



**An Bord Um
Chúnammh Dlíthiúil**
Legal Aid Board

Providing access to justice since 1979

Strategy and Plan for the Provision of Family Mediation Services **2021- 2023**

Foreword by the Chairperson and Chief Executive



Mr Philip O'Leary
Chairperson



Mr John McDaid
Chief Executive

This Strategy and Plan for the provision of family mediation services for the period 2021 – 2023 is aligned with our overall Statement of Strategy 2021 – 2023. It draws on the high level objectives in that Statement of Strategy as a means of setting the direction for the provision of family mediation services for the next three years. This Strategy and Plan will be fundamental in bringing about an efficient and effective mediation service for the end user.

In developing this Strategy and Plan a considered consultation process was undertaken which was fundamental to the identification of strategic objectives, plans and key performance indicators for the next three years. The consultation process commenced with a situational analysis of family mediation services and identified a number of strategic issues to be considered. A number of consultation meetings were held which allowed interested colleagues across the organisation to offer views on the strategic direction of the service. Those views, along with potential legislative changes, current and anticipated future policy and the Board's overall Statement of Strategy 2021 - 2023 have informed this document. Our obligations regarding Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 are stated in our Statement of Strategy 2021 – 2023 and mirrored in this document.

We hope that the Strategy and Plan objectives will ensure the following for users of our service:



Users will meet persons trained in information giving on mediation and will be given relevant and timely information with regard to the options available to resolve their dispute.



Users will be facilitated with a speedier service in terms of waiting times to access the service and the average time taken to mediate a dispute to resolution.



Users who are not within easy reach of our offices will be offered the service via technological solutions.



Users who are obtaining legal services from the Board will be given access to family mediation services without having to wait.



Business cases will be made to the Department of Justice expand in line with demand for the service as an effective option to resolve family disputes.

Mr Philip O'Leary
Chairperson

Mr John McDaid
Chief Executive

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Purpose

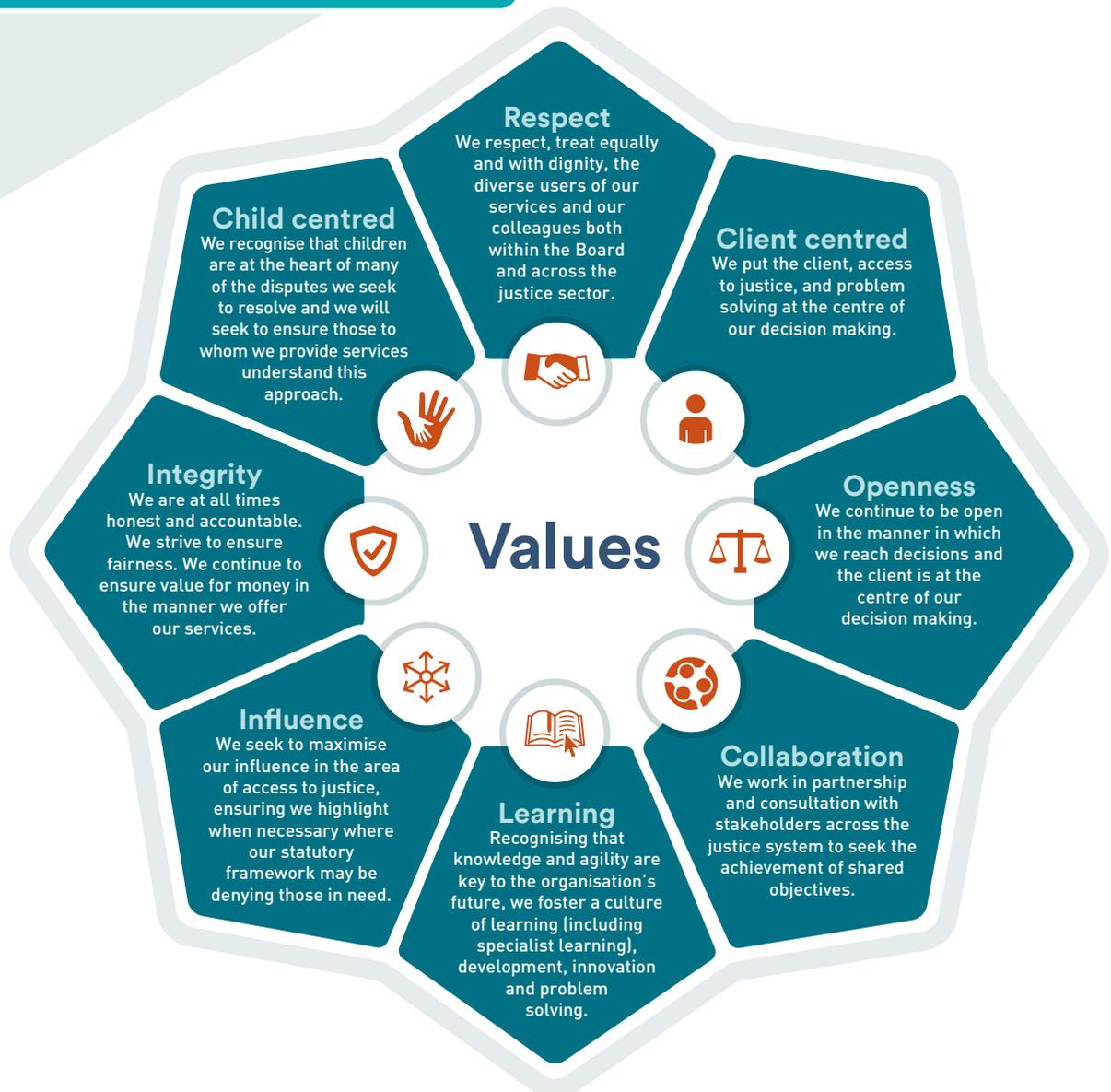
We are an independent statutory body responsible for the provision of civil legal aid and advice, family mediation and vulnerable witness related services and for the administration of a number of ad hoc legal aid schemes. We are a key strategic partner and a civil agency of the Department of Justice.

Mission

Our Mission is to deliver timely, effective, inclusive and just resolution of family and civil disputes to those most in need of our assistance, through high quality legal representation and advice and / or mediation and to manage other aspects of legal aid which have been entrusted to us.

Vision

We will be instrumental in ensuring access to justice to those most in need, through a highly motivated and trained workforce, external providers and working with stakeholders across the justice framework and beyond.



Internal Environment

Our People, Resources & Culture

Applicable Statement of Strategy 2021 - 2023 Objectives	Provision of family mediation services strategy & plan objectives	Key Performance Indicators By 2023
<p>We will develop and align our resources and capabilities with demand on our services to ensure an efficient and effective service for the client.</p>	<p>We will have a prioritised service delivery model which will allow for priority to be given to persons receiving legal services from the organisation with a view to providing a unified service for the client.</p>	<p>A documented prioritised service delivery model which offers the most effective legal and mediation service for the client.</p> <p>At the co-located offices, any necessary decisions are made on local line management structures that are necessary to ensure an efficient and effective service.</p> <p>Clerical staff in the offices trained in information giving about mediation, key legal issues and relevant services.</p>
	<p>We will anticipate aligning our internal resources, to the extent required, with the potential enactment of a Family Court Bill and in doing so have regard to the Board's experience to date of having mediators present in the court environs.</p> <p>In terms of developing our presence in further court environments we will only do so if the location is likely to be a site for one of the more centralised family courts that the Courts Service and the Family Justice Oversight Committee is contemplating.</p>	<p>A documented plan outlining the requirements on the service in the light of the potential enactment of a Family Courts Bill and other changes to the family justice system.</p> <p>No further court presences developed other than in locations where more centralised family courts may be situated in the future.</p>
	<p>We will reduce the time from when a client first applies for mediation to mediation completion.</p>	<p>A reduction in the average number of days from when a client agrees to mediation to the first session and when a final agreement is made in comparison to the previous year/three year average.</p>
	<p>We will identify issues that are affecting throughput of cases and implement a range of procedures to deal with them. We will reduce the number of slots for sessions a mediator has available which go unused.</p>	<p>Waiting times in line with Board targets. Diary measurement of 3 cases per day. A decrease in the number of mediator sessions per case in comparison with at least one year in comparison to the previous three year average.</p> <p>A reduction in the proportion of session slots which go unfilled in comparison to the previous year/previous three years/overall average.</p>
	<p>We will provide value for money in delivering the mediation service.</p>	<p>A decrease in the total direct cost per case in comparison to the previous year/three year average.</p>
	<p>We will recruit and train new mediators each year and in doing so we will seek to have regard to having a more diverse workforce of mediators.</p>	<p>Five new mediators trained each year.</p>

Applicable Statement of Strategy 2021 - 2023 Objectives	Provision of family mediation services strategy & plan objectives	Key Performance Indicators By 2023
<i>(continued)</i>	We will work to improve the key performance indicators for family mediation offices and the provision of family mediation services generally and also the means by which those indicators are monitored.	Clear and documented performance indicators in place with an active monitoring system.
We will ensure our staff are seen, engaged and listened to. We will build on the communication initiatives employed during the Covid-19 pandemic and continue this approach into the future.	Communication policy and procedures implemented. Staff working in the mediation area will meet at least twice yearly with senior management including the Director of Family Mediation and the Director of Human Resources. At least one of these meetings will be a virtual meeting. The meetings will be agenda based and minuted.	Communication Policy and Procedures posted on iLAB and implementation of same reviewed quarterly. Minutes of twice yearly meetings will be posted on iLAB.
We will explore and implement solutions as regards how technology can provide access to and assist with learning and development	We will utilise technology as a means of ensuring the vast majority of: → line manager case consultations → reflective practice groups → other learning and development events take place using video conferencing and thus, increase the availability of mediators to offer dispute resolution consultations.	Line Manager Case Consultations, Reflective Practice Group meetings and most learning events being conducted via technological solutions.
We will foster an environment focused on staff development, learning and innovation in the delivery of services in response to an ever-changing legal and social environment.	We will implement a Continuing Professional Development requirement for Board mediators. The learning programme for both mediators and support staff will be organisation led while at the same time having regard to individual training needs.	A CPD requirement in place. Specific training plans in place for staff working in this area.
We will commence an on-going assessment of our workforce with a view to the organisation being reflective of the broader community in terms of gender, race, and diversity.	Steps will be taken to improve the diversity of our mediation workforce having regard to among other things, gender, ethnicity and age.	A more diverse workforce in terms of gender, ethnicity and age.

Operating Environment

The Justice framework

Applicable Statement of Strategy 2021 - 2023 Objectives	Provision of family mediation services strategy & plan objectives	Key Performance Indicators By 2023
<p>We will work with our stakeholders to improve the level of awareness of the Board's services and also to address how we can meet the needs of persons and/or communities who may be marginalised or in danger of marginalisation.</p>	<p>We will undertake social marketing in appropriate places to ensure all applicants and potential applicants are exposed to the right information in terms of resolving their dispute.</p>	<p>Social Marketing will be evident in appropriate places – internally and with the cooperation of external stakeholders.</p>
	<p>We will engage with relevant stakeholders who may act as 'gateways' to the Board's services with a view to improving awareness of our services among those who can benefit from mediation, particularly those who may not be able to afford private mediation.</p>	<p>Documented engagements with stakeholders.</p>
<p>We will seek to put in place solutions to facilitate those that are not within easy reach of our offices. Those solutions will have regard to the availability of information on our services and access to those services and to how technology can assist.</p>	<p>We will offer mediation via technology to those not within easy reach of our services when it is appropriate to do so. We will take our learning from the initiatives employed during the Covid-19 pandemic in drafting a policy.</p>	<p>Policy implemented regarding offering mediation via technology. Video enabled mediations taking place.</p>
<p>We will facilitate a timely consultation following receipt of an application for services. We will assess and implement measures including empowering staff to assist in meeting this target.</p>	<p>We will work with law centres to ensure applicants who satisfy the financial eligibility criteria set out in the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995 and who are referred for family mediation services are afforded a priority service over those who may be in a position to pay privately for family mediation services.</p>	<p>Prioritisation policy in place and being implemented. Monitoring system in place which will document proof, or otherwise, that more applicants to the Board are opting for alternative dispute resolution rather than litigation.</p>
	<p>We will train administrative staff to enable them to give meaningful information to applicants and clients regarding the mediation service.</p>	<p>Training programme for administrative staff established and rolled out.</p>
	<p>In accordance with the statutory Board's decision of September 2018, we will again examine the option of mediation services remaining universally accessible but on the basis that clients, or certain clients, make a financial contribution.</p>	<p>Options presented to the Board in terms of introducing the requirement to pay for the service.</p>
	<p>We will adopt and apply a consistent policy in relation to hearing the views of the child in mediation having regard to the age and maturity of the child.</p>	<p>A clear policy in relation to hearing the views of the child in mediation in place.</p>

Applicable Statement of Strategy 2021 - 2023 Objectives	Provision of family mediation services strategy & plan objectives	Key Performance Indicators By 2023
<p>We will monitor, anticipate and respond to legislative changes. We will seek to involve ourselves at the earliest opportunity when relevant legislation is being drafted and offer observation from the perspective of those in need of our services and from the perspective of our operating environment.</p>	<p>We will monitor legislative changes which require us and / or allow us to expand our services and meet the needs to those who require a dispute resolution mechanism. In particular we will have careful regard to the possibility of making a case to the Minister to establish a scheme of information sessions in certain family law matters on foot of section 23 of the Mediation Act 2017.</p>	<p>Documented reflection on the merits or otherwise of making a case to the Minister to approve a Scheme on foot of section 23 of the Mediation Act 2017.</p>
		<p>Business cases submitted to the Department of Justice seeking the resources to expand the service into new areas when appropriate.</p>
	<p>We will bring the pilot of the provision of family mediation in child abduction cases to an end and evaluate the pilot. We will make a submission to the Department of Justice should the evaluation support a submission for resources.</p>	<p>An evaluation of our involvement in child abduction cases undertaken with a consequent business case to the Department of Justice if deemed appropriate.</p>
<p>We will continue to develop our research function, liaising with service users, third level institutions and other relevant stakeholders, to further our collective knowledge and ensure our policy decisions are evidence based to the greatest extent possible.</p>	<p>We will examine and recommend appropriate research topics, either internally or in conjunction with third level institutions and other relevant stakeholders, in the area of family mediation to further our collective knowledge.</p>	<p>Support offered when required to the Irish Research Council Enterprise Partnership research currently being undertaken into the client journey.</p>
		<p>Research on the availability of information on mediation in the wider justice framework will be completed, the outcome of which will be used to inform policy.</p>
	<p>We will improve the level and quality of the management information available to the Board to allow greater statistical analysis and to better inform decision making.</p>	<p>Gaps in data will be identified and steps taken to fill those gaps. Ready availability of necessary management information and statistics.</p>
	<p>We will evaluate to a much greater extent, the impact for the client of the co-location of the law centre and the family mediation office where co-locations have been established. Pending that more comprehensive evaluation, we will carefully evaluate any co-location opportunity from a value for money perspective.</p>	<p>Evaluation of co-location model completed. Individual evaluation of any further opportunity.</p>

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