



Annual Report 2002

Department of Social & Family Affairs





mission statement

*“to promote social well-being through income and other supports
which enable people to participate in society in a positive way”*

Annual Report 2002

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foreword

Annual Report 2002



Foreword

I welcome the publication of the 2002 Annual Report of the Department, which demonstrates our ability and our record of delivery of policies which are making real changes in the lives of those dependent on social welfare.

In 2002 this Department disbursed over nine billion euros in social welfare payments to a wide category of recipients, in child benefit, pensions, illness and care supports and unemployment benefits, to name a few.

In my first year as Minister for Social and Family Affairs I set a number of goals.

I intend to build on the significant foundations already in place to promote a caring society and to combat poverty.

Our policies are informed by the ideal of equality of opportunity, and in seeking to accomplish this goal, this Government has adopted a two pronged approach.

Firstly, our policies aim to provide that opportunity and to equip people to access that opportunity.

By countering the economic challenges and ensuring social partnership we are working to create the economic environment that will result in job creation. Because, put simply, the best and most effective way to counter poverty and social exclusion is to provide sustainable employment.

Secondly, for those who are ill or disabled, elderly, unemployed or disadvantaged and who need help in participating in our society, ongoing supports are provided by the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

Our social service policies allied to our policies on education, housing, health and governance to name a few, make real differences to the lives of our citizens and lead to employment which gives our citizens choices – choices that end the trap of social exclusion and help build a healthier economy whose fruits, in turn, can help others.

From birth, through life to death, our system of social supports administered by my Department helps approximately one in three citizens at any one time.

With a Budget spend last year of €9.52 billion the increase again in social welfare spending has remained above the rate of inflation and increased by over €3.5 billion between 1997 and 2002.

Payment rates for both recipients and their families have improved in real terms.

Children and older people have been specifically targeted in our policy drives. We have consistently recognised the central role in our society of our older people who laid the economic foundation stones of this economy. We are on target to fulfil our pledge to them to increase the lowest pension rate to €200 a week. A further increase was delivered in the Budget ensuring rates for a pensioner couple have increased by 50 percent between 1997 and 2002.

We have continued our unprecedented strategy to increase the level of child benefits. This payment of €1.462 billion to 522,441 families is the most effective way to support children without contributing to work disincentives or poverty traps.

I intend to further the family role of my remit in 2003, and took an early step on that path by establishing the Family Support Agency. I look forward to the role they will play in providing assistance and information through a national professional network of family support organisations and services.

I look forward to the challenges of the year ahead, and I take this opportunity to formally place on the record my gratitude and appreciation of the commitment and hard work of all the staff of the Department of Social and Family Affairs throughout the country.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mary Coughlan". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Mary Coughlan TD
Minister for Social and Family Affairs



Introduction

This Annual Report outlines the progress we made in 2002 in delivering on our Strategy Statement 2001-2004.

The year was one of considerable change for the Department including some change in our responsibilities. Following the general election and the appointment of the Government, the remit of the Department changed with part of our previous responsibilities transferring to the new Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. 2002 also saw the establishment, on an interim basis, of the new Family Support Agency which will be responsible for delivery of certain services for families for which the Department was previously directly responsible.

The delivery of social welfare services to those who depend on those services is the Department's primary responsibility and in 2002 we continued to deliver high standards of service in a challenging environment. A number of significant improvements in our services were brought into operation effectively and smoothly and our staff responded very well to the demands of a growing and diverse customer base.

During the year we continued to develop the programme of consultation with customers and their representatives, in the belief that only through a constant process of review and monitoring of the delivery of services can we ensure that are responsive to customer needs.

We are also conscious of the need to provide a high quality service to the Minister and the Government and to public representatives. We continued to do this in 2002 and to support the work of relevant Oireachtas Committees.

The need to manage effectively the resources entrusted to us by the Government requires a strong emphasis on efficiency and value for money, even more so in a situation of public finance restrictions. The implementation of the Management Information Framework project, on which considerable progress was made during 2002, will support the achievement of improved management and financial systems for the future.

Good organisations need able people and must seek to develop their abilities, skills and opportunities. As a Department we try to do this and, during 2002, the continuing implementation of the Performance Management and Development system has been a major project for the Department. What makes the greatest difference, however, is the way people work together to be productive and flexible and to meet new challenges. I believe that in 2002 this was a key strength of the Department and one which I am confident that we will continue to demonstrate.

During 2002 we reviewed our strategy to reflect the new Government programme and put in place a new strategy to guide us in the period ahead. The launch of the Review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy in 2002 following an inclusive process of consultation has also set a challenging agenda for us in this vital area in which the Department, through the Office of Social Inclusion, has a key co-ordinating role.

We look forward to the challenges ahead and to working with the agencies for which we are directly responsible – the Pensions Board, Combat Poverty Agency, Comhairle and the Family Support Agency – and with the other public service in continuing to deliver a high quality of service to the citizen. I want to thank, in particular, the staff of the Department for their work over the past year and look forward to working together in partnership to meet the challenges ahead.

John Hynes
Secretary-General



chapter 1

Department of Social & Family Affairs

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Chapter 1

Department of Social & Family Affairs

Functions of the Department

The main functions of the Department are:

- to formulate appropriate social protection policies
- to administer and manage the delivery of statutory and non-statutory social and family schemes and services
- to work with other Departments and agencies in the delivery of Government priorities.

The main business of the Department continues to be the insurance (PRSI) based payments, social assistance (means tested) payments, associated secondary benefits and Child Benefit.

In recent years the supports and services provided have been expanded to include:

- Employment supports for job-seekers
- Assistance for people at work and on low pay and farmers on low income
- Marriage Support Services
- Family Mediation Services

- Family Resource Centres
- Social Inclusion Initiatives

The Department also has a dedicated unit with responsibility for co-ordinating and developing cross-Departmental action in support of social inclusion initiatives and the National Anti-Poverty Strategy.

The Structure of the Department

The Department is structured on Aireacht/Executive lines and has a total of over 4,850 staff (of which over 900 are work sharing) equating to about 4,400 full-time posts.

The **Aireacht** is composed of two distinct divisions – Corporate Services and Planning. Corporate Services comprises Personnel (including Staff Development Unit and the Employee Assistance Service), Finance Branch, Facilities Management (including Business Information Protection and Health and Safety Unit) and the Internal Audit Unit. Planning Division is responsible for the formulation of social protection and other social support policies and for the provision of support and advice to the Minister and the Government.



Management Advisory Committee, 2002

(Left to right) Oliver Ryan, Director – REACH; Alice O'Flynn, Assistant Secretary; Benny Kevitt, Director (standing); Bernadette Lacey, Director-General; John Hynes, Secretary-General; Vera Dervan, Director; Gerry Mangan, Director (standing); Niall Barry, Director (standing); Gerry Daly, Assistant Director-General; Cyril Havelin, Director/Chief Appeals Officer.

Social Welfare Services (SWS) is the executive arm of the Department and is responsible for the day-to-day administration and management of social welfare schemes and services through a network of local, regional and decentralised offices. Our HQ offices are located in Dublin, Sligo, Letterkenny, Longford, Waterford and Dundalk (2002).

Regional Structure Our delivery of services is structured on a 10 region basis with regional offices in Waterford, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Longford, Sligo, Dundalk and three in the Dublin area. Within these regions there is a network of 58 Social Welfare Local Offices and 69 Branch Offices.

Social Welfare Appeals Office is an independent Office responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Statutory Agencies

There are four statutory Agencies under the aegis of the Department:

The **Combat Poverty Agency** has responsibilities in the areas of advice to the Minister, research, action programmes and information in relation to poverty in Ireland.

The **Pensions Board** is responsible for promoting the security and development of occupational pensions and the general issue of pensions coverage.

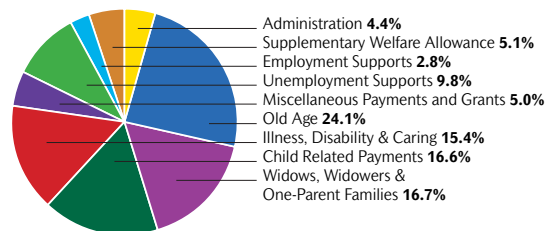
Comhairle has responsibility for supporting the provision of independent information, advice and advocacy services for all citizens throughout the country including those with disabilities.

The **Family Support Agency** brings together a number of family support programmes and measures introduced by the Government in recent years, providing a comprehensive response for families in need of support services and for families generally.

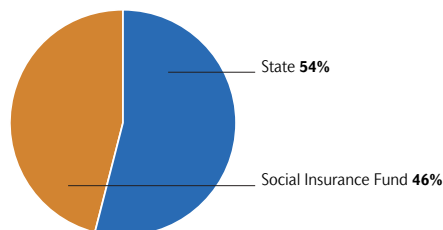
Finance

In 2002, total expenditure by the Department amounted to over €9.52 billion. This was mainly financed by the Social Insurance Fund and by the Exchequer. The charts below illustrate the sources of finance in 2002 and the programme areas where this money was spent.

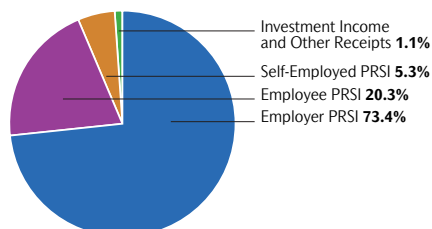
Expenditure on Social Welfare by Programme, 2002



Financing of Social Welfare Expenditure, 2002



Financing of the Social Insurance Fund, 2002





chapter 2

Policy Development

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Chapter 2

Policy Development

GOAL

To develop the highest standard of policies and advice to Ministers and Government for the promotion of effective social protection, family and community support.

OBJECTIVE

To ensure that well prepared options are available in good time to enable the best possible consideration to be given to them.

Review of Expenditure Programmes

The expenditure review process is a civil service wide programme, under the Strategic Management Initiative, initiated in 1997.

The expenditure review process has twin aims:

- to provide a systematic analysis of what is being achieved by expenditure in each programme
- to provide a basis on which more informed decisions can be made on priorities within and between expenditure programmes.

The Department has completed fourteen expenditure reviews since the start of the programme. The review of Urban and Gaeltacht School Meals was completed in 2002.

Work on the following reviews was undertaken and progressed in 2002:

- Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance
- Orphan's Pensions/Allowances
- Illness and Disability Payment Schemes
- Supplementary Welfare Allowance

These reports are planned for completion in 2003.

Families Research Programme

The Families Research Programme was launched in 1999 to provide grant aid to support research projects. These projects inform public policy in relation to family services. The research programme covers areas of family life, marriage, marital breakdown, the impact of counselling services on relationships, children and parental separation, fathers, grandparents and family friendly work practices. To date nine projects have been completed and published, five of which were completed and launched during 2002. The remaining projects are scheduled for completion in 2003.

ESRI

The Department has a research programme with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) based around the Living in Ireland (LII) survey. The data collected in the Survey provide an important resource for policy analyses and development especially in the context of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy. The data also underpin the ESRI tax-benefit model (SWITCH) which has been developed to model the effects of tax and social welfare changes.

Research output from the ESRI for the Department in 2002 included: "Monitoring Poverty Trends in Ireland: Results from the 2000 Living in Ireland Survey", published in July 2002.

The ESRI also commenced research projects for the Department on the issues of relative income poverty levels in Ireland and 'work-rich' and 'work-poor' households. These will be completed in 2003.

Labour Market – Profiling

Following on from the study of employability and the Live Register (published by the ESRI in 2001), the Department has been involved in ongoing research with the ESRI to evaluate the relative effects of a variety of characteristics which affect progression in the labour market. It is hoped to implement the practical outputs from this research in 2003.

National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland

The Government have decided to establish Ireland's first long-term study of children. The information gained from the study is expected to provide vital information on the types of services and supports to be provided to children and their families.

The National Longitudinal Study will be a comprehensive national child development study, focusing on a significant number of children, which examines their progress and well-being at critical periods from birth to adulthood.

The project is being managed jointly by the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the National Children's Office.

OBJECTIVE

To ensure that we discharge the responsibilities we have for meeting Ireland's international obligations, reflecting national concerns in the field of social protection and social exclusion as well as contributing to international research.

EU National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion

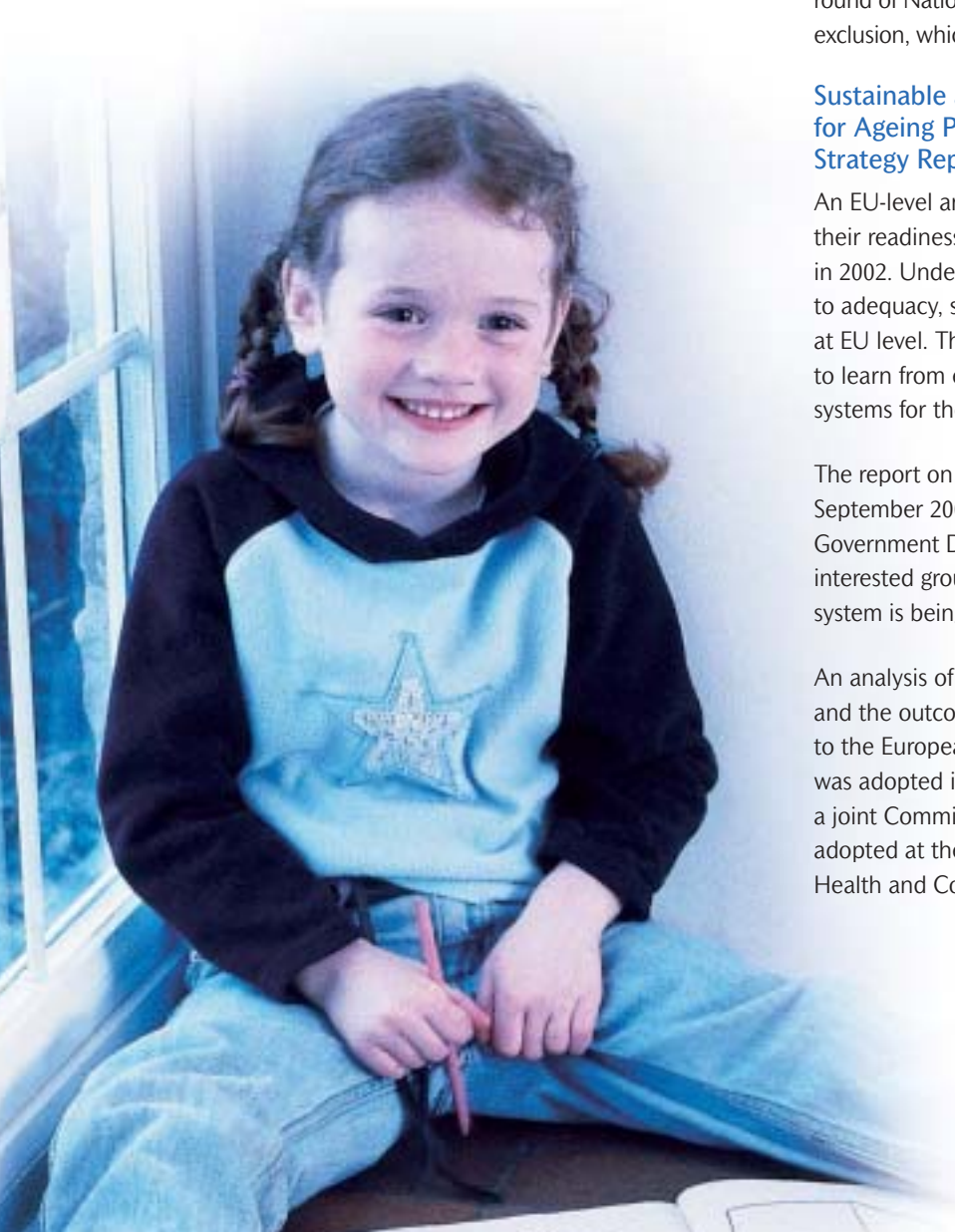
In December 2002, Member States reached agreement on the revised EU objectives for combating poverty and social exclusion. In relation to this, a Eurobarometer Survey was carried out in all 15 Member States in 2002 for the European Commission. Both of these developments will be of assistance to Member States when preparing the second round of National Action Plans to combat poverty and exclusion, which are to be submitted in July 2003.

Sustainable and Adequate Pension Provision for Ageing Population – Ireland's National Strategy Report

An EU-level analysis of national pension systems and their readiness for the challenge of aging was carried out in 2002. Under this process agreed objectives in relation to adequacy, sustainability and modernisation were set at EU level. The aim of the process is for Member States to learn from each other in developing their pension systems for the future.

The report on Ireland, was submitted to the EU in September 2002, after close co-operation with other Government Departments and consultation with interested groups. It outlines how Ireland's pensions system is being developed to meet the agreed objectives.

An analysis of all national reports is being conducted and the outcome is a joint Council/Commission report to the European Council. A Commission analysis which was adopted in December 2002, will form the basis for a joint Commission/Council report to be considered and adopted at the March 2003 Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council of Ministers.



EU – Social Security Rights for Migrant Workers

Significant progress was made in 2002 in the process of reform and simplification of the EU Regulations that protect the social security rights of migrant workers and their families who move to other Member States. It is envisaged that work in this area will progress sufficiently to allow for overall agreement on the reform and simplification proposal by the end of 2003.

In December 2002, political agreement was reached at the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council Meeting in Brussels on the proposal for a Council Regulation aimed at extending the provisions of Regulation 1408/71/EEC to third-country nationals. The Regulation is expected to be adopted during 2003.

OECD

The OECD has undertaken a comparative analysis of the impact of family friendly policies in Ireland, Austria and Japan. Ireland's participation in the review required the production of a national report, 'Family Friendly Policies: The Reconciliation of Work and Family Life', detailing the development of family policy in Ireland. This was co-ordinated by the Department. The OECD report will be finalised in 2003.

Council of Europe

The Department was represented at the Council of Europe on various committees, most notably the European Committee for Social Cohesion, of which Ireland held the Chairmanship in 2002.

United Nations (UN)

The Department was represented in the Irish delegation to the United Nations in Geneva, during the second report on Ireland's compliance with the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR). In its concluding remarks the UN ESCR committee welcomed Ireland's revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy as set out in 'Building an Inclusive Society'.

The Department also participates in the newly-formed Inter-Departmental Committee on UN Affairs.

Bilateral Relations with Other Countries

The Department hosted visits during 2002 by social security Ministers from Australia, China and Moldova, mutually sharing experience and examining ideas regarding the provision of social welfare services. In particular, interest was shown in the concept and development of the personal public service number.

We also met requests for study visits, presenting many aspects of the work of the Department, for senior officials from a number of other countries including Albania, Hungary, Lithuania, New Zealand, Russia, Slovakia and Sweden.

International Social Security Agency (ISSA)

The Department was represented on the ISSA committee researching labour market flexibility in a variety of countries. The committee is identifying good practice measures from these countries and these will form part of a report to general convention.



OBJECTIVES

To promote the provision of social protection through the social insurance system and to enhance the capability of the system to meet its aims in the medium to long term, through the development of appropriate financial, operational and supervisory structures for the Social Insurance Fund.

To help employers, as major stakeholders in the social insurance system, fulfill their obligations in respect of the operation of the Pay Related Social Insurance (PRSI) system.

Social Insurance

The Social Insurance system plays a key role, in terms of the numbers of people who depend on it and also in terms of the financial and economic scale of the system. It is an important vehicle of income distribution and solidarity between generations and between those in work and those out of work.

In line with commitments made in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, work commenced in mid-2002 on developing a “Family Friendly” social insurance model in consultation with the social partners. The work of the group is expected to resume in 2003.

Social Insurance Fund (SIF)

The estimated surplus of SIF income over expenditure in 2002 was €423 million, leading to a cumulative surplus of €1,273 million at the end of the year.

In accordance with the 1998 Social Welfare Act, the first Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund was completed and was laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas in October 2002. The main purpose of the Review is to consider the adequacy of the current rates of contribution to the Fund, both now and in the future, taking account of forecast demographic and other developments.

Information for Employers

To help employers, as major stakeholders in the social insurance system, information packs are distributed to employers (using a Revenue database) on an annual basis providing them with information on the PRSI system.

OBJECTIVES

To provide advice to the Minister in relation to poverty, social exclusion and inequality issues. To contribute to the overall development of policy aimed at tackling social exclusion, poverty and inequality. To create greater awareness of NAPS.

Our aim is to strengthen the NAPS process through consultation with other departments and agencies as well as internally.

National Anti-Poverty Strategy

2002 was a particularly significant year for the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS). In February, the Taoiseach formally launched the revised NAPS, entitled ‘Building an Inclusive Society’. The revised NAPS is the culmination of an intensive process of consultation undertaken throughout 2001 with the social partners and other interested parties.

In the revised NAPS the range of policy areas covered has been extended, specific attention is given to the position of groups particularly vulnerable to poverty, and the strategy sets out a range of key new targets – notably in relation to consistent poverty and income adequacy.

Results from the 2000 ‘Living in Ireland’ survey conducted for the Department by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) showed that consistent poverty rates have fallen from some 15.1% in 1994 to 6.2% in 2000.

The revised NAPS establishes a new target of reducing the numbers of those who are ‘consistently poor’ below 2% and, if possible, eliminating consistent poverty.

In the area of income adequacy, the target is to achieve a rate of €150 per week, in 2002 terms, for the lowest rates of social welfare to be met by 2007. The revised NAPS also sets the appropriate equivalence level of basic child income support (i.e. Child Benefit and Child Dependent Allowances combined) at 33%-35% of the minimum adult social welfare payment rate.

The strategy establishes a range of targets across the policy domains of employment and unemployment, education, health and housing and accommodation, together with specific targets in respect of each of the vulnerable groups identified above.

Office of Social Inclusion

The implementation of the revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) is supported by a new set of institutional structures. Key to this is the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) which took over the functions of the NAPS Unit in the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The Office is headed by a Director, and its operation will be overseen by a management group of Assistant Secretaries drawn from the relevant Departments, including the Department of the Taoiseach.

Amongst the key functions of the Office are:

- the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the NAPS;
- the preparation of Ireland's National Action Plans against Poverty and Social Exclusion;
- the development of a NAPS data strategy and research programme;
- the development of a NAPS communications strategy;
- the development of an enhanced poverty proofing process.

Other key institutional structures supporting the NAPS include the Cabinet sub-Committee on Social Inclusion, the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion, a Social Inclusion Consultative Group involving the social partners and anti-poverty experts, and a Technical Advisory Group which will have a key role in developing the Office's data and research strategy. The Combat Poverty Agency also has a critical role to play in the implementation of the NAPS.

In addition, the NAPS provides that the National Economic and Social Forum will convene an annual Social Inclusion Forum. This will allow individual members and representatives of the community and voluntary and other sectors an opportunity to contribute to the process.

Extending the NAPS to Local Levels

During 2002, the Department continued to participate in ongoing work with the Combat Poverty Agency and Department of Environment and Local Government to promote the NAPS in local authorities, primarily through the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network.

The Combat Poverty Agency and the Department also continued work in 2002 on the pilot project with the Regional Operational Programmes of the National Development Plan (NDP) to increase the social inclusion focus of the NDP and develop key indicators in this regard.

Policy Developments

Child Income Support

In 2002, resources for child income support continued to be focused in ways to avoid contributing to work disincentives and poverty traps.

The Government's programme of multi-annual increases in Child Benefit continued during 2002. Child Benefit was increased by €31.80 per month on the lower rate and €38.10 per month on the higher rate. These increases were paid from April 2002, two months earlier than in 2001. The remainder of this programme will be implemented over three years.

Child Dependant Increase

From March 2002, payment of Child Dependant Increase with short-term schemes was extended to the end of June following the child's 18th birthday or until the child completes a course of full-time education, whichever is the earlier.

Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (BSCF)

In 2002 the additional income disregard for the BSCF scheme was increased from €6.35 to €50. The rate of payment in respect of children aged 12 and over was increased from €99.04 to €120. In 2002 BSCF payments were made in respect of 150,679 children at a cost of €15.2 million. Of these children, 89,717 were aged 2-11 and 60,962 were aged 12-22. A working group is in the process of finalising a review of the Back to School Clothing and Footwear scheme.

School Meals Community Programme

The School Meals Community Programme meets the food costs of the voluntary and community based groups that are currently operating innovative school meal projects outside of the scope of the statutory School Meals scheme. This funding is provided to initiatives known as Breakfast, Lunch, Homework or Afterschool Clubs at local level, that are targeting areas of disadvantage or children with special needs.

In 2002, funding of €1 million was provided under the school meals community programme which benefited a total of 109 schools and voluntary organisations covering some 11,000 children. In addition, a further €1 million was provided under the Urban & Gaeltacht School Meals Scheme which benefited 380 schools and approximately 60,000 children.

An Interdepartmental Working Group undertook a review of the statutory School Meals Scheme. The review was finalised in December 2002 and its recommendations are under consideration.

Family Income Supplement

In January 2002, the FIS income thresholds were increased by a minimum of €34 per week.

Employment Support Services

The range of Employment Support Services administered by the Department was reviewed in 2002 in the light of the major economic and labour market changes that have occurred in recent years.

Following on from this review, and in order to focus resources on the more vulnerable in the community, the qualifying period for persons on Unemployment Benefit/Assistance was increased from 12 and 15 months to 5 years, with effect from 1 January 2003. Changes were also announced in the Back to Education Allowance scheme, to come into effect in 2003.

An amendment to legislation in 2002 addressed a situation which may have been a disincentive to customers, (5 years on Disability Benefit), who wished to take up part-time work. The change provided that persons who found that within 13 weeks of taking up the employment they were unable to continue to work, would re-qualify for Disability Benefit at the rate applicable to the claim immediately prior to taking up work.

Employment Action Plan

The policy of referral and activation of persons on the Live Register in co-operation with FÁS, commenced in 1998, continued in 2002. Under this process, persons under 25 years of age are referred to FÁS for a job or employability support after 6 months on the Live Register and those aged 25 or over are referred at 9 months' duration for similar interventions.

During 2002 (up to end of September) a total of 25,073 persons were referred to FÁS for interview. Of these some 13,959 (51%) left the Live Register. Also during 2002 the Department, in co-operation with FÁS, commenced implementation of EAP-style referral and intervention in certain RAPID areas.

Disincentives to Work

Previous gains in removing disincentives to work were maintained in 2002, principally:

- (a) Payment of the second installment of the multi-annual Child Benefit increases announced in Budget 2001 and confirmation of a further increase in Budget 2003.
- (b) Ensuring the FIS income thresholds increased in line with unemployment payments.
- (c) The increases in the qualified adult allowances in January 2002, together with the extension of the upper earnings limit governing entitlement to the allowance, improved the position for welfare dependent families where the spouse was in low paid or part-time employment.

People with Disabilities

In line with the policy focus of ensuring that people receiving disability payments are facilitated and encouraged to take up available employment, training and educational opportunities, a number of further improvements were introduced in this area in 2002:

- The amount of weekly earnings from rehabilitative employment or self-employment which can be disregarded for means-tested purposes in the case of the Disability Allowance and Blind Pension schemes was increased by 26%, from €95.23 to €120,
- Back to Work Allowance scheme was further extended to those who have been receiving Disability Benefit for three years or more,
- Back to Education Allowance was extended to those in receipt of Disability Benefit for three years or more, and

- The linking of two periods of incapacity not separated by more than 13 weeks in the case of people receiving Disability Benefit for 5 years or more. This measure is designed to encourage long-term recipients of Disability Benefit to re-integrate into the workforce, by ensuring that their benefits will not be reduced if they find that they are unable to continue working in the short-term.

It is estimated that in 2002, approximately 18,700 recipients (11%) of illness and disability payments were availing of the various employment, training and educational supports available.

Carers

Budget 2002 made provision for the following measures for carers:

- The weekly income disregard on the Carer's Allowance means test increased by €32.28 to €191 for a single person and by €64.57 to €382 for a couple from April 2002.
- The annual Respite Care payment which is paid with both the Carer's Benefit and Carer's Allowance schemes increased by €127.11 from €507.89 to €635.00 and to €1,270 for carers who are caring for more than one person from June 2002.

Pensions

In 1997 the Government, in the Action Programme for the Millennium, made a commitment to increase the minimum old age pension to €127 by 2002. In the mid-term review of the programme this commitment was extended to all payments for those over 65 years of age.

Budget 2002 provided for an increase of €12.74 per week in old age pension rates which brought the rate of the Old Age (Non-Contributory) Pension to €134 per week.

The increases saw the Government commitment fulfilled in relation to the Old Age (Non-Contributory) Pension. The target had already been reached in 2001 in the case of the contributory payments.

Free Schemes

Budget 2002 made provision for the introduction of a household benefits package from May 2002.

The introduction of the Household Benefits package, with one application form, ensures that where a person qualifies for one of the three Free Schemes, they qualify for all of the Free Schemes. This is achieved by standardising the living alone conditions for all the Free

Schemes. Previously, the living alone condition applying to the Telephone Allowance was stricter than that which applied to the other schemes.

Companion Free Travel Pass

The Companion Free Travel Pass was extended to recipients of Invalidity Pension who are medically certified as unfit to travel alone. This allows any person age 16 years and over to accompany the pensioner free of charge.

This measure was implemented in May 2002.

Electricity Allowance

From April 2002, Electricity Allowance was increased by 300 units per annum bringing the Allowance to 1,800 units per annum. This was one of the recommendations arising from the Review of the Free Schemes which was published in April 2000. Corresponding increases were given on the Electricity (Group Account) Allowance, Natural Gas Allowance and Bottled Gas Refill Allowance.

Widowed Parent Grant

Budget 2002 made provision for an increase in the rate of Widowed Parent Grant from €1,270 (£1,000) to €2,500 (£1,969) from December 2001.

The grant is payable to widows and widowers with dependent children who qualify for a Widow/er's Pension or a One-Parent Family Payment or a Bereavement Grant payable on the death of their spouse.

OBJECTIVE

To ensure that a firm legislative basis exists for social protection schemes and that the legislation is in a format accessible both to those whose tasks it is to apply it and our customers.

Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2002

This Act provided for increases in the monthly rates of Child Benefit, and in the amounts of the Respite Care and Widowed Parent Grant as announced in Budget 2002. It also catered for certain other miscellaneous amendments to the social welfare code and for an amendment of the provisions relating to the administration of public service data.

The Act provided for the amendment of legislation relating to the registration of births, deaths and marriages, primarily to facilitate the initial implementation of the new computerised system of registration of births and deaths. It also amended the Combat Poverty Agency Act, the Health Contributions Act and the Charities Act.

Social Welfare Act, 2002

This Act provided for increases in the rates of social insurance and social assistance payments, and improvements in the Family Income Supplement scheme as announced in Budget 2003.

It also provided for the PRSI changes announced in Budget 2003 including an increase in the annual earnings ceiling above which contributions are not payable by employed contributors.

Pensions (Amendment) Act, 2002

Occupational Pensions

2002 saw a significant development in Irish occupational pensions with the passing into law of the Pensions (Amendment) Act, 2002. This Act began a new cycle of reform which was the culmination of considerable research and debate about new and emerging challenges for pensions policy.

The Act provides for the introduction of Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (PRSAs), the establishment of a Pensions Ombudsman and other important improvements for members of occupational pension schemes.

PRSAs

PRSAs are a new type of pension vehicle aimed at meeting the needs of the flexible labour market of today without undermining existing provision especially in defined benefit schemes. In particular, they are designed to tap into previously untouched customer sectors thereby increasing the level of occupational and personal pension coverage, which is a key objective of Government.

A PRSA is an investment account owned by an individual, based on a contract between an individual and an authorised PRSA provider. They are designed to be flexible and accessible regardless of employment status. There are two types of PRSA, Standard and Non-Standard.

The **Standard PRSA** has charges capped at 5% of contributions paid and 1% per annum of PRSA assets. Any employer who does not provide access to a pension scheme, or who operates an occupational pension scheme where membership is restricted, must provide access to at least one Standard PRSA. All PRSAs must have a default investment strategy which is an automatic investment strategy linked to good practice for investment for retirement which will be applied unless the contributor elects otherwise.

PRSA products are approved by the Pensions Board and the Revenue Commissioners.

Pensions Coverage

In line with the commitment in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF), a survey of occupational and personal pensions coverage was published by the Central Statistics Office in September 2002. This survey, which was based on the Quarterly National Household Survey, estimates that overall occupational and pension coverage is almost 51% of those at work aged 20 to 69 and provides a benchmark against which coverage rates will be monitored in the future. One of the key objectives of Government is to increase the level of pension coverage to 70% of those at work over the age of 30, which was the target agreed by the National Pensions Policy Initiative (NPPI). The Act requires that a report on coverage be prepared within three years.

Pensions Ombudsman

The Act provides for the establishment of the Office of the Pensions Ombudsman. The Ombudsman will be appointed by the Minister for Social and Family Affairs and the Office will be financed by the Exchequer.

The Pensions Ombudsman, who will be independent in the performance of his/her functions, will have the power to investigate and determine:

- A complaint made by or on behalf of an actual or potential beneficiary of an occupational pension scheme or a Personal Retirement Savings Account (PRSA) who alleges that s(he) has sustained financial loss occasioned by an act of maladministration done by or on behalf of a person responsible for the management of the scheme or PRSA.
- Any dispute of fact or law that arises in relation to an act (or omission) done by or on behalf of a person responsible for the management of a scheme or PRSA and that is referred to the Ombudsman by or on behalf of an actual or potential beneficiary.

Miscellaneous Provisions

The Act also includes measures designed to improve the position of existing and future occupational pension scheme members by improving the security and quality of their pension entitlement. The rules governing preservation of benefits were improved to provide for a reduction in the vesting period from 5 to 2 years and to extend preservation and revaluation of pre-1991 benefits. A new minimum pension rule was introduced which provides that the value of a contributory retirement benefit must equal at least 120% of a member's contributions.

The Act also contains a range of other measures which are designed to strengthen the role of the Pensions Board in the regulation of schemes and expands the range of information available to scheme members in relation to the operation of their scheme.

Family Support Agency Act, 2001

This Act provides for the establishment of the Family Support Agency. The Agency will bring together the main programmes and pro-family services developed since 1997.

The functions of the Family Support Agency are to:

- provide a family mediation service
- support, promote and develop the provision of marriage and relationship counselling and family support services
- support, promote and develop the Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme
- promote and disseminate information about these services and other family issues
- provide financial assistance to voluntary organisations for these purposes
- undertake research into matters related to its functions
- have an advisory role to the Minister for Social and Family Affairs

The Chairman and members designate of the Family Support Agency were appointed in July 2002.

Family Mediation Service

The Family Mediation Service is a free, professional confidential service which enables couples, who have decided to separate, to reach agreement on all issues related to their separation. It assists couples to address the issues on which they need to make decisions including; post-separation living arrangements; finances; and parenting arrangements to enable children to have an ongoing relationship with each parent.

Over the last five years the number of centres has been increased from two, Dublin and Limerick, to twelve. New services have been established in Cork, Wexford, Athlone, Dundalk, Tralee, Galway, Tallaght, Castlebar, Blanchardstown and Marino serving Coolock. Two new offices are planned for Waterford and the Northwest.





chapter 3

Service Delivery and
Customer Service Development

Annual Report 2002

Chapter 3

Service Delivery and Customer Service Development

GOAL

To deliver income supports and other services, to the highest standards, in co-operation with other relevant agencies.

OBJECTIVES

*To deliver continuous improvement in quality customer service by placing the customer at the centre of the process.
To increase efficiency and effectiveness.
To ensure effective control of fraud and abuse. To ensure business continuity.*

Service Delivery Model

The Department's Service Delivery Model (SDM) programme aims to modernise the way in which the Department delivers services to its customers. SDM will be underpinned by new computer systems, organisational structures and work processes, which can take advantage of other modernisation initiatives such as the reformed Civil Registration system and the Public Service Broker. Phase 1 of the SDM was successfully implemented in Child Benefit in November 2002.

Administrative Individualisation

Under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, a Working Group was established to produce proposals to advance the implementation of administrative individualisation within the Social Welfare system.

The Working Group was composed of representatives of the Social Partners and from the Departments of Finance and Social & Family Affairs.

This envisaged the provision of a direct payment to persons who are currently supported as qualified adults on their spouses' social welfare payment. The Report was published in August 2002.

The report envisaged that the facility would be offered to all new claimants on a scheme-by-scheme basis and thereafter, to existing claimants within those schemes.

The new arrangements have been introduced for new claimants of Contributory Old Age and Retirement Pension with effect from 1 October 2002.

Customer Service

Developing Service Delivery

The Department's Strategy Statement and Customer Action Plan provide a specific focus on customer service development. Our Customer Action Plan 2001-2004 was published in May 2001. During 2002 progress achieved on the implementation of the Quality Customer Service (QCS) Principles set out in the Plan continued to be monitored and reviewed.

In October 2002 a progress update 'Delivering for you' was issued to all staff.

A survey regarding the practical implementation of the Principles in the Department's network of local offices formed part of this review.

The Elements of our Customer Service Programme

Our commitments to a quality customer service can be summarised under the following headings:

Consultation

- Further develop the consultative process so that customers can express opinions, give feedback and become involved with the setting of challenging service standards.

Information

- Maintain a proactive approach to the provision of, and ease of access to, quality information and advice.

Employers

- Help employers, as major stakeholders in the social insurance system, to fulfil their obligations in respect of the operation of PRSI.

Equality/Diversity

- Ensure that the service we provide is equitable, non-discriminatory and takes account of increasing cultural diversity. A key focus in this regard is staff training and awareness raising.

Choice

- Promote choice, where feasible, in all aspects of service delivery.

Payment Methods

- Ensure that the most modern and the widest possible range of payment methods is available and provide access, where possible, to new payment services and facilities so that customers can choose the option that best suits their personal preferences.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

- Ensure that the potential offered by Information and Communications Technology is fully availed of.

Accommodation and Access

- Modernise the standard of accommodation in our offices through our building programme, with particular emphasis on privacy and access for people with disabilities. The Department supports the National Heritage Plan.

Appeals/Redress

- Maintain a formalised, accessible and transparent system of appeal/review for customers who are dissatisfied with decisions on entitlements.

Comments and Complaints

- Establish a well-publicised and accessible system for dealing with comments and complaints about the quality of service provided.

Official Languages Equality

- Provide quality services through Irish and/or bilingually and inform customers of their right to be dealt with through one or other of the official languages.

Co-ordination and Integration

- Foster a more co-ordinated and integrated approach to the delivery of services.

Customer Focused

- Further promote and develop a strong customer service culture throughout the Department.

Training and Development

- Support and encourage staff to fulfil customer service objectives by developing appropriate skills and awareness of customer needs.

Staff Consultation

- Promote internal consultation at all levels in the Department so that the opinions of, and feedback from, staff are taken into account in improving customer service.

Monitoring of Quality

- Identify, through the development and monitoring of customer service quality standards, those areas where improvement is warranted.

Customer Consultation

Customer consultation and feedback mechanisms which involve day-to-day contacts, surveys and panels continue to be an integral part of our business. During 2002 there were significant developments in this area with the introduction of a formal comments and complaints system across the Department and the extension of the Touchscreen survey technology facility to all ten regions of the Department.

Touchscreen Surveys

Touchscreen technology is a fast, efficient, cost effective and customer friendly method of carrying out surveys with the results available minutes after the completion of the survey.

The Department has developed this facility in-house. Training and support have been provided for staff in advance of the supply of the Touchscreen survey equipment which has been installed in all of the Departments ten regions. It is intended to co-ordinate the operation of surveys in all regions on a quarterly basis during 2003.

Customer Panels and Surveys

2002 saw the continued use of customer panels.

The following tables reflect the customer panel and customer survey activity during 2002 including the type of customers involved and the location.

Customer Surveys

Type	Area	Date
Family Income Suppl.	Longford	June 2002
Invalidity	Longford	July 2002

Customer Panels

Type	Area	Meetings
Disabilities/Carers	Kilkenny	May 2002 July 2002 Sept 2002 Dec 2002
RP/OACP Pensions	Limerick	May 2002 Oct 2002
Unemployed	Limerick	May 2002
Widows/Widowers	Tullamore	May 2002
Free Schemes	Letterkenny	Nov 2002

A total of 9 panel meetings were held countrywide in 2002.

Customer Service Targets

Activity	Standard	Status
Customer Surveys:		
Internally conducted	1 internal survey in each of 8 regions	Procedural work on touchscreen surveys carried out in regions in preparation for quarterly surveys in 2003
	1 internal survey in each of 2 schemes	Complete
Customer Satisfaction:	Aim	
	To achieve 90% overall satisfaction with service delivery	Average satisfaction rating in completed survey – 85%
	10% improvement in satisfaction with information provision	94% overall satisfaction with information provision – 4% increase

Customer Service Comments and Complaints System

The Quality Customer Service Principles include a commitment to operate a well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of dealing with complaints about the quality of service we provide.

Through the introduction of a computerised complaints recording system across all of the Department's offices, comprehensive data on the nature and volume of complaints Department wide, became available to management and support areas for information and attention.

A comprehensive training programme was devised and delivered to over 2,000 staff during 2002 which included a complaint handling guide for staff and the production of a training video specifically for this purpose.

Customer leaflets, posters and an awareness video were distributed to all local offices. The complaints leaflet is also available on the Department's website. The Comments and Complaints system was introduced in May 2002.

Response to MRBI Recommendations

The Department published the findings of an independent survey carried out by MRBI on its behalf in 2001. A working group was subsequently set up within the Department to consider the report's recommendations and to consider how they could be addressed. The Group produced a report in 2002, and areas identified for action including local offices, forms review, training and information are currently being progressed.

Equality/Diversity

One of the key components of the Strategic Management Initiative is the development of excellent customer service. Equality, with its focus on fair treatment, its objective to secure fair outcomes for all and its emphasis on accommodating diversity is an essential basis for quality service.

In order to achieve this commitment, we recognise that it is crucial to fully support staff and increase the profile and understanding of Equality and Diversity across the Department. We are represented on the various QCS Groups established under the SMI QCS Initiative, including the sub-group on Equality/Diversity. Our staff supports and training and awareness-raising initiatives are, and will continue to be, grounded in our overall objective in the delivery of services – namely, that we are committed to serving all our customers in an equitable and non-discriminatory manner.

Supports for Staff

A series of one-day training courses on anti-discrimination awareness for front-line and HQ staff commenced in April 2002. 9 such courses took place over the year. External partners included the Centre for Migration Studies in UCC and the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism.

Guidelines for staff when dealing with non-national customers were launched in March 2002. These contain information and advice regarding relevant Departmental procedures, entitlements, the asylum process, information sources and cultural best practices etc.



A telephone interpretation service was piloted in one Local Office in each region during the summer of 2002. This entails a three-way conversation between customer, interpreter and member of staff. Clearly, the confidentiality of the conversation is a key element of the service. Work is also continuing on reviewing needs in the area of translation and interpretation services.

Research

The Department also participated in the Southern Integrated Research Partnership (SIRP) which is co-ordinated by the Centre for Migration Studies in UCC. Based in Cork, this Partnership is exploring the needs of immigrants to Ireland. The work of the study will be completed in 2003.

Invalidity Pension Customer Survey

A survey of 1,000 Invalidity Pension customers was completed. A response rate of 87 % (870) was attained which is a very satisfactory response in the context of this customer group. The survey findings highlighted a high level of customer satisfaction with the service provided. The main findings were:

- 91% of respondents were either very satisfied/satisfied that their claim was dealt with efficiently and as speedily as possible.
- 96% of respondents were either very satisfied/satisfied with the quality of service provided.
- 99% of respondents were either very satisfied/satisfied that the staff they had dealt with were polite, helpful, willing to listen, knowledgeable and easy to understand.
- 98% of respondents were happy with the payment service provided.

Disability Customer Panels

Meetings of the Customer Panel of people with disabilities were held on a number of occasions in 2002, at which recipients of Carers Allowance, Invalidity Pension and Disability Allowance provided their views on the services delivered. These were held in conjunction with the North Eastern and South Eastern Regions.

Disability Consultative Forum

A Forum made up of organisations representing people with disabilities acts as a channel to communicate the views of such organisations to the Department and it also provides a mechanism to review and make recommendations which can then input into policy



Minister Mary Coughlan T.D. launching the public awareness campaign for the Personal Public Service Number.

making. In addition, the Forum reviews the operation and administration of income and employment support services delivered by the Department to people with disabilities and carers.

Free Schemes Customer Service Panel

The inaugural meeting of the Free Schemes Customer Service Panel took place in Letterkenny in November, 2002. Overall the customers who attended felt that the Department does a good job. Further meetings are planned for 2003.

Family Income Supplement Customer Survey

A survey of 1,000 Family Income Supplement (FIS) customers was completed. A response rate of 81 % (810) was attained. The survey highlighted a high level of customer satisfaction with the service being provided. The main findings were:

- 96% of respondents found the application form easy to complete.
- 95% of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied that their claim was dealt with very quickly.

- 98% of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied that the staff they dealt with were: polite, helpful willing to listen, knowledgeable and easy to understand.
- 40% of respondents stated they would opt for payment of FIS by electronic fund transfer.

LoCall

As part of this Department's ongoing commitment to providing an easily accessible, quality customer service, our LoCall service, which gives our customers direct access at local call rates, was extended during 2002 to the Pension Services Office in Sligo and Maternity Benefits.

Leaflet Line

A LoCall leaflet request line was set up in Information Services on a twenty four hour, seven day week basis. Approximately 1650 calls per month are received.

There are now 4 LoCall numbers in operation.

OBJECTIVE

To ensure that all our customers are made aware of their entitlements under a broad range of social insurance, social assistance and other supports and are kept informed of changes and improvements as they occur.

Information Services

All of the strategic documents and programmes produced by the Department over the past few years have contained a strong commitment to the provision of accurate, comprehensive and up-to-date information on social welfare schemes and services in a clear and simple manner. To honour this commitment in 2002 we have been pro-active in disseminating information to all our customers, other departments and agencies, and the voluntary and community sector.

Information Services Strategy

Work continued throughout 2002 on the development of our Information Services Strategy. An extensive consultation process with information providers both internal and external, was undertaken. It is intended that the strategy 2003-2006 will set out a plan that will articulate the future development of information provision over the next three years. This document will be published early in 2003.

Media Campaigns

The following information campaigns were carried out in 2002:

Farm Assist A video was produced outlining details of this scheme and the video was played in Marts throughout the country in the last quarter of 2002. Advertisements were placed on Local Radio, in Local Papers and numerous information seminars were held in partnership with the IFA around the country.

PPS Number A major advertising campaign ran on TV and Radio and in all national newspapers to promote awareness and uses of the PPSN.

Budget 2003 An information campaign was undertaken to advise our customers on when and how their Budget 2003 increases would be paid. This campaign consisted of advertorials in four national daily newspapers and in four Sunday newspapers.

Exhibitions, Talks

Staff participated in various exhibitions and made presentations to various groups during the year.

Training and Seminars

Media skills training was organised for relevant staff to enhance their skills when participating in various information campaigns on Local Radio.

Two information seminars were hosted for Information Providers during the year in Dublin and Cork respectively.

A seminar was hosted in Monaghan for frontier workers by this Department, the Department of Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Citizens Advice Bureau. Voluntary workers engaged in information giving also attended this seminar. The seminar was on migration North/South and its implications on Social Welfare entitlements.

In partnership with the Federation of Irish Societies in UK and the Coalition of Irish Emigrant Centres in USA, two seminars were held to enhance information provision to our emigrants in both UK and USA.

Publications

The following booklets were published in 2002:

- Guide to Social Welfare Services SW4
- Employers Guide to PRSI SW3
- Worksharing SW105
- Household Benefits Package SW107
- Family Employments and PRSI SW102



Work continued throughout 2002 on developing a new corporate image for all publications of the Department.

Mailshots

To celebrate United Nations Day of Ageing, copies of Comhairle's booklet 'Entitlements for the Over Sixties' were issued to 330,000 customers of the Department.

An information newsletter was distributed to all the staff in the Department outlining all the services provided by Information Services. An internal customer service survey was included. A very positive feedback was received from both staff and management.

Grants

A total of €762,000 was paid by way of grants to national organisations and voluntary bodies to disseminate information on social service entitlements to our customers.

e-Government and Client Systems

Personal Public Service Number

The PPS Number is a major contributor to strategy on eGovernment and constitutes an underlying pillar in the project to modernise the Civil Registration System (the GRO project).

The Personal Public Service (PPS) Number is the unique identifier for dealing with the public service. It is the individual's unique reference number to assist in accessing benefits and information from public service agencies more quickly and easily.

The Department of Social and Family Affairs is responsible for both the day-to-day operation and for strategy in relation to the PPS Number and for its development in conjunction with the Public Services Card.

REACH

In 2002, the REACH Agency moved into the procurement phase of the project to build the Public Services Broker. This is in line with REACH's mission to specify and establish the Broker as a 'single multi-channel gateway to government' and to 'develop a framework for the integration of public services'.

Procurement

In 2002, REACH went to the market via the European Journal seeking a suitable partner to build and implement the Public Services Broker. There were twenty eight responses to the initial Notice with the number reduced to six after the initial evaluation process. The short listed

companies were then issued with a 'Statement of Requirements'. The Public Services Broker 'Statement of Requirements' document was itself the result of considerable research and analysis with input and refinement throughout its development from all the project stakeholders, including the Departments of

Finance and An Taoiseach. The shortlisted bidders submitted detailed proposals which were evaluated and recommendations for the next phase of shortlisting leading to the "best and final offer" stage were put to the Reach Board in late 2002.

A Board of Management for Reach was set up in mid 2002. The Board consists of senior representatives from the Departments of An Taoiseach, Finance, Social and Family Affairs, Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Revenue Commissioners.

Reachservices.ie

An online service 'Reachservices.ie' was launched in April 2002 in association with the Department's Customer Identity Services (CIS) and the Local Government and Computer Services Board (LGCSB). This afforded an opportunity to register customers and test the process using the Department's CIS database. The system also afforded an opportunity to address issues arising from the requirement to provide high quality customer services.

Inter Agency Messaging System (IAMS)

Finally in 2002, REACH concluded a programme of work leading to the implementation of an Inter Agency Messaging System (IAMS) which will facilitate secure messaging between agencies such the General Registrar's Office, the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Central Statistics Office. Inter-Agency Messaging will facilitate streamlined interaction between Departments and when deployed with a range of Interoperability and Security Standards will contribute significantly to the infrastructure upon which Departments can offer e-services to their customers.

Civil Registration Service Modernisation Programme

The General Register Office (GRO) is responsible for the administration of the Civil Registration Service in Ireland and operates under the aegis of the Department of Health and Children (DoH&C). The day to day service is delivered by the Health Boards (HBs) on an agency basis for the GRO.

In July 1999 the Government agreed a programme for the modernisation of the civil registration service. This is a joint programme of work between the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA) and the Department of Health and Children.

The modernisation of the Civil Registration Service has four distinct elements:

- reform of the legislation,
- design and development of a new organisation structure and business processes,
- introduction of modern technology and
- the capture, in electronic format, of historical records.

The main developments during the year 2002 were as follows:

- The new civil registration computer system was developed and piloted in the Cork Registration Office;
- A comprehensive training programme was developed and tested as part of the pilot in Cork;
- Meetings/briefing sessions were held with staff and all groups/organisations with an interest in the Civil Registration Service;
- Drafting of a new Civil Registration Service Bill;
- The Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2002 contained provisions allowing for the amendment of the Registration of Births and Deaths Acts 1863 to 1996 to facilitate the implementation of a new computerised system of registration of births

and deaths. Provisions were also made to replace, by regulations, the existing system of paper based searches with a new electronic system, a new fee structure and to allow, at the joint request of both parents, for an amendment to the surname of a child at re-registration;

- An Inter-Departmental Committee on Reform of Marriage Law comprising representatives from the Departments of Health and Children, Social and Family Affairs, Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Foreign Affairs, Finance, the Office of the Attorney General, the General Register Office and the Civil Registration Modernisation Programme met for the first time. The terms of reference of the Inter-Departmental Committee are to:
 - “review current marriage procedures and formalities and recommend a framework for reform, and
 - consult as appropriate with relevant, bodies and institutions”.

Freedom of Information (FOI)

During 2002, a total of 670 FOI requests were received in this Department. This represents a 21% increase on the number (553) of requests received in 2001. Of the requests received in 2002, 585 (87%) were from members of the public seeking access to personal records, including 20 requests from staff members for personnel records. The remainder were for non-personal records. The majority (85%) of these requests were granted in whole or in part.



Decisions Advisory Office (DAO)

During 2002 the Decisions Advisory Office continued to play a pro-active role in the provision of advice and support to all Deciding Officers in the Department, to ensure that decisions in regard to applications, or reviews on continued entitlement to Social Welfare payments, were carried out in a consistent and high quality manner.

Throughout the year the office organised and presented 19 training Seminars for Training Officers and Deciding Officers across the Department.

This office responded to over 300 requests from Deciding Officers on complex issues relating to decision making, including interpretation of legislation.

In line with the Department's Strategy Statement (2001-2004), the DAO was involved in the development and subsequent promotion of systems that ensure that any decision of a Deciding Officer will be reviewed in the light of any further information brought to our notice. All customers who receive an adverse decision are advised of their right to have their claim reviewed by a Deciding Officer.

Seirbhís As Gaeilge

Ag ullmhú don Bhille na dTeangacha Oifigiúla (Comhionannas) leanadh le traenáil i nGaeilge (fé chúram Gaeleagras) i mbliana. Cuireadh rannrár fé leith d'ábhar Ghaeilge ar fáil a thugann rochtain do chuile dhuine san Roinn agus a chuireann eolas nuashonraithe ar fáil. D'eagraigh Aonad Forbairt Fóirne sainchúrsaí traenála do bhaill fóirne in oifigí áitiúla, oifigí ceannáras agus oifigí díláraithe don bhliain 2003.

Control

The Department's control policy aims to keep fraud and abuse to a minimum by promoting control as an essential element of the day-to-day work of the Department. To meet this objective the control approach aims at preventing fraud and abuse, detecting incorrect payments at the earliest possible stage and ensuring maximum deterrence. Keeping abreast of developments to maximise the control impact is a key element and in this regard, following a comprehensive analysis, a new control strategy was produced during the year.

During 2002, the Department continued to raise public awareness in the fight against fraud by publicising sanctions in respect of persons transgressing the Social Welfare code. In this regard, emphasis was placed on the Department's determination to recover monies received fraudulently or without entitlement. In addition, the outcome of court prosecutions involving both employers and employees was widely publicised particularly in the provincial and local press.

Enhancements in the Department's computer systems continue to facilitate a more co-ordinated, focused and effective approach to control, enabling, inter alia, data from a variety of sources to be cross-checked and potential irregularities isolated and pursued. In particular, the checking of commencement of employment notifications from Revenue revealed instances of persons having overlaps in the area of working and claiming benefits/assistance. All overlap cases were pursued and, where applicable, overpaid monies recovered and prosecution action initiated where appropriate. In recent years particular emphasis has been placed on combating identity fraud, and this continued in 2002 with a specific focus to ensure that persons do not use false identities to obtain PPS numbers or fraudulently obtain Social Welfare payments.

The Department continued to examine the legislation governing fraud as well as internal procedures and recommendations were made for further changes in legislation. There was continued and enhanced co-operation with other Departments and agencies.

Considerable effort continues to be put into improving the effectiveness of debt recovery measures and pursuit of defaulters. Civil proceedings have been initiated in some cases to recover outstanding overpayments including PRSI arrears due from employers. Work is continuing on the design of a comprehensive computer system to handle overpayments and debt recovery across all schemes.

The Department strives to promote control awareness internally among its staff particularly those involved in the processing and payment of claims. A module on control awareness is included in internal training programmes, as appropriate.

Outcomes

Gross savings from the control activities on scheme payments amounted to €268 million in 2002 (see chart below). In addition, inspections of employer records identified arrears of PAYE/PRSI amounting to €14.5 million. Some 340,000 claims were reviewed. Overall savings from control activities were 5% higher than in 2001. In 2002, 246 cases of fraud were passed to the Chief State Solicitor's Office for prosecution and in all a total of 539 cases are currently awaiting finalisation in the courts. (148 cases were finalised in 2001. Of these, 138 were convicted with a variety of penalties imposed. This compared with 199 cases finalised in 2000 with 175 convictions.)

Savings	€m
Unemployment	118.5
Illness	50.0
Pensions	89.3
Child Benefit	7.0
Carers	2.2
PAYE/PRSI	14.5
Others	1.0
Total	282.5

Highlights in Service Delivery

Projects undertaken in 2002

As a result of the introduction of the Household Benefits package a mailshot issued in April to over 58,000 customers on the Department's records who had a possible entitlement to a Telephone Allowance. In early October a reminder issued to over 34,000 customers. Just over 29,000 claims were received and processed by year end by a special project team.

A smaller Budget project also ran in 2002 following the extension of the Companion Free Travel Pass to Invalidity Pensioners. A total of 2010 applications were received and processed.

Rural Transport

Under the The Rural Transport Initiative (RTI) pilot schemes in 34 rural areas are being funded by Department of Transport under the National Development Plan. The Department of Social & Family Affairs has agreed to make a contribution to the initiative and a contribution of €500,000 is to be made in 2003. ADM have agreed to manage this when sanction has been received from the Department of Finance and a contract has been agreed. The Department is also examining how free travel passholders will be accommodated in the context of the initiative.

Fuel Allowances

In 2002, the standard rate of allowance was increased from €6.35 to €9 while a rate of €12.90 was payable in designated urban areas where a ban on the sale of bituminous coal is in place.

General Benefits Branch

The Branch provides benefits under the Disability Benefit, Injury Benefit and Medical Care Schemes.

Disability Benefit

Disability Benefit is mainly a short-term illness scheme for people with sufficient PRSI qualifying contributions paid while in employment.

Service was provided to over 248,000 new customers in 2002. Approximately 54,500 payments were maintained weekly and over almost 39,000 intermediate medical certificates processed every week. Approximately 52% of these were processed at local offices throughout the country. Expenditure for the year was €394.5 million.



Remote Claim Registration

This facility was extended to 39 Local Offices in 2001. Approximately 63,000 Disability/Injury Benefit claims were registered locally in 2002 and it is hoped to extend the facility to more offices in time.

Control Procedures

The Disability/Injury Benefit schemes are controlled mainly by the Medical Referral and Assessment System. Over 40,000 Medical Assessments were set up in 2002, which is similar to the number for 2001.

In addition, over 11,000 claims involving alleged current working and claiming were examined resulting in savings of over €1.4 million.

Quality Control Section

A Quality Control Section was established in Disability Benefits Branch during 2002. The functions of this Section are to improve the quality of work produced in the Branch and the quality of service provided to the customer.

Overpayments and Debt Management Section

Work commenced in late 2002 on the establishment of an Overpayments & Debt management Section within the Branch. The functions of the Section are to introduce the most efficient practices for detecting overpayments and to ensure appropriate repayments are made in accordance with the relevant legislation.

Family Services Project (FSP)

The Family Services Project provides a high quality information service on the range of supports available to families from state agencies and from the community and voluntary sector with a particular emphasis on the services available locally.

The project is now operational in seven regions, Dublin North, Dublin South, Dublin West, Southern, Mid West, South East and Midlands, with a further three projects expected to start during 2003.

The Government has provided €15.2 million in the National Development Plan for the progressive expansion of the successful elements of the Family Services Project over the years 2000-2006.

Total expenditure on family related initiatives through the Family Services Project for 2002 was just under €1 million.

Unemployment Assistance/Unemployment Benefit Substitute Payments Elimination Project

A project to eliminate the need for recourse to substitute payments (Supplementary Welfare Allowance) by unemployed customers awaiting award of their unemployment claims commenced in three Local Offices – Newcastlewest, Carrick-on-Shannon and Sligo.

Changes have been made to the criticality of tasks associated with claim processing with a view to minimising delays.

In early 2003, it is planned that three further local offices will become part of the project, with an evaluation to be completed by the end of May 2003 to establish whether the scheme should be expanded nationwide.

Treatment Benefit

Treatment Benefit is a PRSI-based scheme which offers qualified people (and their dependent spouses) certain treatments and appliances either free or at substantially reduced cost. The areas covered by Treatment Benefit are Dental, Optical, and Medical Appliances (hearing aids and medically necessary contact lenses).

Dental Benefit

Dental Benefit Section had a somewhat difficult year dominated by an Industrial Dispute between the Department and the Irish Dental Association. The dispute, which concerned the fundamental nature of the Scheme and the fees involved, was resolved in February 2003. The resolution included a 10% across-the-board increase in fees, a new fee structure for fillings and an agreement that an independent facilitator would assist the parties to review outstanding issues.

Despite these problems, 427,707 claims for Dental Benefit were paid in 2002, amounting to €35.1 million up from €35 million in 2001.

Optical Benefit

In the Optical Benefit Section, work began on a new "Direct Payments" system similar to the system already in operation in the Dental Section. Direct Payments will allow claims, for people already known to be qualified, to be processed without an initial application/approval form; by-passing this stage is expected to greatly simplify the procedure and reduce the overall number of forms to be dealt with. Development is now at an advanced stage, and will continue through summer 2003.

Optical Section paid for 177,114 claims in 2002, amounting to €10.8 million.

Medical Appliance Benefit

The Medical Appliance Scheme assists qualified people in purchasing hearing aids (or, in a smaller number of cases, medically necessary contact lenses). The grant had previously been half the price of a hearing aid, subject to a maximum of €350 per aid; at the end of 2002, however, the maximum grant was increased to €700 per aid, a 100% increase. This increase was granted largely as a result of the growing popularity and effectiveness of digital hearing aids, which are considerably more expensive than analogue aids. The grant is payable for both types of aid, but it is anticipated that digital aids, still relatively new in the market-place, will swiftly become the norm.

4,401 claims for Medical Appliance Benefit were paid in 2002, amounting to €1.7 million.

Money Advice and Budgeting Service

The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) operates nationwide through 52 local service providers. The last two MABS were officially launched in 2002. The service is aimed at individuals and families who are experiencing problems with overindebtedness and in particular those who are borrowing from moneylenders.

Each local MABS is incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee with a Board of Directors drawn from local community, voluntary and statutory bodies. These include the Community Welfare Service, Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, Department of Social and Family Affairs and Credit Unions.

A National Conference was held in March and included keynote speakers from England, Scotland and Norway. The MABS was represented at the British Irish Council Community Conference on Financial Inclusion.

The service was used by more than 11,000 new customers in 2002.

The Budget allowance for 2002 was €9.702 million.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA)

Community Welfare Officers employed by the Health Boards administer the SWA scheme on behalf of the Department. Over 100,000 people receive an SWA payment in any given week. A total of €526 million was spent on SWA in 2002, mainly on Rent Supplements

(€252.2 million, or 48% of the total) and basic weekly payments (€145.1 million, or 28% of the total). About half of claims for basic payments are from people awaiting a decision on a claim for another social welfare payment, such as Unemployment Assistance or One-Parent Family Payment, with one third of basic payments to Non Nationals.

An Inter-Departmental Working Group, as part of the Department's series of Expenditure Reviews is currently reviewing the scheme. The review is a fundamental appraisal of the scheme aimed primarily at improving customer service and administrative efficiency. All aspects of the scheme are being examined. The review also provides an opportunity to re-focus the scheme to become more effective in tackling poverty and social exclusion. The first stage of the review involved an examination of the objectives of the scheme and included a widespread consultation process. A total of 145 submissions were received from users of the Supplementary Welfare Allowance service, information providers and other interested parties including the Social Partners, the Health Boards who administer the scheme and the trade unions representing Community Welfare Officers. It is expected that Phase I of the review will be completed in 2003.

Non Nationals

The arrival of 11,634 asylum seekers in 2002 and the presence of significant numbers of asylum seekers who arrived in earlier years continues to pose a particular challenge for the Department.

The income maintenance needs of asylum seekers are met in considerable part via the SWA scheme.

Expenditure on payments to non-nationals under the SWA scheme was approximately €113 million in 2002, accounting for about 20% of SWA expenditure. At the end of 2002, there were 11,119 basic SWA claims in payment in respect of 24,595 non-nationals of which 15,792 were adults and 8,803 were children. Approximately 6,491 of the households also received rent supplements.

Housing Issues

Access to good quality, affordable accommodation is a major concern for people on low incomes, making housing a significant social inclusion issue. The Department's primary response is through Rent and Mortgage Interest Supplements paid as part of the SWA scheme. Expenditure on these supplements amounted to €260 million in 2002, with over 54,000 households and more than 4,300 mortgage holders benefiting at the end of 2002.

In 2001, a new disregard of €6.35 per week was introduced in the means test for Rent Supplement in the case of persons aged 65 years or more. This disregard was increased to €10 in 2002. In addition the weekly disregard for part time workers and those on approved training courses claiming rent or mortgage interest supplements was increased from €31.74 to €50.

In November 2002 the Minister signed Regulations which limited the maximum amount of Rent Supplement that a Health Board may pay. This measure effectively froze Rent Supplement payments at their November 2002 levels until December 2003.



Social Welfare Local Office, Clonmel

Organisational Issues

Buildings

There were a number of significant developments on this front in 2002.

The new Government offices in Dundalk were opened by Minister Dermot Ahern. The new building provides accommodation for 156 staff of the Department.



Social Welfare Services Office, Dundalk

- new local offices were opened at Dundalk, Bishop Square, and Listowel while major renovations were completed at Arklow and Longford;
- work continued at local offices already under construction at Northside Civic Centre in Coolock, Dungleoe and Navan;
- during 2002 construction work commenced on a new local office in Donegal town;
- major repairs were carried out to Lucan signing centre; and,
- work was carried out in Ballyfermot, Ballymun and Wexford local Offices under the OPW's "Disabled Access programme".

Local Offices

The Department, in conjunction with the Office of Public Works, made further significant progress in 2002 with the programme of upgrading existing local office accommodation paying particular attention to access (under the OPW's "Disabled Access Programme"), and privacy:



Health and Safety

One of the most important developments in the Health and Safety (H&S) area in 2002 was the introduction of a No Smoking policy in all buildings in the Department.

Another major development in 2002 was the receipt of reports from Environmental Consultants who examined 80 buildings occupied by the Department around the country to determine if asbestos was present. While the amounts of asbestos discovered were not considered to constitute a health risk, nonetheless arrangements were made for its removal.

The third major development on the H&S front during 2002 was the issue in September of a new Safety Statement to all staff. A notice on the issue of violence against staff members will be displayed in all public offices. The H&S Unit continued to give important support and advice in health and safety matters during 2002.

Client Eligibility Services

During 2002 over 2.6 million PRSI contribution records were received from the Revenue Commissioners and updated to the Central Records System (CRS). Client Eligibility Services also amended over 200,000 insurance records during the year as more information became available.

Microfilm Project

From 1979 onwards contribution and other data has been held on the Department's central computer database but records which predate 1979 have only been available on microfilm or as paper records. These records are still required for contributory pension and other benefit schemes.

A project to computerise pre-1979 insurance records using the latest technology was initiated during the year. Over 4.3 million microfilm images of records have been captured and the necessary software to access this data installed. When the project is completed it will lead to easier and faster access to these records, administrative savings and improved customer service.

Mailshot

As part of an ongoing commitment to improve customer service, Client Eligibility Services sent a Mailshot to customers who appeared to have a deficiency in the number of their insurance contributions. The Mailshot went to 20,000 of the insured population and enquiries were received from 1,028 customers representing 5.1%

of the total. There were 458 enquiries relating to PRSI contributions, 79 regarding credits and 491 miscellaneous enquiries, all of which were dealt with to the satisfaction of the customer.

Information Systems

Information and Communication Technology

The bulk of the effort in the IS Division is focused on maintenance of the Department's production environment (i.e. ensuring that payments are accurate and issued on time to the correct clients, while also ensuring that the infrastructure supporting this is maintained, extended and operated securely).

The IS Division has been working on a new platform and new systems design approach for the last few years and implemented the first of its new type of applications in 2002 with the introduction of its Expressive Object Architecture (EOA) to support its new Service Delivery Model (SDM).

In addition, e-Government initiatives have meant that a growing amount of resources are being consumed in supporting the Department's role as custodian of the Personal Public Services (PPS) number and Public Services Identity (PSI). This has involved support for other agencies in their use of the number and related data as well as significant involvement in the Reach programme.



Social Welfare Local Office, Bishop Square, Dublin



chapter 4

Human Resources

Annual Report 2002

Chapter 4

Human Resources

GOAL

To develop the capacity of the organisation and a culture of pride, innovation and performance, with a high level of involvement and participation by staff at all levels and where capabilities are fostered and encouraged.

OBJECTIVES

There are four main objectives in the Human Resource Management area:

- 1 Ensure that Human Resource Management supports the achievement of our strategic and business objectives.*
- 2 Provide a positive working environment where there is equality of opportunity for all employees in the areas of personal career development and advancement.*
- 3 Re-orientate the Human Resource Management function to support the devolution of responsibility for the day-to-day management of human resources issues to line management.*
- 4 Strengthen and extend the Partnership process across the organisation.*

The Department employs more than 4,850 staff and, therefore, continues to be one of the largest employers in the Civil Service. The average number of posts occupied during the year was 4,442.

During 2002, the turnover of staff in the Department was significantly less by comparison with the previous couple of years. 241 employees joined the Department, of which 118 were new recruits into the Civil Service. 116 of the Department's staff were promoted, either internally or through interdepartmental competition.

223 employees left the Department during 2002, including 71 who transferred to other Government Departments on promotion and 74 who moved on lateral transfer, 20 staff retired and 36 staff resigned.

Career Opportunities

During the year 27 Civil Service competitions were administered by Personnel Branch. In addition to Civil Service competitions, 11 competitions for internal promotions were held. Approximately 15 schemes which provided opportunities for career advancement and development were processed during 2002 including an Anglo-Irish Exchange Scheme, Research Fellowships in Trinity College and opportunities to work in other European countries.

Family Friendly Measures

In 2002 a wider range of attendance patterns was introduced, as provided for under the Civil Service Worksharing Scheme. As well as the former attendance patterns (e.g. split week, week on/week off, mornings or afternoons only), the new Worksharing scheme includes 4 day week, 3 day week, 3 weeks on/1 week off and daily attendance of 9.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m.

The most popular option proved to be the 4 day week, which was introduced in March 2002. In 2002 as a whole, a total of 167 staff availed of this option. The 3 day week and 3 weeks on/1 week off option were introduced from November 2002. A total of 18 staff availed of the 3 day week in 2002 and 11 staff opted for the 3 weeks on/1 week off option in 2002. At the end of the year a total of 910 staff were availing of worksharing arrangements.

Term Time

Term Time was introduced in 1998 as a pilot scheme and the number of applications is increasing every year. There were 356 applications for Term Time in 2002 (an increase of 32% on 2001). 331 (92%) of the applicants were female and 341 (95%) availed of the scheme for child minding purposes. 14 applications were refused for business reasons and 38 withdrew from the scheme. 243 temporary Clerical Officers were hired to cover Term Time and 156 staff members received Higher Duty Allowances.

Human Resources Strategy

During the year a Human Resources Policy Unit was established to develop a range of Human Resource Management policies and oversee the implementation of centrally agreed policies. The Unit's key objective during the year was to co-ordinate the production of the Department's Human Resources Strategy for the period 2003-2005. The purpose of our HR Strategy is to bring together our various HR policies, integrate them within the overall organisational strategy and, therefore, place Human Resources at the centre of the Department's decision making.

The Strategy, which will be published in 2003, has been prepared following an extensive consultation programme across the Department, including the Partnership process and having regard for best practice in other organisations.

Equality of Opportunity

The Equality/Diversity aspects of Human Resource Management now require a particular focus, in light of the equality legislation of recent years and the development of specific Civil Service policies in this area. In response to the Civil Service Gender Equality Policy, the Department is preparing a Gender Equality Action Plan which will cover the period 2003-2005. It will set out a series of actions aimed at further progressing gender equality within the Department's overall HR Strategy. The Plan will be finalised in 2003.

During the year the Civil Service Equality of Opportunity (Diversity) Policy was launched. This Policy covers the other eight potential grounds of discrimination (i.e. besides gender) that are set out in the equality legislation. The provisions of this Policy have informed the development of the Human Resources Strategy 2003-2005.

In line with these Gender and Diversity Policies, the Department is developing a range of initiatives aimed at increasing staff awareness of equality issues as they apply across the broad HR agenda.

Employee Assistance Service

The Employee Assistance Service has an important role in HR management. It enables the Department to respond appropriately to situations that may involve employees with personal difficulties and, more broadly, provides an employee support service.

Developments in the Service during 2002 included the appointment of an additional Employee Assistance Officer to be based in Limerick with responsibility for the South-West, South and parts of the West, Midlands and South-East. In addition, a commitment was also given to appointing a further Employee Assistance Officer to be based in Dublin with shared responsibility for Dublin, the North-East and parts of the Midlands.

These additional posts are intended to develop the existing service making it more locally accessible and in line with the Department's commitment to the welfare of its employees.

Human Resource Management System

The current Human Resource Management System was implemented in DSFA in 2000 following a joint project with Revenue and CMOD, (Department of Finance) to identify and procure/develop a suitable HRM System for the Civil Service. As part of the development of common systems in Personnel areas in the Civil Service an upgraded version of the system became available in 2002 and is being adopted as the Civil Service standard system, with implementation underway in some 30 Departments and Offices at present.

The objectives of the upgrade are to:

- Allow the Department to adopt the Civil Service standard system
- Enable Personnel Branch to work more effectively and to improve current standards of service and administrative efficiency
- Support the devolution of certain Human Resource Management functions to line management
- Enable Personnel Branch to meet the HR commitments of the Public Service Modernisation Programme, the HR Strategy 2003-2005 and the Internal Customer Service Plan
- Enable Personnel Branch, as the custodians of an information source, to support the development of other Department initiatives i.e. Management Information Framework.

Performance Management and Development System (PMDS)

The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness identified effective management of performance at all levels as one of its key objectives. PMDS gives the civil service the framework that defines how we can advance towards improved performance, greater job satisfaction and better service.

Resources

The implementation of PMDS is a major project which requires the commitment of significant resources – funding, training and development, management time and staff commitment.

During 2002 four extra trainers were appointed to assist with the delivery of training to some 2,950 staff represented by the Civil & Public Service Union (CPSU). This brought the complement of trainers to 20, located throughout the country.

Evaluation

The implementation of PMDS is being evaluated on an ongoing basis through staff questionnaires and workshops held with staff representatives.

Training, Development and Education Resources

The organisation of the training resources within the Department reflects the significant staffing numbers (some 4,850) and the wide geographical spread of offices. Staff Development Unit, based in Dublin, is the central training unit with a staff of twenty-four but works with and supports the staff of the training units in decentralised headquarters buildings and a network of 57 Local Office Trainers based throughout the country. A separate IT Training Unit (ITDDU) is responsible for the training needs of IS Division staff and liaises with SDU as required. Training in the roll-out of PMDS is managed separately under a PMDS Project Manager and, during 2002, the number of trainers delivering PMDS training was increased to 23 to deliver the roll-out of training to Staff Officer and Clerical Officer grades who commenced Phase 1 PMDS training.

The annual training budget allocation for 2002 was €2.61 million, of which €1 million was delegated to Principal Officers for use in accessing external training courses in areas which the Department does not have the expertise or resources to provide. The training budget also covers funding for special training projects and the Fees Refund Scheme.

Training Services Supplied

An updated Training, Development and Education Directory was published in 2002 with details of all courses supplied by Staff Development Unit as well as



Staff at the closing of Victoria Street Local Office, which moved to Bishop Square

the material available through the Learning Centre for self-managed learning (i.e. CD Roms, books and videos). To assist people in completing their PMDS Personal Development and Training Plan, both formal courses and self-managed learning options outlined in the Directory are linked to the relevant PMDS Competencies.

SDU offer a broad range of courses under the headings of Induction, Customer Service Interpersonal Skills, Manager Development and Computer and PC Training. In addition, specialised training is provided for particular roles within the organisation (e.g. Service Officers, Local Office Managers and staff, Inspectors and Information Officers) and for particular business needs. The unit also actively promotes and supports staff in the provision of on-the-job training and coaching and is working on identifying mechanisms to record and recognise training of this nature.

Three issues of the Department's new training magazine – 'Training Matters' – were published during 2002, updating staff on training plans and initiatives around the Department.

PMDS Personal Development and Training Plans

PMDS Personal Development and Training Plans are the primary mechanism of submitting training requests to SDU. During 2002, SDU received 548 Year 1 Personal Development and Training Plans including 160 from CPSU grades. At the end of 2002, SDU had received 1915 forms since the commencement of PMDS. During 2002, SDU also received 128 annual review forms. 62 Year 2 plans were also received in SDU during 2002. The challenge for Staff Development Unit is to ensure that all training plans are recorded on the computerised HRM system and to deliver training solutions to the needs identified through PMDS.

Training Provided

During 2002, 2563 staff attended a total of 323 SDU training courses involving 3225 mandays. Courses delivered include Induction, Management Development, Interpersonal Skills, Writing Skills and Computer and PC Training. In addition, specialised training was provided for particular roles within the organisation (e.g. Service Officers and Inspectors) and for particular business needs.

Training Strategy

The draft Training and Development Strategy was progressed during 2002. This strategy has been prepared in the context of the wider HR Strategy and will define the scope and responsibility of training and development

in the Department for the next three years (2003-2005). It establishes a framework within which training plans can be developed and outlines the environment and influences that will affect the training function in the future. The Strategy is being developed in consultation with the Partnership Committees, and, in late 2002, a presentation was made to the Partnership Steering Committee, the first of a series of consultations to Partnership which will continue with the regional committees in early 2003. It is anticipated that the Strategy will be finalised and circulated to each staff member by end April 2003.

Training Structures in the Department

During 2002, a training consultative committee was established to examine the training structures within the Department with a view to ensuring the most effective operational arrangements. The initial brief of this group was to examine the role of the Local Office Trainer and Regional Training Administrator.

New Training Facilities

New training rooms were officially opened by the Minister, Mary Coughlan TD, on October 30th 2002 which comprises facilities for SDU and the Training Unit for the General Benefits Branch.

ECDL

Staff Development Unit was successfully awarded ECDL test centre status for our new PC Training facility and a number of SDU PC trainers are now qualified as ECDL testers. SDU can offer ECDL testing to Departmental staff where they have completed the modules of ECDL training by self-managed learning (including refund of fees scheme) or by use of the external training budget.

Learning Centre

During 2002, SDU has continued to cater for self-managed learning needs through its Learning Centre facility. 960 requests were received for material such as CD ROMs, books and videos on topics relating to personal and interpersonal effectiveness, managing for results, thinking style and problem solving. Life Skills material (e.g. parenting skills, coping with bereavement, addiction awareness) was added to the resources in 2002.

In addition to this, the Learning Centre has also launched an internal website for all HQ staff which contains 150 CD ROM courses.

To publicise the wide range of facilities offered by the Learning Centre, information sessions were held by SDU staff in offices nationwide.

Refund of Fees

For the academic year 2002/2003 there are 211 staff members availing of the Refund of Fees scheme. This includes 13 people pursuing Masters Degrees (in Strategic Management, Public Management, European Law, Internet System, Philosophy, Psychology and Sociology) and 124 pursuing courses in core study areas which include Social Policy, Human Resource Management, Public Administration, Financial Management, Information Technology (including ECDL) and Irish Language. This also includes funding for short courses of 16 weeks duration or less e.g. ECDL which is being pursued by 59 people.

Irish Language Training Programme

Proposals for Irish language training were accepted from two providers to deliver two specialised Irish language training programmes in 2003. The first programme will be delivered in Dublin to staff in General Benefits Section, Information Section and Client Identity Services Section. The second programme will be delivered in Donegal to staff from the Social Welfare Services Office in Longford and staff from Social Welfare Local Offices, Inspectors and Job Facilitators in the Western and North Western region. The main objective of the training is to equip front-line staff to deliver a quality customer service through Irish.

Customer Service Training Programme

During 2002, Staff Development Unit delivered Comments and Complaints training to Local Office Trainers who rolled-out this training to staff in the Local Offices. SDU also delivered this training to headquarters sections.

Dealing with Difficult Customers

A new course entitled Dealing With Difficult Customers was delivered by SDU with the assistance of Health and Safety Unit in 2002. The course was designed in SDU as a result of requests from Partnership groups. The course is aimed at helping front line and other staff who have to deal with potentially difficult situations as they present to them.

Action Learning

A new programme of Action Learning commenced in 2002, with over 100 participants at HEO and AP level and including, for the first time, a group of eight Principal Officers.

Internal Customer Service

Our internal customer service plan, 2001-2004 emphasises the importance that the Department

places on ensuring that good external and good internal customer service share the same qualities – e.g. timeliness, courtesy, accuracy, etc.

Under our Partnership process, an internal customer service Monitoring Committee commenced its work in 2002. The Monitoring Committee:

- (a) records internal customer service commitments as identified in the business plans of all areas of the Department;
- (b) monitors progress on the internal customer service commitments made by areas in the Internal Customer Service Plan;
- (c) reports on a regular basis to the Department's partnership steering committee; and,
- (d) communicates all initiatives to the staff in the Department.

OBJECTIVE

The Objective of the Partnership approach in the Civil Service is to ensure that, through consultation and the participation and co-operation of all concerned, there is common ownership by management, unions and staff of the development and implementation of action programmes for change and a participative approach to resolving issues.

Partnership

The effective delivery of our services and management of our work requires a partnership approach between management, unions and staff, and is a key element of our modernisation programme. 2002 saw the continued development of Partnership in the Department. The Steering Committee, which is chaired by the Secretary-General, is supported by 5 Regional Committees and 34 local committees.

The 5 Regional Committees consist of the Central, Dublin North, Dublin South, North & West and Southern. The areas they cover are:



Staff at the closing of Werburgh Street Local Office, which moved to Bishop Square

- **Central Regional Partnership**
North Eastern Region, Midlands Region and Longford Decentralised Office
 - **Dublin South Regional Partnership**
Dublin South Region, Headquarter buildings, Kildare and Wicklow
 - **Dublin North Regional Partnership**
Dublin North Region and Headquarter buildings
 - **North and West Regional Partnership**
North West Region, Western Region, Decentralised Offices in Sligo and Letterkenny
 - **Southern Regional Partnership**
South East Region, Southern Region, Mid West Region and Waterford Decentralised Office.
- The Steering Committee met on five occasions during the year; key issues addressed and progressed include:
- **PPF Performance Indicators for the Civil Service Quality Assurance Group**
Payment of the third phase of the PPF increase of 4% was dependent on all Government Department's and Offices meeting agreed performance indicators. The Steering Committee agreed the indicators for this Department.
 - **Internal Customer Service Plan 2001-2004**
The Steering Committee established a Monitoring Committee, to monitor commitments of areas outlined in the ICS Plan 2001-2004. The Committee is comprised of 10 members, who are representative of grade, job title and location across the Department.

- **Statement of Strategy**

The Steering Committee considered the Department's Statement of Strategy 2003-2005, 'Promoting a Caring Society'. One of the Department's key values and guiding principles is to recognise that the effective delivery of services and management of our work requires a partnership approach with staff and staff unions and associations.

It also considered and agreed the Department's new Human Resource Strategy and the soon to be published Training and Development Strategy.

- **Evaluation of Partnership in the Department**

The Department's Partnership process has now been in existence since May 1998, and the Steering Committee considered it timely to evaluate the process. This commenced in 2002 with an audit of Partnership activity across the Department. The Department's external partnership facilitator conducted a process review of the Steering, five Regional and four Local Partnership Committees. This process review allows the committee to assess its activity in terms of process and assists the committee to identify and where possible undermine potential or actual difficulties. The results of this will feed into the internal review, which is expected to be completed by end 2003.

The Department remains committed to strengthening and developing the Partnership process in the Department and its statutory agencies.



chapter 5

Financial Management and
Organisational Issues

Annual Report 2002

Chapter 5

Financial Management and Organisational Issues

OBJECTIVE

To operate Financial Management systems of the highest quality.

Management Information Framework (MIF)

The report 'Delivering Better Government', which outlined the programme for change for the Irish civil service under the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI), identified the need to improve financial management systems in order to ensure the achievement of best value for money. One of the key elements in the reform process is the development of a Management Information Framework (MIF).

As part of its MIF implementation agenda, the Department is engaged in a major development programme that is aimed at developing a comprehensive management information system integrated with output and outcome measurement. This, when operating in tandem with the Department's existing accounting and financial reporting systems, will enhance performance measurement and accountability, encourage value for money approaches and improve the quality of resource allocation and decision making by managers.

Stage 1 of the Management Information Framework (MIF) project was initiated and completed in the Department in 2001.

Following on from this, it was agreed to carry out a pilot project in three areas of the Department – Human Resources Division, Old Age (Non-Contributory) Pension Scheme in PSO and the South-East Region of the Department.

Work on the Pilot was completed in September 2002 and the contents of the Final Report on the Pilot which included a revised Implementation Plan was accepted by the MIF Project Board in October 2002.

It is expected that elements of the revised MIF Implementation Plan will be progressed during 2003.

DSFA Audit Committee

As an integral part of the ongoing systematic review of the corporate governance processes within the Department, the DSFA Audit Committee's role is to oversee and advise on matters relating to the Department's business control and risk management environment; to the operations and development of its internal audit function and to the Department's relationship with its external auditors.

During the year, the Department and its Internal Audit Unit benefitted significantly from the advice and support that it received from the DSFA Audit Committee, which met on four occasions during 2002 and which consists of five persons, three of whom (including the Chairperson) are external to DSFA.

Central Overpayments and Debt Management Unit

The Central Overpayments and Debt Management Unit was established in June 2002. It is responsible for recording, analysing and reporting details of all overpayments which arise on Social Welfare schemes as well as details of moneys recovered. The unit provides accounting data for the Appropriation Account and the Social Insurance Fund Account. It aims to ensure that debt management practices across the organisation are consistent and it monitors overpayment and recovery data.

During 2002, work continued on the new Central Overpayments & Debt Management (CODM) Project. This is a major project with implications for all of the Department's payment systems with which it will have to link.

The unit undertook a series of regional workshops during the latter part of 2002. The aim of the workshops was to provide an opportunity for local debt management staff to raise issues of concern and to discuss matters of common interest. The workshops have generated much useful material, which will be examined by the CODM Project Team.

Overpayments recorded in 2002, broken down by scheme type, are set out in the following Table.

2002 Overpayments By Scheme Type

Overpayments	Cases	Value €
Unemployment	29,641	11,182,781
One-Parent Families	599	3,161,674
Pensions	3,577	10,213,535
Illness	2,496	1,967,942
Child Benefit	1,422	1,051,742.25
FIS/Preta	678	624,425
Other	215	533,697
Total	38,628	28,735,796

2002 Overpayment Recoveries By Scheme Type

Recoveries	*Cases	Value €
Unemployment	54,069	5,514,704
One-Parent Families	3,873	367,645
Pensions	5,622	7,390,601
Illness	5,349	839,600
Child Benefit	1,173	480,221
FIS/Preta	2,403	405,535
Other	351	92,450
Total	72,840	15,090,756

*The actual number of cases is in fact higher than stated here, as the values shown in the table include sums recovered in respect of cases which had not been identified by year end.

The Table above gives a breakdown of overpayment recoveries, broken down by scheme type, for 2002. Most overpayments are recovered in instalments over a period of years, rather than in a single lump sum. The bulk of recoveries in any one year will relate to overpayments which came to light in previous years.

Change Management Fund

The Change Management Fund, managed by the Department of Finance, supports Departments/Offices in their efforts to implement, in an effective and co-ordinated manner, the strategic change agenda under the SMI programme of modernisation.

In 2002, the Department received some €977,000 from the Fund for a number of key projects – i.e. the Performance Management and Development System, the Management Information Framework, the Donegal Integration Project and our anti-discrimination awareness training courses for staff.



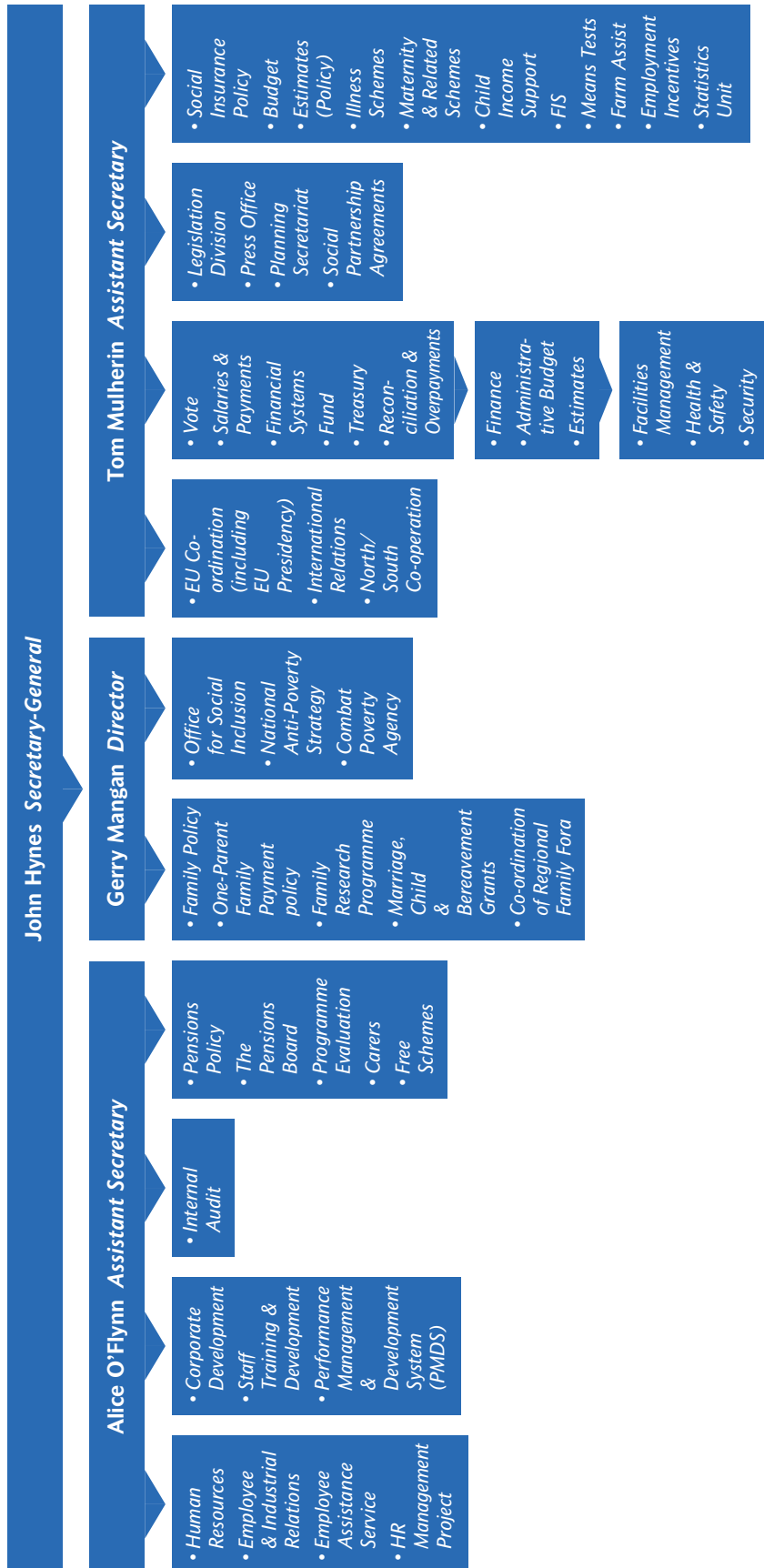


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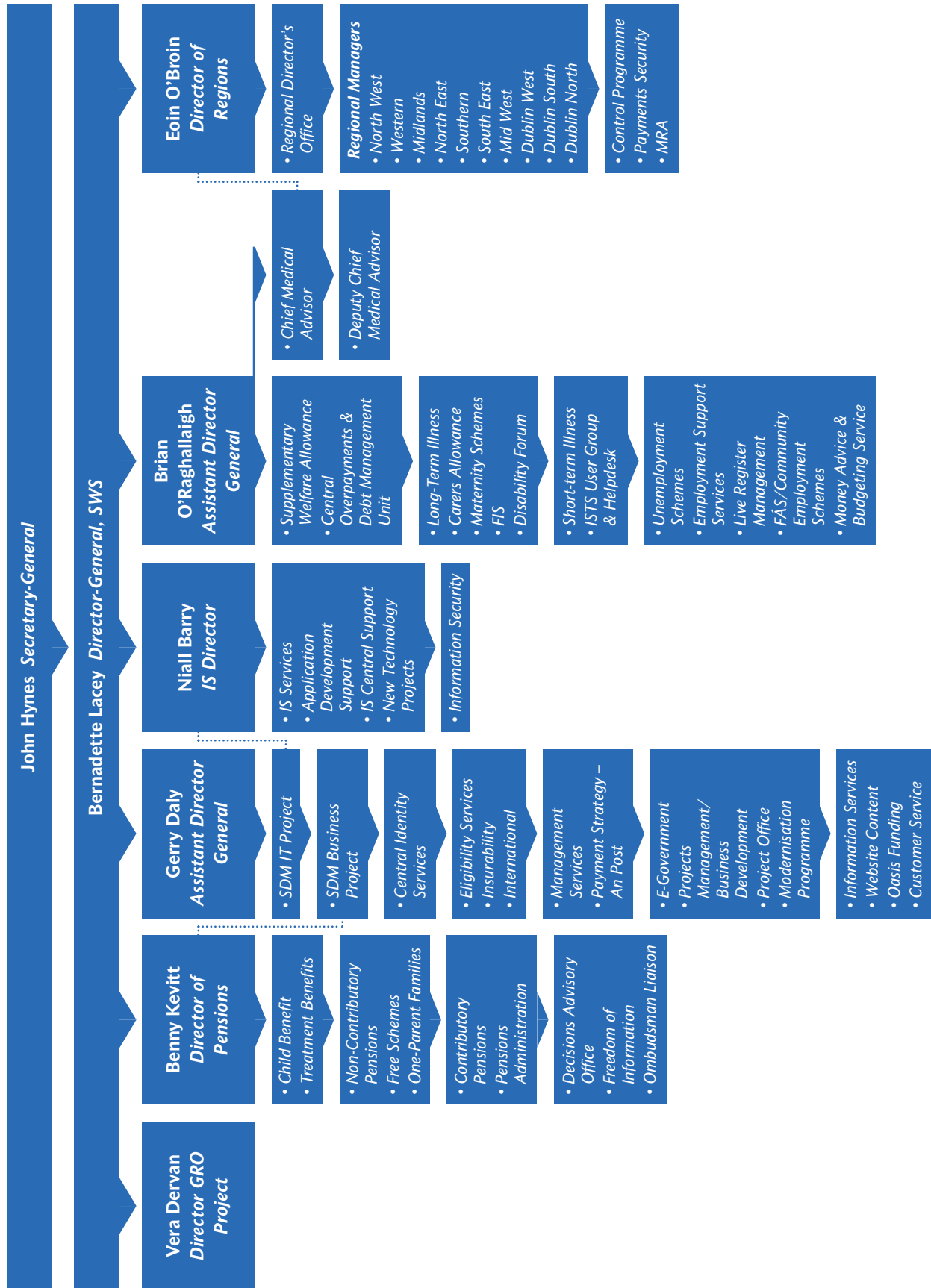
Appendix 1

Organisation Structure – Aireacht



Appendix 1

Organisation Structure – Executive



Appendix 2

Expenditure on Social Welfare by Payment Type, 2001 and 2002

Type of Payment	2001 €000	2002 Provisional €000	Change %
Old Age (Contributory) Pension	716,563	868,647	21.2%
Retirement Pension	697,432	803,383	15.2%
Old Age (Non-Contributory) Pension	490,718	537,308	9.5%
Pre-Retirement Allowance	82,774	87,028	5.1%
Total Old Age	1,987,487	2,296,366	15.5%
Widow/er's (Contributory) Pension	672,959	761,489	13.2%
Widow/er's (Non-Contributory) Pension	107,164	116,493	8.7%
Deserted Wife's Benefit	84,877	88,167	3.9%
Deserted Wife's Allowance	9,179	10,238	11.5%
Prisoner's Wife's Allowance	13	12	-7.7%
One-Parent Family Payment	537,376	613,035	14.1%
Widowed Parent Grant (Contributory)	1,312	2,932	123.5%
Widowed Parent Grant (Non-Contributory)	80	113	41.3%
Total Widows, Widowers and One-Parent Families	1,412,960	1,592,479	12.7%
Maternity Benefit	78,933	99,128	25.6%
Health and Safety Benefit	210	218	3.8%
Adoptive Benefit	260	578	122.3%
Orphan's (Contributory) Allowance	9,447	11,619	23.0%
Orphan's (Non-Contributory) Pension	4,421	4,494	1.7%
Child Benefit	964,847	1,462,793	51.6%
Total Child Related Payments	1,058,118	1,578,830	49.2%

Type of Payment	2001 €000	2002 Provisional €000	Change %
Disability Benefit	329,897	385,352	16.8%
Invalidity Pension	354,459	403,611	13.9%
Injury Benefit	10,872	11,842	8.9%
Disablement Benefit	54,342	59,393	9.3%
Death Benefit	5,055	5,558	10.0%
Disability Allowance	332,308	407,585	22.7%
Medical Care	227	225	-0.9%
Carer's Allowance	130,325	160,042	22.8%
Carer's Benefit	2,457	5,776	135.1%
Bereavement Grant	12,577	12,223	-2.8%
Blind Pension	13,156	14,221	8.1%
Total Illness, Disability and Caring	1,245,675	1,465,828	17.7%
Unemployment Benefit	290,689	423,461	45.7%
Unemployment Assistance	429,875	511,985	19.1%
Total Unemployment Supports	720,564	935,446	29.8%
Family Income Supplement	37,099	42,423	14.4%
Employment Support Services	195,955	168,134	-14.2%
Farm Assist	50,650	58,571	15.6%
Total Employment Supports	283,704	269,128	-5.1%
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	363,576	484,929	33.4%
Total Supplementary Welfare Allowance	363,576	484,929	33.4%

Type of Payment	2001 €000	2002 Provisional €000	Change %
Treatment Benefits	56,505	60,803	7.6%
Rent Allowance	736	666	-9.5%
Free Schemes	240,994	296,043	22.8%
Miscellaneous	64,352	57,422	-10.8%
Equal Treatment – Insurance payments	56	17	-69.6%
Equal Treatment – Assistance payments	-	-	0.0%
Redundancy and Insolvency ⁽¹⁾	33,404	61,618	84.5%
Total Miscellaneous Payments and Grants	396,047	476,569	20.3%
Administration - Insurance Schemes	158,910	177,458	11.7%
Administration - Assistance Schemes	215,838	242,636	12.4%
Total Administration	374,748	420,094	12.1%
Grand Total	7,842,878	9,519,669	21.4%

⁽¹⁾ These schemes are administered by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

Appendix 3

Legislation Enacted in 2002

During 2002, 29 Statutory Instruments were produced by the Department.

A brief description of each instrument follows.

SI No. 18 of 2002

Occupational Pension Schemes (Revaluation) Regulations, 2002

This Regulation provides for a revaluation percentage of 4% for 2001.

SI No. 119 of 2002

Social Welfare (Consolidated Supplementary Welfare Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations, 2002

These Regulations provide for an increase from £75 (€95.23) to €120 in the amount of weekly earnings from employment of a rehabilitative nature disregarded in the assessment of means for the purposes of Supplementary Welfare Allowance, with effect from 1 April 2002.

SI No. 120 of 2002

Social Welfare (Consolidated Payments Provisions) (Amendment) (Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations, 2002

These Regulations give effect to a number of social welfare improvements provided for in Budget 2002. These include:

- increase in the weekly income disregarded for the purposes of determining entitlement to Carer's Allowance, which amount to €191 for single people and €382 in the case of married people;
- increase from £75 (€95.23) to €120 (€94.51) in the disregard applicable to earnings from rehabilitative employment in the case of Disability Allowance and Blind Pension;
- increase from £75 (€95.23) to €120 (€94.51) in the disregard applicable to income from self-employment of a rehabilitative nature in the case of Disability Allowance; and
- extension of the Sale of Residence provisions to cases where the pensioner disposes of his or her main residence for the purposes of residing with a person in receipt of Carer's Benefit or Allowance where the

recipient is the pensioner's carer, or where the pensioner moves to reside in sheltered housing funded under the Capital Assistance Scheme operated by the Department of Environment and Local Government.

SI No. 121 of 2002

Social Welfare (Rent Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations, 2002

These Regulations provide for increases in the minimum rent for the purposes of the Rent Allowance scheme for people affected by the decontrol of Rents. These Regulations take effect from the first week in April 2002.

SI No. 132 of 2002

Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2002 (Sections 14, 15 And 16) (Commencement) Order, 2002

This Order provides for the commencement of Sections 14, 15 and certain provisions of Section 16 of the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2002 with effect from 11 April 2002.

Section 14 provides for amendments to Sections 14 and 20 of the Principal Act. Firstly, it will allow the Revenue Commissioners to off-set repayment of taxes against outstanding liabilities for PRSI. Secondly, it allows the Revenue Commissioners to publish details of tax defaulters on whom a fine or penalty has been imposed by the Courts.

Section 15 provides for an improvement to the entitlement conditions for Carer's Benefit in the case of certain job-sharers and part-time workers. This amendment provides that the number of hours of employment which a person is required to work during the 13 weeks immediately prior to claiming Carer's Benefit will be reduced from 19 to 17 hours per week or from 38 to 34 hours per fortnight.

This Order also provides for the commencement of Part 2 of the Schedule to Section 16 of the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2002.

Part 2 of the Schedule provides for amendments to the Charities Act 1961 regarding the abolition of the financial limit in the application by the Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests of a gift Cy-prés.

Cy-prés applies where the intention of a testator in a charitable trust is substituted by another mode because the original intention cannot be executed.

It also provides the Commissioners with the power to authorise a lease rather than a disposition of land held on charitable trust where a power of sale was not provided for in the original gift.

SI No. 268 of 2002

Social Welfare (Consolidated Contributions And Insurability) (Amendment) (Refunds) Regulations, 2002

Where a separated person makes an enforceable maintenance payment, PRSI is levied at the point at which it is earned as part of the person's earnings/income and also as income in the hands of the receiving spouse. Section 23 of the Social Welfare Act, 2000 provided for the return of social insurance contributions in certain circumstances to the maintenance payer.

The Social Welfare (Consolidated Contributions and Insurability) (Amendment) (No. 3) (Refunds) Regulations, 2001 outlines the circumstances in which a return of contributions is made and the basis for calculating the amount of PRSI contribution to be returned. This Regulation substitutes those provisions to provide for changes consequent on the removal of the PRSI ceiling for the self-employed.

The Regulations provide that the refund due to a self-employed person who pays maintenance will be the amount of maintenance multiplied by the rate of self-employment PRSI (Class S) paid. In the case of a person who, in the contribution year in question, is both an employed contributor and a self-employed contributor, the amount of refund due will firstly be calculated in respect of his or her reckonable earnings as an employed contributor and subject to the employee PRSI ceiling and any balance will be refunded at the self-employed rate.

SI No. 276 of 2002

Pensions (Amendment) Act, 2002 (Part I and Section 6, 9 to 12, 15 to 28, 30 to 36, 40, 44, 50 to 55 and 59) (Commencement) Order, 2002

This Order brings into effect the provisions of Part I and Sections 6, 9 to 12, 15 to 28, 30 to 36, 40, 44, 50 to 55 and 59 of the Pensions (Amendment) Act, 2002.

SI No. 277 of 2002

Occupational Pension Schemes (Preservation of Benefits) (Special Calculations) Regulations, 2002

These Regulations, which revoke and replace the Occupational Pension Schemes (Preservation of Benefits) (Special Calculations) Regulations, 1993 (SI No. 217 of 1993), provide for the calculation of the preserved benefit entitlements of members who have completed periods of reckonable service in more than one scheme relating to the same employment. It was necessary to revoke and replace SI No. 217 of 1993 as a consequence of the preservation of Part III of the Pensions Act, 1990 (by Chapter 3, Part 4 of the Pensions (Amendment) Act, 2002).

SI No. 278 of 2002

Occupational Pension Schemes (Funding Standard) (Amendment) Regulations, 2002

These Regulations, which arise, mainly, out of amendments to the funding standard in Part IV of the Pensions Act, 1990 (by Chapter 4, of the Pensions (Amendment) Act, 2002) amend the Occupational Pension Schemes (Funding Standard) Regulations, 1993 (SI 419 of 1993).

The Regulations:

- provide for new forms of actuarial funding certificates in line with amendments to the funding standard, and
- change the percentages of self-investments and concentration of investment, which must be excluded for the purpose of meeting the funding standard (these changes are reflected in the note above in relation to SI 419 of 1993).

SI No. 279 of 2002

Occupational Pension Schemes (Preservation of Benefits) Regulations, 2002

These Regulations revoke and replace the Occupational Pension Schemes (Preservation of Benefits) Regulations, 1992 (SI No. 445 of 1992) as amended by the Occupational Pension Schemes (Preservation of Benefits) (Amendment) Regulations, 2000 (SI 262 of 2000). It was necessary to revoke and replace SI 445 of 1992 as a consequence of the extension of the preservation provisions of Part III of the Pensions Act, 1990 (by Chapter 3, Part 4 of the Pensions (Amendment) Act, 2002).

SI No. 332 of 2002**Social Welfare (Consolidated Payments Provisions) (Amendment) (No. 1) (Qualified Child) Regulations, 2002**

The Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2002 provided for the extension of increases in respect of short-term social welfare payments for dependent children up to the end of June following the child's 18th birthday where he or she is in full-time education.

These Regulations specify the circumstances under which a child who reaches the age of 18 years is to be regarded as attending a full-time day course of study, instruction or training at an institution of education.

The Regulations provide that a child will be regarded as attending a full-time day course while he or she is attending a full-time day course of study, instruction or training other than a course provided or approved by FÁS with the exception of Youthreach or where the course forms part of work experience or arises from employment.

The Regulations also provide that a student who reaches 18 in the summer term vacation between academic years, except where he or she has completed the final part of second level education, will continue to be regarded as attending school and, where appropriate, the parent(s) will continue to receive the Child Dependent Increase up to the June of the following year.

SI No. 354 of 2002**Social Welfare (Rent Allowance) (Amendment) (No. 1) Regulations, 2002**

These Regulations provide for the continuation of entitlement to Rent Allowance to successor tenants for whom the protection of the 1982 Housing Act ceases on 26 July 2002. Article 6 amends the scope of the current Regulations to include cases where (1) the amount of rent applicable on 25 July 2002 continues to apply or (2) where the amount of rent has been set by the Circuit Court under the Landlord and Tenant (Amendment) Act, 1980.

These Regulations also provide for increases in the amount of means which are subject to a 50% taper for the purposes of the Rent Allowance scheme with effect from 26 July 2002. In the case of a married person the amount is increased by €187 (to €461.10) per week and in the case of a single person by €193 (to €347.30) per week.

SI No. 412 of 2002**Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2002 (Section 16) (Commencement) Order, 2002**

This Order provides for the commencement of certain provisions of Section 16 of the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2002 in relation to the amendment of the Combat Poverty Agency Act, 1986 and the Family Law (Maintenance of Spouses and Children) Act, 1976 with effect from 9 August 2002.

The amendment to the Combat Poverty Agency Act provides for the payment of fees and certain expenses to members of the Combat Poverty Agency.

The amendment to the Family Law (Maintenance of Spouses and Children) Act 1976 provides that a Court can Order that periodical maintenance payments awarded under the Act, commence at any time from the date of the original application for the maintenance Order. This in effect allows the Court to back-date the maintenance Order to the date the proceedings commenced or at any time during the intervening period.

SI No. 461 of 2002**Social Welfare (Consolidated Payments Provisions) (Amendment) (No. 2) (Means Assessment) Regulations, 2002**

Social Welfare legislation provides for Regulations to assess certain non-cash benefits in relation to certain means tested schemes.

Regulations currently provide for the assessment of the non-cash benefit of the housing costs of a beneficiary which are paid by a liable relative in so far as they exceed a certain amount per annum for the purposes of the One-Parent Family Payment Scheme.

These Regulations provide for the inclusion of the non-cash benefit of Direct Provision Accommodation, as provided under a scheme operated by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in the assessment of means for the purposes of the One-Parent Family Payment Scheme.

The net cash value of such meals, accommodation and related services, where no charge is made for the service, may now be assessed as means against the qualified parent with effect from 17 September 2002.

SI No. 480 of 2002**Social Welfare (Transitional Arrangements) (Alignment Of Income Tax Year With Calendar Year) Regulations, 2002**

Regulations currently provide for the preservation of entitlement to social insurance-based benefits, consequent on the alignment of the income tax and calendar years with effect from 1 January 2002.

These Regulations provide for a change in the calculation of the yearly average test used for the purpose of determining entitlement to Retirement Pension, Old Age (Contributory) Pension & Widows(ers) Pensions for people who attained the age of 66 years between 1 January 2002 and 5 April 2002.

In such cases the yearly average test may be satisfied on the basis of contributions paid or credited up to the end of the second last complete contribution year before attaining pensionable age if this is more favourable.

SI No. 481 of 2002**Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2002 (Section 16) (Commencement) (No. 2) Order, 2002**

This Order provides for the commencement of Section 16 of the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2002, in so far as it relates to the amendment of Section 1 of the Registration of Births Act, 1996 with effect from 17 October, 2002.

The amendment to Section 1 of the Registration of Births Act, 1996 allows for the re-registration of a child's surname at the joint request of both parents.

SI No. 497 of 2002**Social Welfare (Temporary Provisions) Regulations, 2002**

These Regulations provide for the payment of a Christmas Bonus to long-term social welfare recipients, equivalent to 100% of their normal weekly payments, subject to a minimum payment of €30.

The bonus payment applies to recipients of:

- Disablement Pension,
- Death Benefit by way of pension,
- Old Age (Contributory and Non-Contributory) Pension,
- Retirement Pension,
- Invalidity Pension,
- Widow's and Widower's (Non-Contributory) Pension,
- Widow's and Widower's (Contributory) Pension,
- Orphan's (Contributory and Non-Contributory) Pension,
- Pre-Retirement Allowance,
- Blind Pension,
- Carer's Allowance,
- One-parent Family Payment,
- Relevant payments under Section 18(1) of the Social Welfare Act, 1996 (formerly Deserted Wife's Benefit and Allowance and Prisoner's Wife's Allowance),
- Unemployment Assistance at the long-term rate,
- Disability Allowance and
- Farm Assist.

SI No. 501 of 2002**Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (Disclosure) Regulations, 2002**

These Regulations govern the disclosure of information to be made by or on behalf of a PRSA provider both prior to the conclusion of a PRSA contract and at specified times after a PRSA contract has been concluded. Section 111 of the Pensions Act, 1990 as amended by the Pensions (Amendment) Act, 2002, provides for the issue of a Preliminary Disclosure Certificate (PDC) to specify, inter alia, the level of benefits which the person could reasonably expect to receive. The PDC must issue prior to the conclusion of a PRSA contract. Section 112 provides for a Statement of Reasonable Projection to be issued at conclusion of the contract and annually, containing more specific information as to the projected level of benefits. These Regulations provide for the form, content and the manner of preparation of those forms. Section 113(4) of the Pensions Act provides that a PRSA provider cannot accept a transfer of funds from an occupational pension scheme unless a Certificate of Comparison and Written Statement has been issued to the contributor. The certificate sets out the reasons why such a transfer is or is not in the interest of the person wishing to make such a transfer. These Regulations prescribe the form and content and the manner of preparation of the certificate and the statement. Section 113 also provides that the person preparing such certificates for statements must have a professional indemnity insurance, the amount of which is set in these Regulations at €1,000,000 per claim.

SI No. 502 of 2002**Pensions (Amendment) Act, 2002 (Section 3 (in so far as it relates to the insertion of Section 91 to 120 into the Pensions Act, 1990) and Sections 4, 7, 13, 14, 38, 56 and 57) (Commencement) Order, 2002**

Section 3 of the Pensions (Amendment) Act, 2002 provides for the insertion in the Pensions Act, 1990 of a new Part X which sets out the framework for the Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (PRSAs). This Order provides for the commencement of Sections 91 to 120 of that Part X. This Order also brings into force Section 4 of the Pensions (Amendment) Act, which amends the Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997 to provide for the introduction of the new PRSAs. Section 7, 13, 14, 38, 56 and 57 which are also brought into force by this Order, provide for amendments to other Sections of the Pensions Act to reflect the arrangements for the new PRSAs.

SI No. 503 of 2002**Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (Operational Requirements)**

These Regulations prescribe the information which must be furnished to the Pensions Board by a PRSA provider, detailing the information to be contained in:

- the Report and the Return required under Section 99 of the Pensions Act, 1990 relating to the database of statistics to be maintained by the Board, and
- an Annual Report to be delivered by a PRSA provider to the Pensions Board.

The Regulations also provide for:

- delivery to the Pensions Board of the Audited Accounts of a PRSA provider;
- the requirements to be compiled with in relation to the Default Investment Strategy;
- the periods within which the determination and certificate of a PRSA actuary required Section 119 must be made and the matters to which the determination should relate.

The Regulations also empower the Pensions Board to impose conditions or requirements on a PRSA provider in respect of advertising of PRSA products.

SI No. 506 of 2002**Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (Fees) Regulations, 2002**

Section 96 of the Pensions Act, 1990 provides for the payment of a fee by an applicant for approval of a PRSA product. Section 117(5) of the Pensions Act, 1990 provides for the payment of an annual fee by a PRSA provider. These Regulations contain the detailed provisions in relation to the amount of these fees and the time of payment.

SI No. 527 of 2002**Social Welfare (Consolidated Supplementary Welfare Allowance) (Amendment) (No.1) Regulations, 2002**

These Regulations provide for the continuation until 31 December 2003 of the current levels of maximum rent, as determined by the Health Boards, in respect of which rent supplement is paid. They also provide that rent supplement shall not be payable where the level of rent paid exceeds the relevant maximum level determined by the health board.

SI No. 609 of 2002**Pensions (Amendment) Act, 2002, (Certain Sections) (Commencement) Order, 2002**

This Order provides for the commencement of certain provisions of the Pensions (Amendment) Act, 2002 as follows:

This Order provides that Section 41 of the Pensions (Amendment) Act, 2002, comes into operation on 1 January 2003. Section 41 inserts a new Section (58A) into the Pensions Act 1990 the effect of which is to require employers to remit certain contributions in respect of schemes within a specified time limit. The Order also provides that Section 42, in so far as it inserts Section 59 (1) in to the Pensions Act, 1990 come into operation on 1 January 2003. Section 59(1) amends the existing Section 59 by inserting an additional requirement that contributions received by trustees must be invested within 10 days of receipt. It also implements Article 5 of the Mobility Directive by providing that trustees must make arrangements to pay benefits, net of taxes and transaction charges, in any Member State.

SI No. 610 of 2002**Occupational Pensions Scheme (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations, 2002**

Section 25 of the Pensions Act 1990 provides for the payment of annual fees by occupational pension schemes to the Pensions Board. These Regulations provide for increases in the level of fees with effect from 1 January 2003.

SI No. 611 of 2002**Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (Functions of Pensions Board) Regulations, 2002**

These Regulations prescribe the information to be contained on the register in relation to PRSA providers and PRSA products which the Pensions Board must keep under Section 117(1)(a) of the Pensions Act, 1990. The Regulations also prescribe the information to be contained on the database of statistics to be maintained by the Pensions Board under Section 117(1)(b) of the Pensions Act, 1990. The Regulations require the Pensions Board, from time to time, to monitor a PRSA provider's promotional material as the Pensions Board sees fit and also prescribes the material for the purposes of Section 117(4) of the Pensions Act, 1990.

SI No. 628 of 2002**Social Welfare (Occupational Injuries) (Amendment) Regulations, 2002**

The Social Welfare Act, 2002 provides for increases in the maximum rates of benefits payable under the Occupational Injuries Benefits Scheme arising from the Budget. These Regulations provide for increases in the reduced rates of the following Occupational Injuries benefits:

- in respect of Disablement Gratuities appropriate to degrees of disablement assessed at 19% or less with effect from 30 December 2002,
- in respect of Disablement Pension payable in lieu of such Gratuities, with effect from 3 January 2003, and
- in respect of Injury Benefit payable to persons under the age of sixteen with effect from 30 December 2002.

SI No. 629 of 2002**Social Welfare (Rent Allowance) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations, 2002**

These Regulations provide for increases in the amount of means disregarded for people affected by the decontrol of rents and the minimum rent for the purposes of the Rent Allowance scheme with effect from 2 January 2003.

SI No. 630 of 2002

Social Welfare (Consolidated Supplementary Welfare Allowance) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations, 2002

These Regulations provide for a number of changes to the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme. They provide for:

- an increase in the maximum amount of Rent Supplement payable to tenants in voluntary housing developments funded through the local authority Capital Assistance scheme as announced in Budget 2003. The maximum amounts are being increased to €40.00 (from €36.82) for a single person and to €45.00 (from €39.36) in any case where the claimant is a spouse,
- an increase from €10 to €23 in the amount of pension income disregarded for the purposes of Rent and Mortgage Interest Supplement, and
- an increase in the minimum contribution payable by a recipient of Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement. The minimum contribution is being increased from €7.62 to €12.

These amendments are effective from the first week in January 2003.

SI No. 631 of 2002

Social Welfare (Consolidated Payments Provisions) (Amendment) (No. 3) (Increase In Rates) Regulations, 2002

The Social Welfare Act, 2002 provides for increases in the maximum rates of social insurance payments arising from Budget 2003.

These Regulations provide for increases in the reduced rates of Disability Benefit, Unemployment Benefit, Health and Safety Benefit, Old Age (Contributory) Pension, Retirement Pension, Widow's and Widower's (Contributory) Pension, Deserted Wife's Benefit, and also provides for increases in the rates of tapered increases in respect of Qualified Adults. All of these increases are effective from the first week in January 2003.

The Regulations also provide for increases in the minimum weekly rate of Maternity Benefit and Adoptive Benefit with effect from January 2003.

Appendix 4

Ministers in Charge of the Department Since 1947

	From	To
James Ryan	22 January 1947	18 February 1948
William Norton	18 February 1948	14 June 1951
James Ryan	14 June 1951	2 June 1954
Brendan Corish	2 June 1954	20 March 1957
Patrick Smyth	20 March 1957	27 November 1957
Sean McEntee	27 November 1957	24 June 1959
Sean McEntee	24 June 1959	12 October 1961
Kevin Boland	12 October 1961	21 April 1965
Kevin Boland	21 April 1965	16 November 1966
Joseph Brennan	16 November 1966	2 July 1969
Kevin Boland	2 July 1969	6 May 1970
Joseph Brennan	6 May 1970	14 March 1973
Brendan Corish	14 March 1973	5 July 1977
Charles J Haughey	5 July 1977	12 December 1979
Michael Woods	12 December 1979	30 June 1981
Eileen Desmond	30 June 1981	9 March 1982
Michael Woods	9 March 1982	14 December 1982
Barry Desmond	14 December 1982	14 February 1986
Gemma Hussey	14 February 1986	10 March 1987
Michael Woods	10 March 1987	18 July 1989
Michael Woods	18 July 1989	13 November 1991
Brendan Daly	13 November 1991	11 February 1992
Charlie McCreevy	11 February 1992	12 January 1993
Michael Woods	12 January 1993	15 December 1994
Proinsias De Rossa	15 December 1994	26 June 1997
Dermot Ahern	26 June 1997	17 June 2002
Mary Coughlan	17 June 2002	