



ALMOST 7,000 PEOPLE SUCCESSFULLY APPEAL
SOCIAL WELFARE DECISIONS IN 2002 –
MINISTER MARY COUGHLAN

Mary Coughlan, Minister for Social and Family Affairs, today announced publication of the Annual Report of the Social Welfare Appeals Office, 2002. Minister Coughlan welcomed the continued commitment of the Office to providing an accessible and independent review mechanism for people who wish to appeal against decisions made by the Department in regard to entitlement to benefit.

Commenting on the report, Minister Coughlan said: “I am pleased to read the very positive findings of the Report. The fall of over 6% in the number of appeals received, and the increase by 800 of the number of appeals processed during the year, reflects the hard work and customer focus not only of the Appeals Office, but also of the whole Department”.

While every effort is made by the Department to deliver entitlements to people in accordance with the legislation it is understandable that not everyone will agree with the decisions made on their claims. In 2002 some 15,000 people made appeals



to the Social Welfare Appeals Office. 12% of these appeals were subsequently withdrawn and the results of the rest of the appeals broke down equally between "allowed" and "disallowed" outcomes for the appellants.

ENDS July 6th 2003

NOTE FOR NEWS EDITORS

* The Social Welfare Appeals Office is an independent office operating under the auspices of the Minister for Social and Family Affairs. It is based in D'Olier House, D'Olier St.

* The Office deals with appeals on decisions made in regard to entitlement to benefits provided under the Social Welfare Acts and questions regarding the insurability of employment. It also provides an appeals service to the Health Boards in relation to questions pertaining to Supplementary Welfare Allowance.

* The broad categories of the illness and unemployment schemes attract the most appeals reflecting the fact that they are the ones with the highest volumes and turnover of claims.



* Appeals can be decided summarily but of the cases determined by Appeals Officers some 58% were dealt with by way of oral hearing. Such hearings are held at over 70 venues nationwide.

*The time taken to process appeals is under constant review and during 2002 the number on hand was reduced by 800 during the year, down from 6,900 to 6,100 in the course of the twelve months. The Office is continuing to focus on appeals clearance times.

* The Office processed nearly 22,000 appeals in 2002 - 15,017 new appeals and a carry-over of 6,973 from the previous year.

* 1,836 appeals were withdrawn, 3854 were given the benefit of a revised decision by the Deciding officers in the Department of Social and Family Affairs and 10,144 were decided by Appeals Officers.

* Part of the appeals procedure is a review by the Deciding Officer, who made the original decision, prior to making his or her submission to the Appeals Officer in relation to the appeals case. Frequently new evidence becomes available in the course of an appeal and a revised decision is warranted. There were 3854 such revisions in 2002.



* 11.6% of appeals were withdrawn, 24.3% were revised by Deciding Officers, 21.5% were allowed, fully or partly, by Appeals Officers who also disallowed the remaining 43.6%.

* In 2002 it took an average of almost 23 weeks to dispose of an appeal. However, many cases require longer times due to legal matters, medical considerations, additional investigations etc. If the 25% of longest cases are disregarded the average falls to 15 weeks. [The appeals system is a quasi-judicial one and due process must be followed. There is very limited scope for fast-tracking cases.]

* The 2002 Report includes a brief commentary on 13 appeals cases to give an illustration of the type and range of appeals dealt with.