



Office of the **Refugee Applications Commissioner**



Customer Service Action Plan 2002

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Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner

OIFIG AN CHOIMISINEARA IARRATAIS DO DHIDEANAITHE



Customer Action Plan 2002

PLEAN GNIOMHAIOCHTA SEIRBHIS DO CHUSTAIMEIRÍ 2002



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1. Introduction

The Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner was established on 20 November, 2000, following the commencement in full of the Refugee Act, 1996 as amended by the Immigration Act, 1999 and the Illegal Immigrants (Trafficking) Act 2000.

The Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner is an independent statutory authority and is responsible for

- The investigation of applications from persons seeking a declaration as a refugee and the issue of appropriate recommendations to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform
- The investigation of applications by refugees to allow family members to enter and reside in the State and reporting to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on such applications in accordance with the Refugee Act, 1996 (as amended).

This document is intended as a guide in relation to customer service for the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner. It embraces the revised principles of Quality Customer Service adopted for the Civil Service as approved by Government in July, 2000.

The plan has been prepared taking account of the views of staff and a representative group of other stakeholders. This plan can be seen as an initial statement of the principles and standards for the Office. I think this is appropriate for what is still a very new organisation and over the year we will be taking a critical and detailed look at the way we provide services to our

customers. In 2003 I will publish a more long term plan having taken the time to review and refine our procedures in the light of experience and with the input of various customer groups.

Customers of the Office

Our customers include:

- Individual asylum seekers,
- Dependants of asylum seekers
- Refugees who are seeking reunification with family members
- Legal representatives of asylum seekers
- The Government
- The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
- Other Government Departments and Statutory agencies
- The general public and their elected representatives
- Non-Governmental organisations
- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- The staff of the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner.

The challenge of providing high quality service to all our customers is a complex one given

- The scale, diversity and variation of our customer base
- The complexity of the asylum process
- The need to ensure that the procedures for processing applications are fair and efficient
- The necessity to demonstrate the integrity of the asylum process through clear and transparent and procedures

The OECD has commented in relation to public sector customer service programmes that the customer cannot be the final arbiter of standards of service and that there is a need to recognise and balance the legitimate interests of other stakeholders. I am committed to recognising my customers and their needs and to achieving a balance between the legitimate interests of all stakeholders.

In the search for quality the Office is committed

- To deal with all our customers with courtesy and respect
- To provide fair and equitable treatment to everyone who makes an application to this office and with whom we engage in the course of our work
- To improving the mechanisms for communicating and consulting with our customers
- To staff consultation and appropriate training programmes
- To harness staff potential and ability
- To raise staff awareness and sensitivity so as to deliver a quality service which in turn will bring greater job satisfaction and fulfilment to all working in the Office.

Delivering a quality service is a challenge to us, which requires sustained commitment and effort. As a new organisation we realise that we have to continually build on our expertise, review our systems and examine our procedures.

I would like to take this opportunity to put on record that information provided by individual applicants to my Office during the application process will not, under any

circumstances, be disclosed to the authorities of the applicants country. From time to time information may however be disclosed to other Irish Government Departments and Agencies or to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to enable them to carry out their functions.

We are committed to the realisation of the standards we have set for 2002. In the development and delivery of our services we will engage in meaningful consultation with our customers, evaluate what we do on an ongoing basis and explore best practices achieved elsewhere.

Berenice O'Neill
Refugee Applications Commissioner,
May 2002.



2. Context and background to the development of Customer Service Action Plans

The programme for "Delivering Better Government" approved in 1996, emphasised the importance of Departments/Offices addressing the needs of the people who they aim to serve and their own staff who provide the services. Principles of Quality Customer Service have been established and in July 2000, the Government decided that

- The revised QCS principles be adopted for the Civil Service;
- Departments/Offices proceed to update, refine and publish their Customer Action Plans (CAPs) by the first quarter of 2001 to give full effect to these revised principles and to ensure continuous quality improvement;
- Departments/Offices ensure that the revised principles are firmly embedded in their Strategy Statements and Business Plans;

- Departments/Offices report on progress on the goals and objectives of their CAPs in their Annual Reports;
- The QCS principles be extended by each Department/Office to include any public service organisation, agency or body for which it has responsibility.

As public servants, we all have customers, – the public who we serve, colleagues in our own organisation or in another department or office, or organisations outside the civil service. We cannot expect to deliver quality services to the public if we do not meet the needs of our colleagues with similar standards of timeliness, courtesy and respect.

3. Functions of the Refugee Applications Commissioner and Services provided to Customers



Functions of the Refugee Applications Commissioner

The functions of the Refugee Applications Commissioner, as provided by the Refugee Act, 1996, (as amended), are of a statutory and non-statutory nature. The key statutory responsibility is the making of recommendations to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on the outcome of applications for declarations as refugee. It is also the Commissioner's responsibility to ensure that applications are processed in a fair and efficient manner; to present a case to the Refugee Appeals Tribunal where recommendations made by the Commissioner are appealed to the Tribunal; to investigate applications for family re-unification and report to the Minister on the result of the investigation; to issue Temporary Residence Certificates to asylum seekers and to furnish the Refugee Appeals Tribunal, the Refugee Advisory Board, the Minister for Justice, Equality & Law Reform and the UNHCR with information for the purpose of their functions under the Act. The Commissioner may delegate these functions to members of her staff. It is also the Commissioner's statutory function to act as Secretary to the Refugee Advisory Board, when established.

The Commissioner's non-statutory functions include; issuing directives on the practical application of the Refugee Act, 1996 (as amended) and procedures and standards of work; ensuring that adequate information on countries of origin of asylum seekers and international jurisprudence and practice in the area of asylum is available to fulfil her remit; ensuring clarity and transparency in

procedures used in the Office, participating in international fora relevant to the Commissioner's functions; staff performance, training and development; handling publicity and the news media; preparation and management of the budget and business plan.

Services provided to customers

The Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner which provides services to the public is located at 79-83 Lower Mount St., Dublin 2. The office is open 5 days a week including lunchtime. The office is open to personal callers between the hours of 9.00a.m. and 4.00p.m. Monday to Friday. A telephone enquiry service is provided from 9.15a.m. to 5.30p.m. (5.15p.m. on Fridays).

The Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner consists of twelve distinct Units, some of which are inter linked.

1. Reception and Fingerprinting Units

The Reception Unit and Fingerprinting Unit are usually the first points of contact that asylum seekers have with the Office. These Units assist personal callers to the office by

- Accepting applications for a declaration as a refugee
- Completing initial interviews in the application process to obtain the basic details of a person's application
- Dealing with queries
- Issuing Temporary Residence Certificates
- Fingerprinting of asylum applicants over the age of fourteen

In terms of Customer Service the Reception Unit assists our Customers by:

- Explaining the asylum application process and referring applicants to other appropriate agencies
- Responding to individual queries in relation to the asylum or fingerprinting process and/or progress of an application
- Ensuring that information leaflets and documentation are available to our customers at all times and in an appropriate format and language
- Liaising with Health Boards in relation to applications from unaccompanied minors
- Liaising with Immigration Officers and other relevant statutory agencies

2. Dublin Convention

The Dublin Convention Unit is responsible for establishing whether Ireland or another Convention country is responsible for processing each asylum application. In this context the unit has ongoing liaison with the competent authorities of the other Convention Countries in relation to the exchange of information and fingerprints and transfer of asylum applicants in accordance with the Dublin Convention, the relevant Sections of the Refugee Act, 1996 (as amended) and the Dublin Convention (Implementation) Order, 2000.

The Unit assists our customers in a number of ways which include

- Giving information on how the Dublin Convention process operates
- Explaining the current position in relation to applications being dealt with

under the Dublin Convention to applicants, legal representatives, other Government Departments and agencies and other Convention Countries

- Conducting interviews with applicants.

3. Case Processing Units

Case Processing Units are responsible for

- The fair and efficient investigation of applications for a declaration as a refugee and making recommendations on such applications to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, in accordance with the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended), having regard to relevant country of origin information
- Responding to specific enquiries and correspondence from applicants, legal representatives, NGO's and others as necessary
- Participation and engagement in appropriate training and development programmes

4. Case Processing Support Units

The Case Processing Support Units are responsible for

- Advance scheduling of interviews and provision of translation/interpretation services
- Sourcing and maintaining country of origin information
- Co-ordinating responses to judicial reviews
- File copying.

5. Policy and Procedures Unit

The Policy and Procedures Unit is responsible for

- Review of procedures and policies used in Case Processing Units
- Development of Case Processing policies and procedures
- Co-ordination of training for Case Processing staff
- Investigating ways to help applicants gain full benefit of legal services

6. Family Reunification Unit

The Family Reunification Unit is responsible for investigating applications from people already recognised as refugees for permission to have family members reside in the State.

(These applications are referred to the Commissioner by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform)

7. Case Presenting Unit

The Presenting Unit is responsible for representing the Refugee Applications Commissioner at the appeals stage of the asylum process. This includes attendance at hearings, the preparation of statutory responses and dealing with enquiries from customers and their legal representatives

8. Customer Service Centre

The Customer Service Centre was established in September 2001 as part of the process of preparing this plan. The Unit is responsible for

- Development and monitoring of Customer Service structures
- Management of customer enquiries

- Liaison with other organisations (governmental and non-governmental)
- File management in the office.

9. Secretariat

The Secretariat Unit is responsible for

- Co-ordination of management functions
- Development and monitoring of Business Plan
- Co-ordination of input for Parliamentary Questions and other material for Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
- Preparation of annual report
- Press liaison

The following units have limited contact with the public

10. Organisation/Finance Unit

The Organisation/Finance Unit is responsible for the provision of corporate services to other functional units in the organisation. The unit is also responsible for the identification of the financial resources required to achieve the objectives of the organisation and for the management of these resources. An annual report on expenditure to the Comptroller and Auditor General and Houses of the Oireachtas must be furnished in accordance with Paragraph 8 of the First Schedule to the Refugee Act, 1996 (as amended).

11. Personnel/Training Unit

The Personnel/Training Unit is primarily responsible for the establishment and development of a human resource function in the Office of the Refugee Applications

Commissioner. It is also responsible for the development of a best practice training model and for the support, timely delivery and monitoring of suitable training courses and programmes. They liaise with the UNHCR and outside training providers.

12. IT Unit

The IT Unit is responsible for the day to day maintenance of all equipment, software maintenance and development, telecommunications equipment and infrastructures for the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner.

The Unit also provides technical training and support on a range of issues.

4. Customer Service Commitments

The Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner is committed to providing a quality service to all our customers, including our own staff. Our guiding principles are independence, fairness, openness and commitment to excellence. We aim to achieve these through the implementation of the following policies

- The delivery of quality services with courtesy, sensitivity and the minimum delay
- Fostering an atmosphere where customers feel welcomed and gain confidence in the attitude of staff and the services we provide
- Respect for all customers regardless of gender, ethnic origin, religion or personal characteristics
- The publication of a statement which outlines the standards of service which customers can expect
- Ongoing review of information and interpretation services to ensure, where possible, that they meet the needs and are in suitable format for our customers
- The provision of clean, accessible public offices which ensure privacy, comply with occupational and safety standards and facilitate access for people with disabilities and other specific needs
- The provision of information that is clear, timely, and accurate and meets customer requirements
- Simplification of rules, regulations, procedures, forms and information leaflets insofar as possible

- Providing a well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of dealing with complaints
- Providing means for consultation with, and participation by, customers in relation to the delivery of our services
- Taking a co-ordinated and integrated approach to delivery of services
- Ensuring staff are recognised as customers and that they are properly supported (in terms of formal and on the job training) and consulted

The Customer Service Action Plan is the first step in delivering on the commitment to quality service. It will be reviewed, in the light of our experience and customer (including staff) feedback within 1 year of publication.

Customer Service Standards for the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner

General Standards

- give clear and, as far as possible, comprehensive information to customers
- give a contact name and phone number
- respond promptly and courteously

Personal callers to our offices

- people who have appointments to be met promptly on arrival
- strive to minimise waiting periods for services

- maintain and improve our reception and waiting facilities
- provide appropriate interpretation facilities as far as possible
- strive for full access for people with disabilities or special needs

Telephone callers

- if we can't answer a question straight away, take the enquiry and call or write back promptly
- use voice-mail selectively – generally only for staff absences or outside of office hours

Correspondence

When applicants have their substantive interview they or their legal representatives have a period of seven working days to make additional written submissions. These are considered in conjunction with the details of the interview. Standards for other written correspondence are as follows,

- acknowledge written enquiries, including E-mail and fax messages within 5 working days of receipt
- issue a full reply within 20 working days in most cases, and
- where this is not possible send an interim reply explaining the position
- ensure that all letters carry a contact name and telephone number
- write clearly, using technical and legal terms, only where necessary

Forms and Official Documents

- produce forms and information leaflets in as user friendly a format as possible
- produce documentation in an appropriate range of languages (currently available in 24 languages)

Customer Feedback, including Complaints

- to be directed to Customer Liaison Officer, Mr. Brendan Sheehy
- complaints to be acknowledged within 5 working days with a detailed reply within 20 working days

Consultation

- carry out surveys among our customers to ascertain their views
- consult with non-Governmental organisations with a view to improving our services
- consult with staff on all aspects of customer relations/services.

5. Customer Service Consultation

The Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner recognises that

- It is vitally important to ensure that services are and remain relevant and responsive to the changing needs of customers
- Consultation and empathy is the key to understanding the needs and expectations of individuals and groups
- Meaningful consultation requires commitment to an ongoing partnership approach aimed at continuously improving services
- Consultation is particularly relevant to monitoring the impact of the requirements imposed by the legal and regulatory environment within which the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner operates.

In that context a process for formal and informal consultation with our customers (including staff) is being put in place.

Formal Consultation

Customer Liaison Panels

Two Customer Liaison Panels have been established, (see Appendix 1) one representative of the NGO sector and one representative of the Statutory and Legal sector. Each will examine and comment on issues such as

- interests and needs of customers
- range and quality of services
- accuracy of information supplied
- standard of presentation

- suitability of delivery methods
- impact of regulation on services provided
- proposed new services

The Customer Liaison Panels will meet every six months, or more often if necessary. The panels will be chaired by Mr. Garrett Byrne, Principal Officer. Their membership will be drawn from representative segments of the customer bases. Heads of functional units will attend as requested by the Chairman.

It may not be necessary for the full Statutory and Legal Panel to meet as a body and in considering many issues it is more productive for a smaller group to meet. Structures are being put in place to ensure adequate communication channels with all of the customers on the Statutory and Legal Panel. The customer liaison structure will become a key mechanism for formal consultation between the Office and its contacts. Senior management will ensure that the views of the panel are circulated throughout the organisation and incorporated into the overall planning process. They will also give timely feedback to the panels as to how the Office has responded to its recommendations.

Internet

The Office will develop a World Wide Web site on which views and comments can be communicated. The Customer Liaison Officer will be responsible for any necessary follow up action.

Customer Feedback

During 2002 the Office will bring forward proposals for Customer Feedback mechanisms in consultation with Customer Liaison Panels and staff.

Information

We are committed to the provision and dissemination of information on our services in a timely manner and in appropriate formats. Published material and information leaflets will be made available from the Office or the Government Publications Office, if appropriate in the future. The Internet web site, when established, will include details of the Office's role and services and any other relevant statistical or general information.

Each applicant for a declaration as a refugee will be provided with an information leaflet, where possible in a language that he or she understands, setting out the procedures for processing applications for a declaration as a refugee.

Staff consultation and feedback

Quality Customer Service Principles will be embedded in the work of the organisation. 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 Unit Head. Staff have also had an opportunity to contribute to the drafting of this plan.

Mechanisms are being put in place for joint staff and management review of all aspects of Customer Service. This includes review under the Performance Management Development System (PMDS) as well as through internal review structures in the Office. (PMDS is a Civil Service wide programme to assess and improve performance incorporating input from all staff)

Appropriate training will be provided to enable staff implement the principles of quality customer service for customers and clients of the Public Service.

6. Objectives, targets and performance indicators



The guidelines for the preparation of Quality Customer Service Action Plans by Departments and Offices for the period 2001-2004 provide that that Action Plans must include appropriate and meaningful performance indicators to allow for the assessment and measurement of qualitative and quantitative performance over the term of the Plan. The following are the performance indicators for the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner:

Complaints/Customer Satisfaction

Output: In 2002 proposals for Customer Feedback mechanisms to be produced and implemented. Role of Customer Liaison Officer in receiving feedback and complaints to be publicised.

Outcome: Feedback received will enable level of customer satisfaction to be monitored and appropriate service adjustments to be made.

Timeliness

Output: Acknowledge all letters, faxes, e-mails within 5 working days of receipt. Issue a substantive reply to all correspondence requiring a reply within 20 working days and if this is not possible issue an interim reply.

Outcome: Ensure a responsive and quality service, measured by the number of complaints received and feedback from customers and from consultations with Customer Service Panels.

Focus on Customer Needs

Output: Review services to ensure they meet customers needs with particular reference to language and cultural differences.

Outcome: Ensure a responsive and quality service, measured by the number of complaints received and feedback from customers and from consultations with Customer Service Panels.

Telephone Service

Output: All calls to be answered promptly and courteously.

Outcome: Ensure a responsive and quality service, measured by the number of complaints received and feedback from customers and from consultations with Customer Service Panels.

Staff Customers

Output: Provide training courses on Quality Customer Service to relevant staff.

Outcome: Provide high quality training appropriate to support the QCS initiative to staff, in line with the commitments in the Customer Service Action Plan, Business Plan and in accordance with the PMDS.

Evaluation/Consultation

Output: Customer Liaison Panels established, liaison meetings with NGO's two to three times yearly (or more if necessary).

Outcome: Effective monitoring of services, which meet the needs of customers.



7. Regulation

The statutory functions of the Refugee Applications Commissioner are set out in the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) by the Immigration Act 1999 and the Illegal Immigrants (Trafficking) Act, 2000. The Office also has regard to the following Statutory Instruments (S.I.) in the discharge of its business

- S.I. No. 342 of 2000 - Refugee Act, 1996 (Appeals) Regulations, 2000
- S.I. No. 343 of 2000 – Dublin Convention (Implementation) Order 2000
- S.I. No. 344 of 2000 – Refugee Act, 1996 (Places and Conditions of Detention) Regulations, 2000.
- S.I. No. 345 of 2000 – Refugee Act 1996 (Application Form) Regulations, 2000
- S.I. No. 346 of 2000 – Refugee Act, 1996 (Temporary Residence Certificate) Regulations, 2000

In processing applications for a declaration as a Refugee the Office also has regard to the procedures set out in the Information Leaflet provided to applicants.

Key areas of regulation which impact on customers

The key aspects of the legislation which impact directly on customers are as follows:

1. Initial application process – Section 8 of the Refugee Act, 1996 as amended
2. Fingerprinting of applicants – Section 9A
3. Consideration of application under the Dublin Convention – Section 22
4. Investigation of application, recommendation and reports by the Refugee Applications Commissioner – Section 11, 12 and 13
5. Notification of change of address – Section 9 (4A)
6. Family Reunification – Section 18
7. Participation in appeals process – Section 16.

8. Procedure for reporting and evaluating progress

Business Plan

The Business Plan for the Office is subject to review on a monthly basis by the Refugee Applications Commissioner with senior management. Structures for regular review involving each unit are also in place. This review process takes account of customer service issues identified in the plan.

Non-Governmental Organisations

The Customer Service Action Plan and all Customer Service issues will be subject to review and discussion at the meetings with the NGO Customer Liaison Panel. (See Section 5., Customer Service Consultation)

Customer Liaison with Staff

Mechanisms for staff liaison and feedback are described in Section 5., Customer Service Consultation.



9. Service Integration/Cross-departmental issues

Certain aspects of the work of the Office intersects with the work of other Government Departments and agencies. Co-operation with and from these agencies is necessary for the effective discharge of responsibilities.

The main organisations involved, the issues and the respective roles of organisations are set out beneath.

Reception and Integration Agency (RIA)

The Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner liaises with the RIA in relation to the referral of applicants for a declaration as a refugee to that service for the purpose of providing accommodation and in relation to the scheduling of interviews for certain applicants who are in accommodation provided by the RIA. Our aim is to refer applicants for a declaration to the RIA as early as possible on the date of application to facilitate the effective co-ordination of that offices business in ensuring accommodation is arranged at the earliest possible stage. Insofar as the scheduling of applicants is concerned the target is to obtain, where possible, current addresses of applicants and notify RIA of date of applicants interview at least 2 weeks in advance to facilitate organisation of transport etc.

Legal Aid Board, Refugee Legal Service and Refugee Documentation Centre

The Refugee Legal Service (RLS) which operates under the aegis of the Legal Aid Board is the primary legal assistance available to asylum seekers. The Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner attempts to provide the fullest possible co-operation with the RLS to ensure that asylum applicants have the fullest possible support in progressing their case. The Office provides the RLS with copies of documentation submitted with applications (with applicants consent) and answers any related queries. In addition the Office is keen to co-operate as far as possible in the facilitation of customer friendly legal services as early as possible in the asylum application process.

The Refugee Documentation Centre (RDC) provides detailed Country of Origin Information which is used by this Office in the assessment of applications. There is ongoing business liaison between the RDC and this Office.

Health Boards

The Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner liaises with the Health Boards in relation to applications for declarations from unaccompanied minors in accordance with the arrangements set out in Section 8 (5) of the Refugee Act 1996, as amended. The primary role of the Health Boards in this regard is to decide whether an application for a declaration should be made by or on behalf of the child.

This Office is responsible for accepting and processing such applications and our aim is to co-operate with the Health Boards to ensure sensitive and timely processing.

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (D/JELR)

The Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner liaises with the following areas of the D/JELR

- **Immigration/Ministerial Decisions Unit**
 - a. In relation to applicants who wish to voluntarily return to their home country
 - b. In relation to return of persons to other Convention Countries under the Dublin Convention
 - c. In relation to visas granted enabling applicants access the territory
 - d. In relation to file movement and queries concerning aspects of recommendations of the Refugee Applications Commissioner
 - e. In responding to Judicial Reviews on behalf of the Refugee Applications Commissioner
 - f. In relation to applications referred by the Minister under Section 18 of the Act

- **Personnel Division, D/JELR**

In relation to filling of vacancies and posts sanctioned, staff transfers and leave arrangements.

- **Asylum Policy**

In relation to policy issues which require amendment/attention or in relation to issues for which information is requested by the Minister.

Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT)

The Office maintains ongoing contact with the RAT for the purpose of

- Providing quality representation at oral appeal hearings
- Addressing operational issues which may arise in the day to day business between RAT and this office.
- Processing appeals under the Dublin Convention
- Responding to enquiries from the RAT under Sections 16 (6) and 16 (7) of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended)

The objective of this Office is to provide information on a timely basis which is accurate and in keeping with the spirit of the Act.

Garda Síochána

The Office liaises with the Garda Síochána and the Garda Síochána liaise with this Office in relation to

- Notifications provided for in the Act – viz applicants in or leaving detention (Sections 9A and 10(3) of the Refugee Act, 1996 (as amended))
- Prosecutions of cases which have implications for asylum applications
- The provision of information in relation to such other issues as are necessary to enable the Gardai to discharge their duties having regard to the statutory provision in relation to the protection of the identity of applicants.

The objective of this liaison is to ensure that both agencies discharge their responsibilities in a timely and professional manner in accordance with our statutory responsibilities.

Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs

The Office and Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs liaise for the primary purpose of validation and consistency in relation to certain common data related to applicants.

Chief State Solicitors Office (CSSO)

The Office has important links with the CSSO in dealing with legal proceedings relating to asylum applications and, in particular, in cases where Judicial Review is being sought.

The Law Society of Ireland

The Office is in daily contact with solicitors who represent asylum applicants, so there is a need for appropriate liaison with the Law Society which is the representative body for Solicitors.

10. Dealing with complaints

It is our aim to deliver our services in a manner which reduces the scope for customer dissatisfaction as much as possible by

- maintaining high standards of customer care
- well focused staff training programmes for staff involved in service delivery and for staff dealing with complaints
- openly acknowledging any limitations as well as benefits of the services available
- reviewing our procedures (including our complaints procedure) and making appropriate changes
- collating and analysing the nature, type and number of complaints received and disseminating the results throughout the organisation
- bringing the complaints to senior management for appropriate attention.

We accept however that from time to time some customers may be dissatisfied and wish to lodge a complaint. We will adopt a positive attitude towards all comments/complaints, treating them fairly, sympathetically, impartially and as an extension of our customer consultation process. Information regarding complaints procedures will be provided to all applicants. The following procedure aims to ensure that any complaints are dealt with in a consistent, fair and open manner.

Complaints Procedure

We aim to refine all aspects of our Customer Service procedures during 2002 in the light of experience and ongoing consultation with customer groups, including staff. As a starting point the following procedures will apply in respect of complaints.

- Mr Brendan Sheehy, Assistant Principal, is the Customer Liaison Officer and is responsible for the processing of complaints/comments which may be received in the Office.
- Complaints will be acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt and the complainant will be advised that a reply will issue within 20 working days of receipt of the complaint.
- The Customer Liaison Officer will ask the Head of the relevant functional unit to investigate the details of the complaint.
- A reply to the complaint will issue within 20 working days of receipt.
- Where a mistake has been made, an apology and explanation will be offered and every effort will be made to rectify the matter.
- Where investigations show that a complaint has arisen from faulty processes or procedures, these will be remedied as quickly as possible.

11. Organisational arrangements for embedding quality customer service within the office

The Framework Document for the Office and the Business Plan contain specific commitments to the principles of quality customer service adopted for the Civil Service.

The Business Plan for the Office contains specific commitments to review progress on a regular basis.

Staff Consultation and Development

Our staff have a crucial role in delivering quality Customer Service and we aim to enhance all of our abilities through consultation and appropriate development programmes. It is our intention to draw particularly on the experience and feedback gained through the following,

Staff training and development under the Performance Management Development System (PMDS) as operated within the Office

Reception Unit (see page 7)

Case Processing Units (see page 8)

Case Presenting Unit (see page 9)

Policy and Procedures Unit (see page 9)

Customer Services Centre (see page 9)

Our overall aims are to

- Heighten awareness among all staff of the need for quality Customer Service
- Strengthen staff motivation by engaging in meaningful consultation
- Consider new strategies for enhanced service
- Challenge values and assumptions which may be inhibiting quality service
- Bring forward suggestions for change in organisational behaviour/practices which would contribute to improved customer service.

APPENDICES



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APPENDIX 1

Customer Service Action Plan Consultation Process

Staff Consultation

The draft plan was made available initially to unit heads and, later, to all staff who had the opportunity to give feedback on its content.

Consultation with Non-Governmental Organisations and Statutory and Legal Bodies

A copy of the draft action plan was circulated to the members of the Customer Liaison Panels for comments and many of the amendments suggested as a result of this consultation have been incorporated in the text.

Customer Liaison Panel for Non-Governmental Organisations

Vincentian Refugee Centre,
St. Peters Church,
New Cabra Road,
Phibsboro,
Dublin 7.

Irish Refugee Council,
40 Lower Dominic Street,
Dublin 1.

Irish Immigrant Support Centre (NASC),
St. Mary's of the Isle,
Sharman Crawford Street,
Cork.

Spiritan Asylum Services Initiatives
(SPIRASI),
213 North Circular Road,
Dublin 8.

African Refugee Network,
90 Meath Street,
Dublin 8.

Integrating Ireland Network,
10 Upper Camden Street,
Dublin 6.

Customer Liaison Panel for Statutory and Legal Sector

Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform
Reception and Integration Agency (RIA)
Refugee Appeals Tribunal
Garda Síochána
Legal Aid Board (including the Refugee Legal Service)
Department of Social Community and Family Affairs
Health Boards
Office of the Chief State Solicitor
The Law Society of Ireland

APPENDIX 2

How to contact the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner

Address:	Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner 79-83 Lower Mount Street Dublin 2
Telephone:	01-6028000
Lo-call:	1890 202418
Fax:	01-6028122
Customer Liaison Officer:	Brendan Sheehy
Email for Enquiries:	oracmail@justice.ie

APPENDIX 3

Information available from the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner

1. Information leaflet for applicants for a declaration as a refugee.
2. Monthly statistics
3. Annual report to the Minister for Justice Equality and Law Reform in accordance with section 7 of the Refugee Act (as amended)*
4. Annual report on expenditure to the C&AG in accordance with paragraph 8 of the first schedule to the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended)

* the first such report is due for completion in 2002.



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