



Office of the
Refugee Applications Commissioner
Corporate Plan 2004-2008

Planning for the future



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Foreword by Refugee Applications Commissioner



I am pleased to introduce the Corporate Plan for the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) for the period 2004 to 2008.

This Corporate Plan – the first for ORAC – has been developed with a view to this Office leading the way forward as both a high quality asylum determination agency and a high quality public service office. It was developed through broad consultation. As part of its formulation, I invited the Centre for Management and Organisation Development (CMOD) to carry out an examination of current procedures, practices and structures within the Office in order to align resources to maximise efficiency and effectiveness.

There has been widespread consultation with staff at all levels both through the CMOD review itself, the business planning process and also through the Partnership process. The consultative process involving staff, representative groups and other state agencies and organisations involved in the asylum process will continue to be an integral part of our business into the future. The knowledge gained from such consultation is of vital importance in shaping our future direction.

The targets we have set ourselves for the duration of the Plan are practical, ambitious and challenging. Our aim is to be a much more efficient, effective, responsive and professional organisation. During the lifetime of the Plan I look forward to working to improve the standard of service we provide. I believe we are well placed to do this. I am confident that with the continuing commitment and dedication of staff we can achieve our objectives and become a more professional organisation in every respect throughout the challenging years ahead.

One of the challenges recently presented for the civil service as a whole is the Government's announcement of decentralisation. ORAC has been identified as one of the organisations involved in the decentralisation programme which, while at a very early stage of implementation, will require flexibility and responsiveness.

This Plan provides us with a template for excellence which we will continue to monitor, review and adjust, if necessary, to ensure its continued relevance.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to everyone involved for their contribution to the preparation of this Plan.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Berenice O'Neill". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Berenice O'Neill
Commissioner

The Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner was established on 20 November, 2000, as an independent Office to consider applications for refugee status and family reunification and to make recommendations to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on whether such status should be granted.

Our first challenge was the successful transition from the previous administrative regime to the new statutory basis. In the short time since establishment we have shown that we are a progressive and responsive organisation. We have made dramatic progress and serious inroads have been made into the backlog of cases that were on hands. There has also been a considerable reduction in the waiting times for interviews and recommendations. We have operated throughout in a constantly changing environment and at this juncture it is appropriate that we take steps to ensure our systems and processes are both flexible and responsive to meet future requirements. It is timely then for the Office to take a look at what we have put in place and to decide on future priorities.

While we have made considerable progress to date, we must continue to ensure that we are in a position to respond effectively to future challenges. We also need to ensure that we all have a common view of where the organisation will be in 5 years time and to plan ahead for that period. Such planning requires that we formulate a vision for the organisation and that we identify the components of that vision. We also need to set out our key objectives for the period and the necessary actions

required to achieve those objectives. Of course, there are external influences that also need to be taken into consideration. We cannot accurately predict the numbers of applications (or their countries of origin) which we are likely to receive over the period. Neither can we be certain of the resources that will be available to us. Legislation is also likely to change as work continues on the European Directives increasing harmonisation of asylum processing systems within the EU.

This 5 year Plan, when implemented, should transform the organisation and how we operate. It has been developed with a view to the Office leading the way forward as a highly professional organisation committed to providing high quality asylum determinations. It is also something we want to do with a view to creating an even better place to work where people feel they have a voice and that their individual contribution is valued.

We will continue to focus on developing and delivering the service that meets the expectations and needs of our stakeholders. We will need to be proactive, focusing on excellence, ensuring that processes and procedures are more streamlined and that we have all the necessary legal and organisational skills which will allow us develop an organisation capable of fulfilling its statutory role into the long term.

Finally, this Plan will continue to be reviewed to ensure its relevance to the context within which we operate and our effectiveness as a public service.

The focus of this 5 year Corporate Plan will be:

to deliver high quality refugee status determination through an organisation committed to continual improvement where people are valued.

Its main themes will be:

- **Efficiency and Effectiveness in the Decision-making Process**
- **Quality Customer Service**
- **Effective Communications**
- **Development of Human Resource Management**
- **Effective Use of Information Technology**

The Plan will be elaborated and implemented through strategy statements and business plans with progress reviewed and reported on in our annual reports. It will be guided by our mission statement, goals and key values.

The mission of the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner is:

- (i) to investigate applications from persons seeking a declaration for refugee status and to issue appropriate recommendations to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform; and
- (ii) to investigate applications by refugees to allow family members to enter and reside in the State and report to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on such applications

and in so doing, to provide a high quality service to our customers through the implementation of policies and procedures which are fair and open, treating all applicants with courtesy and sensitivity.

To deliver this mission ORAC seeks to:

- investigate applications for refugee status and for family reunification within minimum time frames;
- develop the highest standard of investigation and decision-making;
- contribute to the preservation of the integrity of the asylum process; and
- manage our organisation and its resources efficiently and effectively having particular regard to the development of our staff and the delivery of quality customer services.

The key values which guide our work are:

- Independence
- Fairness
- Firmness
- Serving key stakeholders
- Commitment to staff
- Commitment to excellence
- Openness
- Efficiency in the use of resources

Efficiency and Effectiveness in the Decision-making Process

The most vital business of ORAC is decision-making in respect of refugee applications. Service delivery both in quantitative and qualitative terms is the central organisational challenge.

The Office needs to be target-driven and, above all, needs to ensure maximum efficiency in the use of its resources. ORAC must respond flexibly to new application trends. Targets in annual business plans should stretch the organisation, units and individuals to optimum levels of performance; levels recognised by our peers and, more importantly, our customers.

During the lifetime of this Plan, ORAC will:

- Ensure maximum efficiency in the use of processing resources with a view to finalising cases within minimum time frames.
- Develop and implement formal systems of Quality Assurance for the asylum process in order to guarantee, in a structured way, the quality of the investigation and determination process.

Quality Customer Service

Quality Customer Service is a fundamental core value of this Office. During the life of this Plan we aim to achieve a customer service culture driven by staff who have an attention to detail and commitment to excellence.

A commitment to Quality Customer Service is required by each member of staff in the organisation whether front-line dealing with external customers or support dealing with internal customers.

In addition to complying with the Principles of Quality Customer Service adopted by the Government in July, 2000, we will continue to review Customer Service in this organisation and introduce improvements where it is deemed necessary. Consultation with customers is a key element in identifying areas for improvement.

During the lifetime of this Plan, ORAC will:

- Aim to achieve a customer service culture throughout the organisation, founded on an informed assessment of customer needs and driven by staff commitment to excellence.
- Ensure service delivery consistent with best equality practice and responsive to the needs of a wide and ethnically diverse customer base.

Effective Communications

ORAC management has placed much emphasis on communications, in particular, communications with external customers and stakeholders. However, a recent review of ORAC conducted by CMOD identified deficits in the internal communications systems in place.

In addressing workplace change and the management and organisation culture needed, ORAC recognises that good communications are central to the achievement of ORAC's vision. Good internal communications will ensure that all staff know and understand corporate aims and objectives as well as their personal role in their attainment.

As a public body, ORAC recognises the importance of external communications both in the context of its transparency and responsiveness to stakeholders and to the delivery of public services of a high standard.

Communications, whether for internal or external purposes should be clear, focussed, timely, resourced and sustained. Effective communications will benefit not only those with whom we interact but also the learning culture of ORAC.

During the lifetime of this Plan, ORAC will:

- Ensure comprehensive and effective communication within the organisation.
- Optimise levels of communication with external agencies and ensure a consistent approach to such communication.

Development of Human Resource Management

ORAC currently has a staffing complement of 281. The development of the appropriate management and leadership skills and capabilities and fostering behaviours that facilitate organisational change are critical. The underlying objective of our HRM Strategy will be to build long-term capacity for the organisation and to help us to anticipate and adapt to change. We must ensure that we set and achieve high standards of service; use resources effectively; innovate and improve; and develop the most effective means of service delivery. It is our staff, their skills, knowledge, capabilities and efforts which will enable this Office to achieve the vision for our organisation.

During the lifetime of this Plan, ORAC will:

- Develop a strategic approach to human resource management aimed at ensuring the availability of well trained and motivated staff required to meet business needs; and the flexibility to deploy people to best effect.

Effective Use of Information Technology

Like all organisations processing large volumes of transactions, modern computer-based information systems have become a central component in managing this organisation's information and communications flows. In 2002, a High Level Information Management and Information Technology Strategic Plan was produced by Accenture Consulting for the wider asylum and immigration area, including ORAC. Among the Strategy's key recommendations was the development of a new integrated case management system to replace the existing *Asylum Management Live* system which no longer adequately supports the business requirements of the asylum services and is unable to provide essential management information and statistics.

This Office will play a lead role in the development of this new system which will have increased functionality, will facilitate appropriate data exchanges across the asylum area and will provide the required statistical and management information.

While the impact of decentralisation on public service ICT services is not yet clear, ORAC will respond, as necessary, to any demands generated by this programme.

During the lifetime of this Plan, ORAC will:

- Improve business processes effectiveness and integration through the strategic and effective use of information and communications technology.

Implementation

The Corporate Plan will be implemented in accordance with the principles of good corporate governance and best practice in the fields in question. Strategic objectives, actions and time frames will be incorporated in strategy statements and business plans.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation of the Plan will proceed at unit and corporate level and will aim to:

- Provide information which may indicate required changes in strategy.
- Inform priority actions and plan for subsequent strategies.

A comprehensive evaluation of the Plan will be conducted as its life-span draws to a conclusion.

Reporting

Progress on implementing the Plan will be reported internally through management and partnership structures and externally in ORAC's Annual Report to enable:

- Developments to be recorded and reviewed.
- Removal of obstacles to progress where identified.
- Revision of priorities or action time frames where required.
- Comment and input from stakeholders.



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