



Office of the
Refugee Applications Commissioner

Strategy Statement 2004-2006





Strategy Statement 2004-2006



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Foreword by the Refugee Applications Commissioner



I am pleased to present the first Strategy Statement for the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner.

This Strategy Statement was developed using a partnership approach and involving consultation with all our stakeholders. It provides the Office with operational focus over the next three years. It outlines clear goals and objectives over that period and describes the strategies for their achievement.

Since its establishment on a statutory basis in 2000, the Office has demonstrated that it is both a progressive and responsive organisation. The significant reduction in average processing time while delivering a quality service is one of our important achievements.

This Strategy Statement has been prepared at a time of great change, both in our organisation and in our environment. We are committed to the programme of change as identified in the Civil Service Modernisation Programme and, in particular to the strategies contained in *Sustaining Progress*. The decentralisation programme will pose further challenges for us, which I am confident we will meet and manage effectively. Through a partnership approach, and within the framework of a 5 year Corporate Plan, we will develop and implement a Human Resource Management Strategy, a Communications Strategy, and an IT Strategy. We will continue to develop our service provision to ensure the highest standards of investigation and decision-making while taking into account the needs of our diverse customer base.

Realisation of the goals and objectives in this Strategy Statement is critically dependent on the staff of the Office. I wish to acknowledge their commitment and professionalism and I look forward with confidence to their continued support as we work together over the coming strategy period.

I would also like to acknowledge the co-operation of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the Reception and Integration Agency, the Refugee Appeals Tribunal, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) representation in Ireland and other agencies and organisations involved in the asylum process.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Berenice O'Neill". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Berenice O'Neill
Commissioner

Mission Statement

The mission of the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) 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.

Key Values

The key values that guide the work of the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner are:

Independence

Independence of process and decision-making.

Fairness

Fair and transparent procedures which are notified to applicants, where possible, in a language they understand, and which are available to all interested parties. The Office is focused on designing, implementing and managing fair and transparent procedures.

Firmness

Firmness in implementing statutory obligations.

Serving key stakeholders

Commitment to service to applicants and other stakeholders.

Commitment to staff

Recognising and demonstrating that staff are the most valuable resource of the Office and fostering an environment in which they can work effectively and develop their potential for the benefit of the Office specifically and their careers generally. Our staff must be enabled to operate in a knowledge intensive environment, which requires an in-depth understanding of a wide range of complex legal, cultural and human issues.

Commitment to excellence

Performing work to a standard that will ensure high quality outputs.

Openness

Demonstrating accountability for our actions through transparent procedures.

Efficiency in the use of available resources

Ensuring efficiency in the use of available resources without compromising quality.

In holding all of these values, it is critical to maintain flexibility in both our structures and strategies so that we can respond appropriately to changing demands.



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Introduction



Our Mandate

The Commissioner derives her mandate from the Refugee Act, 1996 and is statutorily independent in the exercise of her functions.

The functions of the Refugee Applications Commissioner, as required by the Refugee Act, 1996, are of a statutory and non-statutory nature.

The key statutory responsibilities are:

- to investigate applications from those who seek a declaration for refugee status and to issue appropriate recommendations to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on such applications, and
- 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.

It is also the Commissioner's responsibility to issue Temporary Residence Certificates to asylum seekers; to comply with any ministerial directives under the Act concerning the prioritisation of certain categories of applicant; to direct the presentation of the Commissioner's case to the Refugee Appeals Tribunal where recommendations made by the Commissioner are appealed to the Tribunal; and to furnish to the Refugee Appeals Tribunal, the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) such information as they consider necessary for the purpose of their functions under the Act. While ultimately responsible for fulfilling these statutory functions under the Act, the Commissioner may delegate these functions to any member of her staff.

The Commissioner also has non-statutory functions. These include ensuring that all applications for asylum at first stage are treated and processed in a fair, courteous and efficient manner; issuing directives on the practical application of the Refugee Act, 1996 and procedures and standards of work; ensuring that adequate information on countries of origin of asylum seekers and international jurisprudence and practice in the area of asylum is available to fulfil the remit of the Office; participating in international fora on asylum related matters; staff performance, training and development; dealing with press queries; preparation and management of the budget and business plan.

Our Strategy Statement

On its inception in November, 2000, the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) developed a Strategic Framework Document which set out the goals, stakeholders, environment, critical success factors and outcomes applicable to the organisation. During its first three years of operation, the Office faced many challenges, including:

- setting up and operating as an independent agency;
- putting in place comprehensive procedures to implement new asylum legislation;
- managing the considerable organisation change as the Office doubled in size; and
- dealing with a backlog of approximately 9400 applications awaiting a decision at 20 November, 2000 together with processing an increased number of new applications.

The Office responded to those challenges and has processed to completion over 36000 applications in the three years in question.

While many of the issues identified in the Strategic Framework still apply, our processes have become more streamlined and our planning functions have developed considerably. Therefore, it is now timely for this Office to produce its first comprehensive Strategy Statement.

This Statement maps a course through the years 2004-2006 to build on the achievements of the Office to date. Coming within the framework of the 5 year Corporate Plan, our Strategy will be supported by annual business plans and customer service action plans, and progress will be reviewed in annual reports. Furthermore, the Strategy and its implementation will be subject to ongoing review to ensure its responsiveness and relevance to our legislative and business environment.

Statement Structure

The Statement sets out four high level goals which will guide us over the next three years and the objectives and associated strategies and indicators against which progress can be judged.

Part 2 of the Statement provides an analysis of our policy and working environment and sets out three High Level Goals covering the operational areas of the Office, while Part 3 focuses on our business support and customer strategies.

Consultation

This Strategy Statement has been informed by wide-ranging consultations held within the Office and with representatives of our stakeholders.

Implementation and Review

The implementation of this Strategy Statement is relevant to all staff in ORAC. It will be reflected in our business planning process and service delivery. At unit level, business plans will contain annual action programmes to implement strategies and achieve goals and will provide for regular reviews of progress throughout the year. At individual level, the business plans will be used as a basis for role profiles in the Performance Management and Development System. Progress in achieving our stated goals will be set out in the Annual Report which the Commissioner presents to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

Critical Success Factors

The following factors have been identified as being critical in determining our ability to achieve our goals and objectives:

- **Sufficient resources and appropriately trained staff**

The availability of suitably trained staff to complete the work without compromising quality is fundamental to the achievement of targets.

- **The support of our staff and our support of them**

Well trained, committed and motivated staff are central to the successful delivery of services.

- **Strong independent status**

True independence guaranteed by statutory provisions is important for the effective working of the Office.

- **Access to information**

Appropriate information on the countries of origin of asylum seekers, international reports and relevant jurisprudence is essential for the evaluation of applications for a declaration for refugee status.

- **Standards, systems, procedures and work practices**

The work of the Office must be organised and based on the application of the highest professional standards and practices for the performance and management of the work with clear guidance and good communication structures.

- **Information and communications technology**

Maximising the application of information and communications technology is key to the efficient discharge of the functions of the Office.

- **Co-operation of applicants and legal representatives**

Timely and complete responses from asylum applicants and their legal representatives.

- **Liaison with other Government agencies and offices**

Effective and co-ordinated liaison with other agencies providing services to asylum applicants is important to the effective working of the Office.

Staffing and Structure

At the end of 2003 there were 274 staff working in the Office which is structured around the following 14 Units:

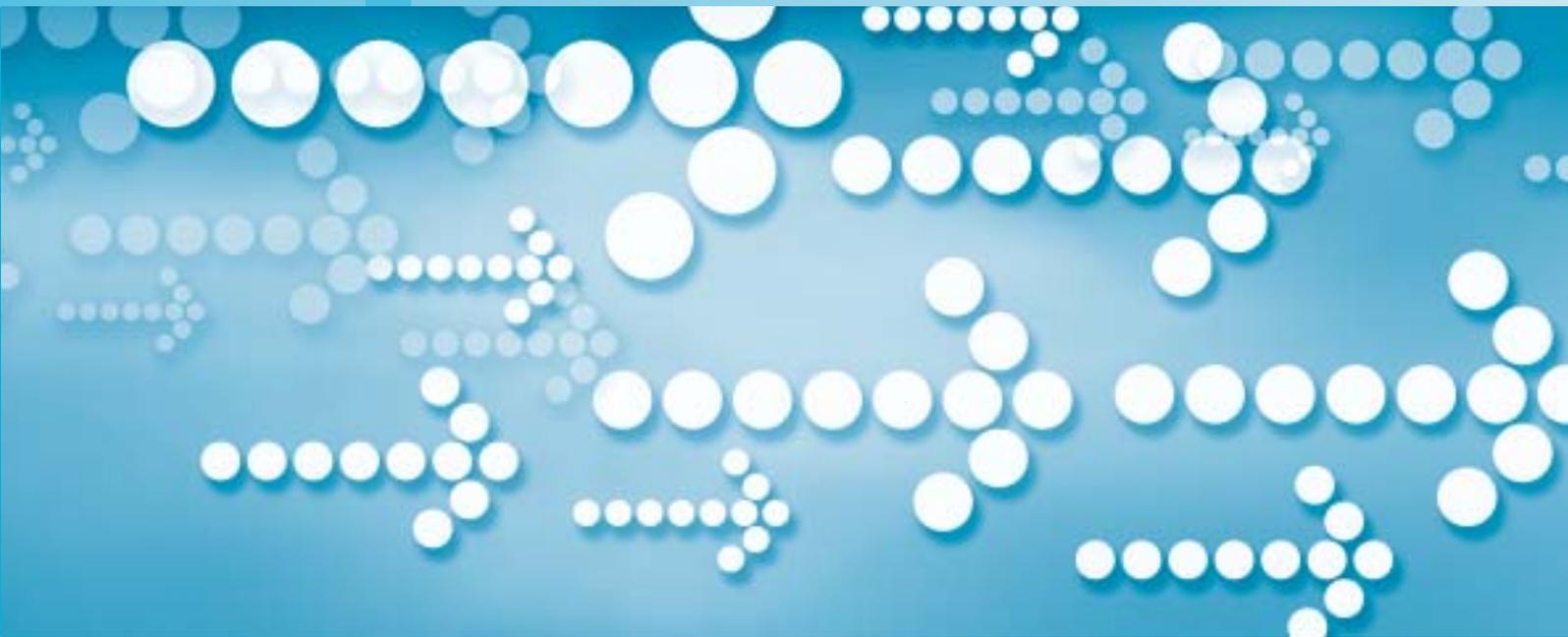
- Customer Service
- Reception
- Scheduling
- Dublin Unit
- Case Processing
- Family Reunification
- Policy and Procedures
- COI/RSD Support¹
- Judicial Review
- Presenting
- Corporate Office
- Human Resources
- Organisation/Finance
- IT/Management Information

¹ Country of Origin Information and Refugee Status Determination Support.



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Policy and Working Environment and HLGs 1-3



Overview

This Strategy has been framed in the context of the changing environment in which we operate. Both national and international developments directly affect the work of this Office, as do economic and social factors such as migration patterns into and within Europe. These issues and the national and global economic environment impact on the volume and type of applications with which we deal. In this context, it is necessary to be able to adapt quickly to changing demands. Some of the main factors affecting our organisation and environment are set out below.

Diversity, Scale and Complexity

The fact that around 130 countries are represented in our applicant population creates its own challenges for the Office. The considerable cultural and language diversity among our applicants, raises ongoing communication issues as well as issues related to interpretation and translation to and from a large number of languages. Added to this is the challenge posed by the complexity of each individual application for asylum, coupled with the volume of applications received by the Office each year. The unpredictability of the number or origin of applicants to this Office in the next three years will provide an ongoing test of the flexibility and versatility of the organisation.

Legislative Environment

Legislation in the asylum area is still evolving in Ireland and is likely to change during the period of this Strategy. This will require flexibility in our systems and procedures. Legislative developments, including those which arise as a result of the EU directives on asylum, currently under negotiation, could come into effect during the term of the Strategy and this Office must be in a position to respond to any ensuing changes in the asylum determination process.

Jurisprudence

Emerging jurisprudence from both High Court and Supreme Court judgements will require appropriate responses from ORAC.

Liaison with other Agencies

In formulating and developing policies and procedures to support the objectives of this Strategy, we will continue to have regard to the issues raised during ongoing consultations with our stakeholders. The relationship between ORAC and its customers is key to the delivery of a high quality service and our strategy in this regard is detailed in the Customer Service Action Plan which is subject to ongoing review. (See Appendix 2 – ORAC's Main Contact Organisations and Appendix 3 – Cross Agency Issues involving ORAC.)

High Level Goal 1

To investigate applications for refugee status and for family reunification within minimum time frames.

Policy and Working Environment

Between 1992 and 1996, applications for asylum in Ireland increased from 39 to 1179. While the Refugee Act, 1996 was passed in June 1996, it was not brought fully into operation until 20 November, 2000. It became clear in 1997 that the structures provided for in the Act would be incapable of dealing effectively with the volume of applications being received. The Act was commenced on a phased basis, with section 24(1) and sections 1, 2, 5, 22 and 25 taking effect from October, 1996 and August, 1997, respectively. The Act was commenced in full on 20 November, 2000, establishing the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) as an independent statutory office to (a) consider

applications for a declaration for refugee status at first instance and to make recommendations to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on whether such status should be granted and (b) prepare reports on applications from those granted refugee status who subsequently seek permission for family members to enter and reside in the State.

On 20 November, 2000, approximately 9400 applicants were awaiting decision at first stage. Of those, 3242 related to applications made prior to the year 2000. Since then, the Office received 30991 applications and processed over 36072 up to 31 December, 2003.

The high number of cases completed has resulted in significant inroads being made into the backlog of applications which this Office inherited. At 31 December, 2003 the number of cases outstanding had been reduced to 4554 with very few applications outstanding prior to 2003.

Following the introduction of Ministerial prioritisation directives in September and December, 2003, an applicant from a prioritised country will now typically receive a recommendation within 5-6 weeks of making an initial application. While overall average processing times have improved, this development, together with vacancies for trained caseworkers has meant that processing times for non-prioritised cases can now be in the region of 8 months following application. Nonetheless, it remains ORAC's objective over the course of this three year strategy period to be able to complete such cases within 6 months.

HLG 1 Objective No 1
To achieve optimum productivity in processing applications for a declaration for refugee status and for family reunification, within minimum time frames and in the order of priority designated by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

Strategies to Support Objective

- Process all new compliant prioritised cases within 6 weeks of initial application and endeavour to reduce processing times for other (non-prioritised) compliant cases to within 6 months or less, predicated on having all sanctioned staff in place and fully trained.
- Prepare, implement and review annual business plans with a strong focus on outputs.
- Apply a scheduling policy to make use of interviewer availability in order to maximise the number of interviews completed.
- Develop processes and procedures to effectively implement the directives of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform relating to the priorities of applications being processed.
- Streamline the processes to deepen quality and improve productivity in processing applications.
- Monitor and review processes to ensure that planned outcomes are achieved.
- Support Case Processing Unit through the provision of training, accessible country of origin information and policy guidelines.
- Maximise the application of information technology.
- Liaise with other countries and agencies to achieve effective implementation of the Dublin Convention and Dublin II Regulation (the legal instruments which set out the criteria for determining the country responsible for processing applications).

Performance Indicators

- Processing times.
- Extent to which interviewer availability is fully utilised as evidenced by monthly reports.
- Efficient and easily accessible Country of Origin Information (COI) systems in place.
- Identification of Dublin Convention and Dublin II Regulation cases and obtaining agreement to transfer within prescribed time frames.
- Compliance with Minister's priority directives.

HLG 1 Objective No 2

Address fully and effectively amendments to the Refugee Act.

Amendments to the Refugee Act, 1996 have recently been passed by the Houses of the Oireachtas and our processes and procedures have been amended to give effect to those provisions which impact on the work of ORAC. In the event of further legislative amendments during the period of this Strategy Statement, this Office will adapt its processes and procedures to ensure that we respond appropriately and effectively.

Strategies to Support Objective

- Inform staff about the legislative amendments and particularly those with direct implications for this Office.
- Put in place appropriate mechanisms to ensure a relevant response to the legislation.
- Provide appropriate training to facilitate efficient and effective implementation of further legislative changes as they occur.

Performance Indicators

- The effective response to the legislative amendments by way of changes in processes and/or procedures within the dates set by legislation.

High Level Goal 2

To develop the highest standard of investigation and decision-making.

Policy and Working Environment

The focus of the Office since its establishment has been the successful transition from an administrative to a statutory basis for the assessment of applications for a declaration for refugee status and the introduction of an overall strategy to ensure that policies and procedures are equitable and reflect best international standards and practices. An important element of this Strategy is appropriate arrangements to take into account the special needs of certain groups of applicants (e.g. unaccompanied minors, victims of torture) and particular procedures have been developed and implemented to achieve this.

During 2002 and 2003, each stage of the process was examined and developed, from reception through to the investigation of applications and our support services were also enhanced. Interaction with applicants at initial point of application was strengthened; the scheduling process was streamlined and improved; statutory reports required under the Refugee Act, 1996 were reviewed and developed; a new questionnaire for applicants was designed to provide greater structure in information gathering and enhanced case investigation; a legal consultancy was commissioned to strengthen the model of reports required under sections 11 and 13 of the Act; and guidance and resource papers were developed.

HLG 2 Objective No 1

To achieve a consistently high quality in the investigation of applications.

Strategies to Support Objective

- Develop staff by investing in high quality training, mentoring and other support structures.
- Apply processes and procedures designed to standardise case processing methodology.
- Develop COI systems which will include guidelines on recurring and complex issues in applications.
- Develop management information systems to facilitate improved analysis of applications and recommendations, which will mainly be dependent on the implementation of the High Level IT Strategy for the Asylum Area.

- Participate in the development of an IT supported COI resource, such as the Knowledge Management Tool, recommended in the High Level IT Strategy for the Asylum Area.
- Develop and implement a Quality Assurance system.
- Implement guidelines which take into account the special needs of certain vulnerable groups, including unaccompanied minors.
- Ensure availability of a quality interpretation and translation service.

Performance Indicators

- A Quality Assurance system which provides information for monitoring and review in relation to quality and consistency of investigations.
- Focused interviews and legally robust reports as measured by quality assurance reports.
- Efficient and easily accessible country of origin information systems.
- An interpretation and translation service with a quality assurance mechanism.

HLG 2 Objective No 2
To achieve a consistently high quality of decision-making.

Strategies to Support Objective

- Develop and implement a Quality Assurance system.
- Support continuous development of staff by investing in high quality training, mentoring and other support structures.
- Strengthen the legal rigour and language of the statutory reports supporting ORAC recommendations, with training and input by legal experts, as appropriate.
- Develop case conference systems further.

Performance Indicators

- Consistency in decision-making as evidenced by quality assurance reports.
- Legally robust reports.
- An enhanced case conference system in place.

HLG 2 Objective No 3
To have in place procedures which are fair and open.

Strategies to Support Objective

- Provide comprehensive information concerning the application process to applicants, where feasible in a language they understand.
- Carry out initial and substantive interviews with the assistance of an interpreter, where necessary and feasible.
- Provide information on an ongoing basis, especially with regard to changes in procedures to Refugee Legal Service, Customer Liaison Panel for NGOs, the UNHCR and other interested parties.
- Make available ORAC processes and procedures to interested parties.
- Maintain and develop ORAC website.

Performance Indicators

- Staff and customer groups informed of processes and procedures.
- Customer satisfaction as measured by customer surveys and other feedback, including that from Customer Liaison Panel for NGOs.
- ORAC website feedback.
- ORAC processes and procedures available through the website.

High Level Goal 3

To contribute to the preservation of the integrity of the asylum process.

HLG 3 Objective No 1

To identify as quickly as possible, in a firm and fair manner, those applicants who come within the definition of a refugee contained in section 2 of the Refugee Act, 1996.

Policy and Working Environment

An asylum seeker is a person who seeks to be recognised as a refugee in accordance with the terms of the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees and the related 1967 Protocol, which provide the foundation for the system of protection of refugees generally.

In Irish law, the definition of a refugee is "a person who, owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his or her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his or her former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it...".

It is essential that we fully honour our international obligations in relation to genuine asylum seekers. It has been found that some applicants make claims which cannot be substantiated or which prove fraudulent. These applications do a disservice to asylum seekers and the public at large and waste the time and resources of the State. It is important for the integrity of the system of international protection that those who do not meet the requirements, or who should be excluded from protection, are not allowed to avail of, or abuse this important safeguard for the genuinely oppressed.

Strategy to Support Objective

- Provide timely decisions aided by IT supported country of origin information and report writing.
- Support continuous development of staff by investing in high quality training, mentoring and other support structures.
- Analyse and screen applications for the early identification of possible well founded cases.
- Develop an environment which facilitates the applicant in freely communicating the circumstances surrounding his/her application.

Performance Indicators

- Prioritised decisions within 1-2 weeks of interview, others within 4-6 weeks of interview.
- Early identification of possible manifestly well founded applications within 6 weeks of application.
- The confidence of the UNHCR in ORAC processes as evidenced by feedback, advice and comment.
- The confidence of NGOs in ORAC processes through NGO Liaison Panel.

HLG 3 Objective No 2

To detect and minimise abuse of the asylum process.

Strategies to Support Objective

- Liaise with UNHCR with a view to improving procedures to preserve the integrity of the process.
- Liaise with other agencies such as the health boards and An Garda Síochána to detect and prevent abuses of the system.
- Use fingerprinting, including the EURODAC² system, to detect multiple applicants.
- Continue to develop security features in Temporary Residence Certificates issued by the Office.
- Implement procedures for accelerated processing for those who fail to co-operate with the investigation of an application.
- Implement the Dublin Convention and the Dublin II Regulation and liaise with the relevant countries and agencies.
- Implement legislative provisions designed to identify manifestly unfounded applications.
- Deal firmly with applicants who frustrate the investigation of their application.
- Continue to develop quality COI to assist in the identification of false claims.

Performance Indicators

- The confidence of the UNHCR in our system as evidenced by feedback, advice and comment.
- Maximum possible number of Dublin Convention/Dublin II Regulation determinations from cases identified under the EURODAC system.

- Multiple applicants identified through daily fingerprinting reports.
- Reduction in multiple applicants.
- Effective implementation of manifestly unfounded legislative provisions as evidenced by quality assurance reports.

HLG 3 Objective No 3

To represent the Commissioner at appeal hearings at the Refugee Appeals Tribunal.

Strategies to Support Objective

- Support ORAC staff who represent the Commissioner at appeal hearings of the Refugee Appeals Tribunal through the provision of training, accessible country of origin information and policy guidelines.
- Provide timely and appropriate responses to requests from the Refugee Appeals Tribunal under section 16(6) and 16(7) of the Refugee Act, 1996.

Performance Indicators

- Quality input into the appeal process as measured by the Quality Assurance system.
- Timely and appropriate responses to Refugee Appeals Tribunal requests within 2 weeks, in so far as it is possible.

² A system for the electronic exchange of fingerprints between EU member states (with the exception of Denmark), together with Iceland and Norway. Fingerprints are transmitted daily to a central database in Luxembourg.



3

Business Support and Customer Services and HLG 4



High Level Goal 4

To efficiently and effectively manage our organisation and its resources having particular regard to the development of our staff and the delivery of excellent customer services.

Policy and Working Environment

Public Service Modernisation Programme

In working to provide a high quality, efficient and effective service which represents value for money, ORAC has been mindful of the Public Service Modernisation Programme and its priorities which include:

- enhancement of strategic planning framework;
- development of human resource initiatives;
- improvement of internal and external customer service;
- development of IT and eGovernment; and
- development of financial management.

We are committed to further developing our organisation and service standards to reflect this and nationally agreed programmes such as *Sustaining Progress*.

Partnership

Partnership has been recognised as an important mechanism in bringing about significant change and improved organisational performance and *Sustaining Progress* generated a momentum for its further development.

The introduction in ORAC of a formal partnership process commenced in 2003, reflecting a commitment to the development of effective partnership in the organisation. A Partnership Committee comprising staff, management and trade union representatives was established to assist in the achievement of the targets and commitments contained in *Sustaining Progress* and in the implementation of the change agenda.

Planning

Strategic and business planning has become an integral part of the work of each unit within ORAC to ensure a coherent approach to the development, management and implementation of our goals. The corporate, strategic and business plans are reflected in the role profiles of each staff member under the Performance Management and Development System. ORAC is committed to strengthening and consolidating its business planning process and in that context included a risk management programme for the first time in its Business Plan 2004.

Human Resources

ORAC's staff are its most valuable resource and we recognise that a skilled, adaptable and motivated workforce will enable us to achieve the objectives and standards required to meet our business needs. Ensuring that we use staff resources effectively while at the same time facilitating staff to develop their careers will be a continuing challenge. We are committed to improved human resource management through the development, implementation and on-going review of a formal Human Resource Strategy.

We facilitate family-friendly working and flexible working arrangements responsive to the needs of staff, the organisation and its stakeholders. The appointment in October, 2003 of an Equality Officer underlines our commitment to the promotion of equality in the workplace with regard to staff and our diverse customer base.

Customer Service

The provision of an efficient and professional service to all of our customers will continue to be a priority for ORAC. The basis of our approach is contained in the Customer Service Action Plan. During 2003, our external customer service programme was further enhanced: the membership of the Customer Service Liaison Panel for NGOs was expanded, a new customer complaints procedure was designed and our first customer survey was carried out.

Over the course of this strategy period, ORAC will further develop its customer service strategy and planning process, based on an informed assessment of customer needs and with a high level of staff involvement in identifying means of enhancing service delivery.

Information Technology

Information and communications technologies play a key role in supporting the business objectives of the organisation. The focus of the IT Unit in 2002 and 2003 was the consolidation and upgrade of existing systems and the development of information technology resources to provide more integrated and effective support for the business processes of the Office.

ORAC now needs to focus on improving information flows within the organisation and developing new systems to meet statistical and management information needs. There is a need for an integrated approach to the development of IT strategies for the Asylum/Immigration areas to facilitate the development of a new case management system and other support systems. In that context, ORAC is committed to implementing the recommendations in the High Level IT Strategy for the Asylum Area produced by Accenture. ORAC also recognises the need for an integrated approach to the development of administrative systems including financial, human resources and document management systems.

The challenge is to advance all of these developments in the context of the eGovernment initiative. We will continue to work closely with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in the enhancement of recently developed systems to exchange data and streamline processes and to provide accurate and timely statistical information on asylum issues. The further enhancement of our IT systems, over the period of the Strategy Statement, will have a major impact on our ability to meet our high level goals.

Financial Management

ORAC receives an annual allocation of funds for which the Secretary General of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform is the Accounting Officer and the accounts for ORAC are included in the annual Departmental accounts.

The Office will comply with the requirements of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General and will liaise with the Internal Audit Unit and Finance Division of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, where necessary, with regard to the Office's financial management policy framework. The Office will also comply with the new financial management procedures arising from the implementation of the ORACLE Financial Management System by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

HLG 4 Objective No 1

Develop our strategic, business planning and individual performance planning frameworks to support optimum performance by the organisation.

HLG 4 Objective No 2

Manage human resources to meet the business needs of the organisation and the development needs of staff.

Strategies to Support Objective

- Deploy resources to consolidate corporate strategic, business planning and review functions.
- Involve the Partnership Committee in the strategic and business planning process.
- Establish a Risk Management Committee to monitor the management of risk throughout the Office and to report on a regular basis.
- Prepare annual business plans.
- Regularly monitor and review business plans and respond to findings as appropriate.
- Implement PMDS.

Performance Indicators

- Business Plans for the start of each year.
- Risk register updated for the start of each year.
- Quarterly Business Plan review reports.
- Quarterly Risk Management review reports.
- Annual strategy review reports.
- Individual PMDS role profile forms and reviews completed within prescribed time frame.

Strategies to Support Objective

- Develop and implement a Human Resource Strategy.
- Develop and implement an Internal Communications Strategy.
- Create an organisation structure to ensure the efficient use of staff resources.
- Deploy staff to meet the requirements of the business and strategic objectives of the Office.
- Implement a targeted training and development programme, consistent with *Framework for Civil Service Training and Development 2004-2008* and linked to the objectives of the Office and based on a skills and training needs analysis.
- Develop a formal training and development strategy.
- Provide specialised HR training to relevant staff in Human Resources Unit.
- Review policies and procedures following publication of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR) Human Resource Strategy and, if appropriate, harmonise with DJELR's integrated Human Resource Management System.
- Adopt family-friendly initiatives in accordance with agreed public service policies.
- Develop and implement an equality policy and programme with reference to the recommendations of *A Review of Equality Initiatives in the Justice and Equality Sector*.

Performance Indicators

- Formal HRM Strategy developed in 2004.
- Implementation of HRM Strategy commenced in 2005.
- Implementation of the Performance Management and Development System and its integration with HRM policies.
- Formal Internal Communications Strategy completed in 2004.
- Annual internal communications audit commencing in 2005.
- Individual and organisational skills and training needs identified and agreed in 2004 and revised annually.
- Annual training and development plans by first quarter of the year.
- Training delivered as measured against the training plan.
- Training and Development Strategy completed in 2005.

HLG 4 Objective No 3
Achieve high quality customer service delivery.

Strategies to Support Objective

- Further develop and refine the Customer Service Action Plan.
- Implement and monitor the Customer Complaints Procedure.
- Publish charters of standards for customers and report on performance against the standards in the Annual Report.
- Carry out regular surveys of customers to determine the level of customer satisfaction with the ORAC's service delivery.
- Develop and implement External Communications Strategy in 2005.

- Support continuous development of staff by investing in high quality customer service training.
- Provide high quality information in response to enquiries.
- Record and monitor communications using correspondence tracking systems.
- Liaise with Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Department of Social and Family Affairs, UNHCR, Reception and Integration Agency (RIA), Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT), Refugee Legal Service (RLS), health boards, An Garda Síochána, non-Governmental organisations who represent the interests of asylum seekers and refugees as well as other stakeholders.
- Ensure that all relevant agencies are made aware of any relevant developments in ORAC.

Performance Indicators

- Feedback from Customer Liaison Panel for NGOs, other stakeholders and directly through customer surveys.
- An operational Customer Complaints Procedure.
- Publication of Customer Service Action Plan 2004-2006.
- Targets in Customer Service Action Plan are met.
- Publication of charters of standards for customers.
- Review of Action Plan and Charter in 2006.
- An established programme of customer service training.
- Focused programme of customer surveys in place and results of such surveys.
- Formal External Communications Strategy 2005.
- Correspondence tracking systems in place in 2004.

HLG 4 Objective No 4 *Maximise use of information technology.*

Strategies to Support Objective

- Implement the recommendations contained in the High Level IT Strategy for the Asylum Area, in particular the development of a new integrated case management system, to improve case management, workflow functionality and management information.
- Adopt other specialist systems to meet the needs of the Office [e.g. Human Resource Management System, the ORACLE Financial Management System (FMS) and correspondence tracking].
- Utilise suitable eWorking and flexible working technological aids/solutions.
- Develop and implement formal IT Strategy.

Performance Indicators

- Successful implementation of the High Level IT Strategy for the Asylum Area, the ORACLE Financial Management System and other specialist systems, 2004-2005.
- Successful implementation of eWorking and flexible working technologies.
- Management information to support business planning.
- IT Strategy developed and implemented 2004-2005.

HLG 4 Objective No 5 *Maximise efficient use of financial resources.*

Strategies to Support Objective

- Implement the provisions of the ORAC Financial Policy Procedures Document.
- Operate a co-ordinated monitoring process in respect of all procurement and decisions on expenditure, having regard to the terms of Public Procurement Guidelines and the provisions of the Prompt Payment of Accounts Act, 1997.
- Put in place monitoring and control mechanisms to ensure value for money.
- Implement the ORACLE Financial Management System.
- Monitor expenditure and provide cost/benefit analysis of major expenditure.

Performance Indicators

- Positive results from the Comptroller and Auditor General's Value for Money Audit.
- Positive feedback from the Internal Audit Unit and Finance Division of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.
- Successful management of ORAC's annual financial allocation.
- ORACLE Financial Management System implemented.



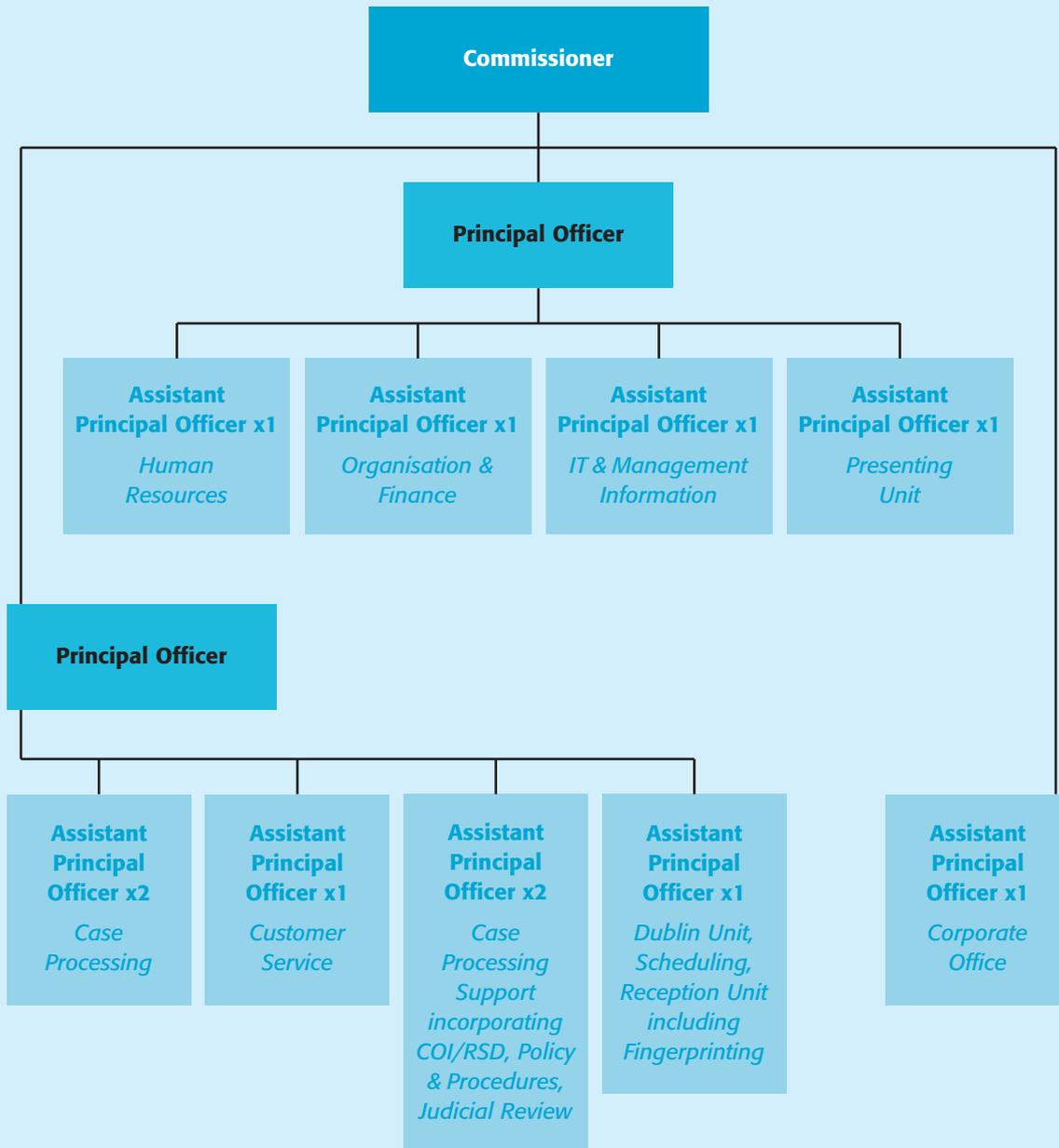


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Appendices



Appendix 1 – ORAC Management and Staffing Structure



Appendix 2 – ORAC’s Main Contact Organisations

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

Department of Social and Family Affairs

An Garda Síochána

Health Boards

Office of the Attorney General

Chief State Solicitor’s Office

Office of Public Works

United Nations High Commission for Refugees

Refugee Documentation Centre

Refugee Appeals Tribunal

Reception and Integration Agency

Refugee Legal Service

NGOs as represented on the Customer Services Liaison Panel

EURASIL

Intergovernmental Consultations on Asylum Matters

Appendix 3 – Cross Agency Issues involving ORAC

Issue	Department/ Agencies Involved	Action Required by ORAC
<i>Verifying the current address of asylum seekers.</i>	<i>Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA).</i>	<i>Liaise with Department of Social and Family Affairs and RIA to verify current addresses.</i>
<i>Informing applicants of their right to seek help with their asylum claim from legal representatives including Refugee Legal Service (RLS).</i>	<i>Refugee Legal Service, Law Society and UNHCR.</i>	<i>This Office encourages applicants to seek legal advice through the provision of appropriate information, in co-operation with other bodies such as the RLS, private practitioners and NGOs.</i>
<i>Representation of the Commissioner at oral appeal hearings of RAT.</i>	<i>Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT).</i>	<i>Provide effective representation at appeal hearings.</i>
<i>Provide replies to statutory requests from RAT under section 16 of the Refugee Act, 1996.</i>	<i>Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT).</i>	<i>Provide timely and appropriate responses.</i>
<i>Fingerprints transmitted to Garda Headquarters in order to verify prints and check for multiple applications.</i>	<i>An Garda Síochána.</i>	<i>Garda HQ maintain a separate asylum seekers fingerprints database and provide results in cases of matching fingerprints to ORAC.</i>
<i>Unaccompanied Minors.</i>	<i>Health Boards.</i>	<i>Refer unaccompanied minors to health boards as required under the Refugee Act, 1996 and process applications. Liaise with health boards regarding the examination of applications from unaccompanied minors or for family reunification as required.</i>

Appendix 3 – Cross Agency Issues involving ORAC

Issue	Department/ Agencies Involved	Action Required by ORAC
<i>Facilitate appropriate access to information required for the investigation/prevention of crime and fraud.</i>	<i>Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB), Department of Social and Family Affairs and health boards.</i>	<i>Operate agreed liaison arrangements with other bodies in compliance with Refugee Act, 1996, Data Protection Act and other relevant legislation.</i>
<i>Facilitate transfer of applicants' files in relation to Appeals, Withdrawal of Applications and Ministerial Decisions.</i>	<i>Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR) and RAT.</i>	<i>Operate agreed secure file transfer procedures.</i>
<i>High Level Asylum IT Strategy development and implementation.</i>	<i>DJELR, RIA, RAT and Legal Aid Board.</i>	<i>Participate in Asylum IT strategy development and implementation.</i>
<i>Training Groups.</i>	<i>UNHCR, RAT, RIA, RLS, DJELR and training provider.</i>	<i>Participate in asylum area and other training groups.</i>
<i>Dublin Convention/ Dublin II Regulation and EURODAC.</i>	<i>DJELR, GNIB, EU Commission and other Dublin Convention states.</i>	<i>Processing of incoming and outgoing requests under the Dublin Convention/Dublin II Regulation to/from other member states.</i> <i>Transmission of fingerprints to Garda Technical Bureau for verification and to EURODAC central database for comparison with prints taken by other member states. Compliance with statutory arrangements in respect of blocking and deletion of fingerprints.</i>
<i>Up-to-date, authoritative, relevant country of origin information.</i>	<i>Refugee Documentation Centre, UNHCR, EURASIL, IGC and other Governments.</i>	<i>Participation in relevant working groups and committees. Utilise the query service and other Research Documentation Centre services.</i>





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