family mediation in accordance with section 23 of the Mediation Act 2017;



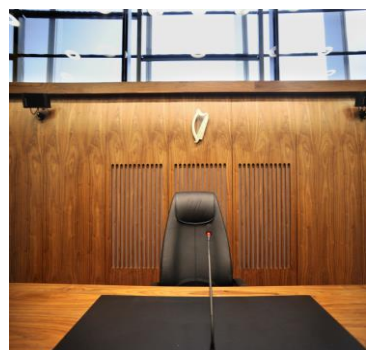
- Pursue the ongoing review of the Civil Legal Aid Regulations having particular regard to the financial eligibility and contributions criteria for legal services;
- Proactively engage with the Department of Justice and Equality, the Courts Service, Tusla and other organisations and key players in relevant areas, including the area of child care, with a view to seeking greater efficiencies and effectiveness in the administration of family justice particularly;
- Work with the Department of Justice and Equality and other bodies to complete the transfer of responsibility for the Mental Health Tribunal legal aid scheme to the Board;
- Anticipate the commencement of legal aid provisions in the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015;
- Review on an ongoing basis the Board's services on foot of the Abhaile Scheme and take steps to ensure the Scheme is efficient and effective from both the client and the State's perspective;
- Review the manner in which the Board delivers all of its services in order to ensure there is coherence from the client's perspective, the review to have regard to issues such as the possibility of a client receiving both family mediation and legal services and a client experiencing a cluster of problems e.g, housing and family breakdown, the review to have regard to clients' views;
- Review and enhance the quality assurance mechanisms the Board applies to both its legal services and its family mediation services;
- Examine and measure the outcomes for the Board's clients.



Specific Actions: Criminal Legal Aid

2. Over the lifetime of this Plan, the Board will:

- Support the Department of Justice and Equality in finalising the necessary legislation to transfer responsibility for the main criminal legal aid scheme to the Board;
- Prepare the necessary systems and structures to position the Board to fully take on the responsibility for the main Criminal Legal Aid Scheme and to introduce and implement the reforms required by the new legislation.
- Keep 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;
- Put 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;
- Place a particular emphasis on the issue of risk in terms of accountability and probity.



Specific Actions: Corporate Support Services



3. In the area of information technology, support service delivery by:

- Completing, with the Department of Justice and Equality, a due diligence exercise in contemplation of moving the Board's IT infrastructure to the Department;
- Roll out improved voice recognition / dictation support for service delivery offices;
- Examine the availability of Skype or other similar technologies as a means of conducting meetings with clients;
- Implement the recommendations contained in a 2017 risk management assessment undertaken by external reviewers in order to ensure, among other things, the security and confidentiality of client data;
- Maximise the benefits obtainable from the Board's IT systems by developing the systems to ensure they meet the business needs of the organisation and by focusing on staff making best use of available technology.



4. In the area of finance, to support the objective of providing its services efficiently:

- 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.



5. In the area of the Board's property portfolio, to support the objective of integrating the provision of civil legal aid and family mediation services:

- 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.

6. In the area of human resources, to support the development of staff:

- 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;
- Develop a strategy for talent acquisition and retention, including a defined graduate traineeship programme;
- Better equip staff to fulfil their existing and future roles to include: a further leadership programme for managers; further professionalising support areas (HR, IT, Legal and Corporate Services); further enhancing solicitors' skills in relation to non court based dispute resolution; and enhancing IT capacity among all staff;
- Identify specific actions that will enable staff to broaden their experience to include ensuring that solicitors obtain reasonable advocacy experience;
- Ensure there is greater internal mobility for staff where practical;
- Put in place a Workforce Plan with a view to ensuring clarity around the allocation of resources.

Drivers of Organisational Performance

- 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 openness, transparency, accountability, learning, professionalism and pride in the quality of service provided;
- An organisational desire to assist in ensuring equal access to justice for all;
- The availability of better technology to support the delivery of services;
- Legislative changes and government decisions;
- The general justice environment;
- Societal change;
- The changing data protection landscape.



Significant Challenges

- Providing an effective and timely service in the resolution of civil disputes;
- 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;
- Developing the necessary IT systems to support effective service delivery and ensuring their appropriate utilisation;
- Making maximum use of the information available to the Board while ensuring that the privacy rights of our clients continue to be maintained;
- 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 management information and 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 and the coherence of services to clients is enhanced rather than diminished;
- Being able to respond to new areas of demand.

Implementation and Monitoring of Progress

1. Organizational priorities will be set out on a yearly basis and will be reviewed by the Board.

2. 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.

Implementation and Monitoring of Progress

3. Progress will be monitored quarterly by the 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.

4. Key deliverables will be incorporated into the Board's annual Oversight and Service Level Agreements with the Department of Justice and Equality.