



# IRISH COURTS STRATEGIC PLAN: 2024-2027

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## INTRODUCTION

The Judicial Planning Working Group (“JPWG”) Report was published in February 2023, with its core task being to “consider the number and type of judges required to ensure the efficient administration of justice over the next five years in the first instance, but also with a view to the longer term.” The JPWG made recommendations to the Minister for Justice for a substantial increase in judicial numbers, initially over two phases.

The Report, which has been welcomed by the Judiciary, represents an important and welcome development in seeking to improve the approach to supporting the administration of justice by investing in judicial resources and associated support. The Report (and the OECD Report that underpins it) provides an evidence-based assessment of the extent to which judicial numbers have fallen seriously short of what was and is necessary to ensure that litigants can exercise their right to timely access to justice.

The Government’s immediate acceptance of the JPWG Report and its actions to create additional judicial positions and fill them are also very important and welcome developments. It is a real and tangible recognition that a functioning justice system is not a luxury but rather a critical component of a modern liberal democratic society founded on the rule of law.

The first phase of appointments was made over the course of 2023. It is understood that the second phase is likely to proceed in 2025. It should be noted that this Strategic Plan has been prepared on the assumption that each court jurisdiction will have its full complement of judges as envisaged under Phases 1 and 2 of the JPWG recommendations, together with the necessary support staff (as also envisaged under those recommendations) by the end of 2025. This planned expansion of the Judiciary represents a historic opportunity to significantly enhance the efficient administration of justice and to provide a modern first-class court system which is fully equipped to address the needs of all court users.

Against this backdrop, it is both timely and appropriate for a long-term strategy for each court to be developed and published. This is reflected in recommendation 19, made in Chapter 4 of the JPWG Report, which provides:

“A long-term strategy should be developed for each Court jurisdiction that aligns with the Courts Service Modernisation Programme and Courts Service’s strategic development generally in order to transform the Courts into a more modern institution. This should articulate a broader strategic outlook and framework for the full justice process, including the criminal justice system.”

This Strategic Plan has been formulated for that purpose. In developing the Plan, account has been taken of a broad range of materials of particular relevance to the administration of

justice. These are described in the [DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY](#). The Plan should be read in conjunction with the Courts Service Corporate Strategic Plan 2024-2027 which has, as one of its key goals, the provision of the necessary resources to enable the Judiciary to effectively carry out their judicial functions.

The Plan commences with a [MISSION](#) statement. This is followed by a description of [CORE VALUES](#). These are the values and aspirations that the Judiciary believes are of central importance in carrying out the work of the Courts in a fair and just manner and in a way that will assist the transformation of the Courts into a more modern institution. The Mission statement and Core Values apply to all of the Court jurisdictions in Ireland.

Having set out the Mission and Core Values and the materials which have been taken into account, the Plan then sets out a brief description of each of the individual Court jurisdictions (under [CONSTITUTIONAL AND STATUTORY MANDATE](#)). This is followed, in turn, by the individual strategic plans for each jurisdiction.

## MISSION

The Irish Courts comprise an independent Judiciary whose goal is to provide fair and impartial justice under the Constitution and the law while striving to meet changing national and local needs. A key goal of the Judiciary is that the Courts should be accessible to and trusted by all, fulfilling a fundamental role in our democratic society in the determination of criminal charges and the resolution of disputes.

## CORE VALUES

The goal and purpose of the Judiciary are underpinned by the following values:

### Independence

It is a crucial aspect of the work of the Judiciary to render justice without fear or favour, affection or ill-will toward anyone, and to that end structural autonomy for the Judiciary (as an equal branch of government) in matters of governance and management of the Courts is central.

### Excellence

The Judiciary seeks for excellence in decision-making and in the performance of all of its work and commits to adhere to the highest judicial standards including the Judicial Council Guidelines on Conduct and Ethics. In discharging their duties and functions, the members of the Judiciary seek to serve the needs of court users and the public in a timely and effective manner. The Judiciary also seeks to attract highly qualified candidates for appointment as judges in accordance with the aims and objectives of the Judicial Appointments Commission Act 2023.

### Equality Before the Law

Impartiality in the administration of justice and equality of treatment for all persons before the courts are fundamental values for the Judiciary in the exercise of its functions. The Judiciary is committed to ensuring fairness and impartiality in the administration of justice.

### Integrity & Transparency

The Judiciary will perform its functions with integrity and propriety.

## Modernisation & Accessibility

The Judiciary is committed to modernising the system of access to justice to simplify such access. The Judiciary will work in cooperation with the Courts Service in implementing new technological processes as part of the Courts Service Modernisation Programme. The Judiciary will also liaise with the Department of Justice in bringing forward the reforms to civil litigation proposed in the Review Group Report. Representatives of the Judiciary are also participating as observers in a sub-group on stakeholder engagement (established by the Judicial Planning Implementation Steering Group) which is currently considering the impact in the criminal justice sector of the JPWG Report recommendations.

## Treating Court Users with Dignity & Respect

Recognising the increasingly diverse nature of Irish society, the Judiciary will seek to treat all court users with dignity and respect, in particular, those with additional needs such as children, victims of crime and persons suffering from a disability.

## Timeliness & Efficiency

The Judiciary aims to perform all of its functions as efficiently as possible, dispose of cases within an appropriate time period, and deliver judgments within a reasonable time.

## Certainty & Clarity

The Judiciary seeks to give judgments that are clear, concise and easy to understand, and strives to ensure legal predictability, continuity and coherence in decision-making.

## Training & Continuing Education

The Judiciary is committed to ongoing training and continuing education in accordance with the aims of the Judicial Council Act 2019.

## Unity & Wellbeing

The Judiciary is committed to fostering health and well-being, continuing professional development and training, collaboration and respect among all judges and court staff.



## DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY

This Strategic Plan has been developed against the backdrop of the JPWG Report and has taken account of the following:

### The Constitution of Ireland

The Constitution is of paramount importance when considering any aspect of the administration of justice. Under the Constitution, the administration of justice is entrusted to an independent Judiciary. While many other provisions of the Constitution are also very relevant to the manner in which justice is administered in our courts, a number of its provisions are particularly relevant in the context of this Strategic Plan. Article 34.1 provides that, save in special and limited circumstances prescribed by law, justice shall be administered in public in courts established by law by judges appointed in the manner provided by the Constitution. Under Article 34.6, every person appointed a judge under the Constitution must make a declaration to uphold the Constitution and the laws and to administer justice impartially. Under Article 35.2, all judges are independent in the exercise of their judicial functions and are subject only to the Constitution and the law. Article 40.1 makes clear that all citizens shall, as human persons, be held equal before the law.

### EU Membership

The Strategic Plan is also informed by the Judiciary's ongoing commitment to and compliance with Article 47 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which guarantees the right to an effective remedy and a fair trial, and Article 20 of the Charter, which guarantees equality before the law.

### UN Principles on Access to Justice

The Strategic Plan reflects the Judiciary's awareness of and respect for the United Nations '*International Principles and Guidelines on Access to Justice for Persons with Disabilities*' published in August 2020.

### Judicial Council

The provisions of the Judicial Council Act 2019 ("2019 Act") are also relevant to this Strategic Plan. It is one of the functions of the Judicial Council under the 2019 Act to promote and maintain high standards of conduct among judges, having regard to the principles of judicial conduct requiring judges to uphold and exemplify judicial independence, impartiality, integrity, propriety (including the appearance of propriety), competence and diligence and to ensure equality of treatment to all persons before the court. In furtherance of this function, the Judicial Council was mandated by the 2019 Act to formulate guidelines on

judicial conduct and ethics. Such guidelines were adopted in February 2022. These guidelines are, in turn, based on the principles of judicial conduct known as the Bangalore Principles endorsed by the 59<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva in April 2003.

The Judicial Council Guidelines on Conduct and Ethics have been taken into account in developing the Strategic Plan. The Guidelines seek to promote the highest standards of judicial behaviour and assist judges in making decisions on matters of ethics and conduct. They provide invaluable assistance to judges in the discharge of their duties and obligations. The promotion and provision of continuing education for judges is also a very important function of the Judicial Council. The Judiciary is very conscious of the need for ongoing training and continuing education for judges and is committed to undertaking it on an ongoing basis.

## Sustainable Development Goals 2030

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which are an urgent call for action by all countries (developed and developing) in a global partnership.

This Strategic Plan takes account of the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and, in particular, Goal 16 to ‘promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels’.

## Victims of Crime

The Strategic Plan has also taken account of the Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Act 2017 (as amended), which gives effect in Ireland to the provisions of Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime. The Judiciary is committed to treating victims of crime in accordance with the principles established by the Act and the Directive insofar as they apply to the Courts insofar as they may be relevant to the conduct of court proceedings.

## Litigants in Person

A Working Group on Litigants in Person (“LIPs”), comprising a number of judges of the Superior Courts and Courts Service officials, was established in 2023 to make detailed proposals in respect of regulating access to justice by LIPs, with the aim of improving their access to the courts while ensuring that scarce judicial and Courts Service resources are deployed in the most efficient way possible when engaging with LIPs. Following the conclusion of a two-stage research process to examine, first, how LIPs interact with the

Superior Courts in Ireland and, second, how comparable jurisdictions engage with LIPs, the Working Group has produced a report detailing measures it recommends should be introduced to regulate access to justice by LIPs. This Strategic Plan seeks to reflect the ongoing objectives of this Working Group.

## Children

The position of children has been taken into account in developing the Strategic Plan. The Judiciary recognises the importance of promoting and considering a child's rights and best interests in accordance with the requirements of the Constitution and the Children Act 2001 and as envisaged by the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child.<sup>1</sup> The Judiciary is also committed to implementing the Protocol to Expedite Rape and Murder Cases involving Victims and Defendants under 18 years of age.

## Chief Justice's Access to Justice Working Group

In January 2021, the former Chief Justice, Mr Justice Frank Clarke, established a Working Group on Access to Justice, which has continued under the chairmanship of the current Chief Justice, Mr Justice Donal O'Donnell. The objective of the Working Group is to bring together key stakeholders and engage in collaborative work to identify barriers to accessing justice and contribute to improving access to justice in Ireland. This Strategic Plan seeks to reflect the ongoing objectives of this Working Group.

## The Review of the Administration of Civil Justice: Review Group Report

Following a decision of the Government in March 2017, a group ("Review Group") was established to review and reform the administration of civil justice in Ireland. The *'Review of the Administration of Civil Justice: Review Group Report'* was published in October 2022, following a process of review chaired by Mr Justice Peter Kelly, former President of the High Court. This Strategic Plan highlights the Judiciary's commitment to the implementation of the recommendations contained in this Report.

## The JPWG Report

In preparing this Strategic Plan, the JPWG Report has also been very carefully considered and taken into account. In accordance with its recommendations, the Strategic Plan seeks to identify measurable goals and achievable long-term strategic objectives for each Court jurisdiction. It is important to stress that the achievement of these objectives is dependent on the appropriate resourcing of the courts so that justice can be administered promptly and in conditions that respect the dignity of all participants in litigation and those affected by it.

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<sup>1</sup> The UNCRC was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, and Ireland ratified it in 1992.

## The OECD Report on Modernising Staffing and Court Management Practices in Ireland

In addition, the OECD Report has been very carefully considered. It was published at the same time as the JPWG Report. It contains a very helpful review of the current system of administration of justice in Ireland. The OECD identified that there is a need for a greater number of judges in the short to medium term. The OECD recommendations are, in turn, reflected in the terms of the JPWG Report.

### Judicial Appointments

This Strategic Plan has also taken account of the new process of appointing judges and Court Presidents as provided for in the Judicial Appointments Commission Act 2023 (“2023 Act”), which is due to commence on 1 January 2025. Under the 2023 Act, all recommendations of the Judicial Appointments Commission of persons for appointment to judicial office are to be based on merit and to be informed by the objective that the membership of the Judiciary in each court should comprise equal numbers of male and female members, reflect the diversity of the population of the State as a whole and include a sufficient number of judges with a proficiency in the Irish language to meet the needs (as identified by the Commission) to have proceedings conducted in Irish.

### Official Languages

It is an objective of the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2023 that there should be a sufficient number of judges proficient in Irish to meet the needs of court users. That objective is fully supported by the Judiciary and has been taken into account when preparing this Strategic Plan. In addition, the Judiciary is mindful of the obligations imposed on Courts under section 8 of the Official Languages Act 2003 (as amended), which provides as follows:

“Every court has, in any proceedings before it, the duty to ensure that any person appearing in or giving evidence before it may be heard in the official language of his or her choice, and that in being so heard the person will not be placed at a disadvantage by not being heard in the other official language.”

### Courts Service Strategies

As noted in the Introduction, this Strategic Plan is intended to be read in conjunction with the Courts Service’s general strategic development, outlined in the documents referenced below, in order to transform the courts into a more modern institution which will be readily accessible either through digital or non-digital means.

## *Supporting Access to Justice in a Modern, Digital Ireland: Long Term Strategic Vision 2030*

The Judiciary recognises and endorses the Courts Service Long Term Strategic Vision for 2030, entitled “Supporting Access to Justice in a modern, digital Ireland”, and recognises and affirms its commitment to supporting the goals identified to provide a modern courts system which is:

- **Just** effective justice systems are anchored in efficiency, quality and independence. The Courts Service will continue to support the independent Judiciary in the administration of justice by providing them with the resources required.
- **User-centric** with an enhanced experience for court users; services delivered through a range of channels that are most appropriate for any interaction, providing an easy to navigate, high-quality service and user experience.
- **Simplified** provision of access to justice for individuals and organisations through reduced complexity and associated cost, particularly in lower value / lower complexity cases, with people only having to come to court to have their case dealt with where necessary.
- **Timely** in the administration of justice, i.e., the progress of cases through the courts system will be optimised, with cases not unduly delayed due to administrative or case management issues.
- **Integrated** with other justice sector organisations, sharing “whole system” information and insights with a focus on interoperability of systems and data.
- **Collaborative** working with other justice sector organisations towards “common purpose” outcome ambitions; proactively and cooperatively working together towards shared goals.
- **Efficient and Effective** in the administration of justice, with the Courts Service supporting the Judiciary using modern technology solutions and best practice processes and procedures to provide a courts system that is value for money for the taxpayer.

## *The Modernisation Programme*

The Judiciary also endorses the Courts Service Modernisation Programme which is underpinned by four key workstreams, namely, (i) organisational reform, (ii) civil reform, (iii) family reform and (iv) criminal reform. The aims of the key elements of the work-streams are:

- Improvements for court users;
- Better operational supports;
- Better financial accountability.

### *Innovation Strategy 2024-2026*

The Judiciary also supports the Court Service's recently published second innovation strategy which outlines the following four key actions areas for the next three year period:

- To improve innovation awareness and capability in the Courts Service;
- To drive idea generation;
- To improve innovation pathway and project delivery;
- To improve participation with the innovation team and innovation advocate network.

### *Courts Service Strategic Plan 2024-2027*

The Courts Service has released its Strategic Plan for the period 2024-2027, focusing on a number of key areas to enhance justice and service delivery and identifying the following goals:

- **Taking a User-Centric Approach:** Prioritising improved service delivery through user-friendly, collaborative methods.
- **Supporting the Judiciary:** Working collaboratively with the Judiciary to define and provide the resources needed for members of the Judiciary to effectively carry out their judicial functions.
- **Digital Transformation:** Implementing a "digital-first but not digital-only" approach to streamline operations and ensure accessibility.
- **Workplace Innovation:** Investing in and supporting staff to create a high-performance organisation, promoting modern, flexible working environments and developing staff capabilities
- **Providing a modern and improved estate and facilities:** Improving court buildings and facilities and supporting new ways in which business will be conducted.
- **Accountability & Leadership:** ensuring that governance structures provide effective accountability and leadership for the Courts Service modernisation and reform agenda.

The Judiciary fully supports the steps being taken by the Courts Service to modernise its facilities and work practices and will liaise with the Courts Service in seeking to achieve the goals set out in the documents described above.

# CONSTITUTIONAL AND STATUTORY MANDATE

## The Supreme Court

The Supreme Court sits at the apex of the Irish courts system. In accordance with Article 34.5 of the Constitution, it is the court of final appeal in civil and criminal matters. It was formally established on 29 September 1961 pursuant to the Courts (Establishment and Constitution) Act 1961.

### *Composition of the Supreme Court*

The Supreme Court comprises the Chief Justice, who is President of the Court, and nine ordinary judges. The President of the Court of Appeal and High Court are also *ex-officio* members of the Supreme Court. Cases are generally heard by a panel of five or seven judges.

### *Jurisdiction*

The Supreme Court enjoys both appellate and original jurisdiction as prescribed by the Constitution. The jurisdiction of the Court was recast in 2014 on the establishment of the Court of Appeal.

Article 34.5.3° of the Constitution confers on the Supreme Court appellate jurisdiction to consider appeals from the Court of Appeal where it is satisfied that the decision involves a matter of general public importance, or it is in the interests of justice that there be an appeal to the Supreme Court. This is the route by which the majority of the appeals are heard by the Supreme Court.

Article 34.5.4° of the Constitution also confers on the Supreme Court jurisdiction to consider appeals directly from the High Court where it is satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances warranting a direct appeal to it, a precondition for the Court being so satisfied is the presence of either or both of the following factors: (i) that the decision involves a matter of general public importance, and/or (ii) it is in the interests of justice that there be an appeal to the Supreme Court. Such appeals known as 'leapfrog' appeals.

The Supreme Court also has original jurisdiction under the Constitution in the following instances:

- i. where a bill is referred to the Court by the President of Ireland, in accordance with Article 26 of the Constitution, for a determination of whether that bill (or certain provisions of it), as passed by both Houses of the Oireachtas, is incompatible with the Constitution, and



- ii. where the Court has been requested to determine, in accordance with Article 12.3 of the Constitution, whether the President of Ireland is incapacitated.

### *Judgments*

A case in the Supreme Court is decided by agreement of the majority of judges. Each judge in a case is entitled to deliver a separate opinion, whether concurring or dissenting.

The exception to this practice arises where a bill is referred to the Supreme Court by the President under Article 26 of the Constitution. In such references, the decision is to be delivered in the form of a single judgment, where only the decision of the majority of the Court is given.

## **The Court of Appeal**

Established on 28 October 2014, the Court of Appeal serves as a jurisdictional tier between the High Court and the Supreme Court. Its main function is to hear appeals from the High Court, both civil and criminal. It acts as a court of final appeal unless leave is granted pursuant to Article 34.5 of the Constitution for further appeal to the Supreme Court.

### *Composition of the Court of Appeal*

The Court of Appeal currently comprises of a President and 18 ordinary judges (with two vacancies). The Chief Justice and the President of the High Court are *ex-officio* members of the Court of Appeal.

The Court sits in divisions of three judges. Some interlocutory and procedural applications may be heard by the President alone or by another judge nominated by the President, under the Courts and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2023.

### *Jurisdiction*

As with the other Superior Courts, the jurisdiction of the Court of Appeal is conferred by the Constitution and by legislation. The Court of Appeal has authority to hear the following appeals:

- A. Appeals in civil and criminal proceedings from the High Court:
  - i. Appeals from the High Court that, prior to the Thirty-third Amendment of the Constitution, would have been heard by the Supreme Court.
  - ii. Appeals regarding the constitutionality of law heard in the High Court, with the Constitution ensuring that no law may restrict the Court of Appeal's jurisdiction in these matters.

B. Under the Court of Appeal Act 2014, the Court of Appeal was given the appellate jurisdiction previously exercised by the Court of Criminal Appeal. The Court of Appeal's appellate jurisdiction with respect to criminal matters include:

- i. Appeals by persons convicted on indictment in the Circuit Court, Central Criminal Court and Special Criminal Court.
- ii. Appeals against the severity of a sentence imposed by those courts.
- iii. Applications by the Director of Public Prosecutions for review of sentence on grounds of undue leniency, under the Criminal Justice Act 1993.
- iv. Applications by persons who, after appeal to the Court of Appeal and any subsequent re-trial, allege that a new or newly discovered fact shows that there has been a miscarriage of justice in relation to the conviction or that the sentence is excessive, under the Criminal Procedure Act 1993.
- v. Appeals by the Director of Public Prosecutions on a question of law arising out of criminal trials which resulted in an acquittal, under the Criminal Procedure Act 1967 ('without prejudice' appeals) or under the Criminal Procedure Act 2010 ('with prejudice' appeals), respectively.
- vi. Appeals by the Director of Public Prosecutions on a question of law arising out of the refusal by a trial court at a preliminary trial hearing to the effect that evidence shall not be admitted at the trial of the offence, under the Criminal Procedure Act 2021.
- vii. Applications for bail post-conviction pending the determination of an appeal.

C. Under the Court of Appeal Act 2014, the Court of Appeal was given the appellate jurisdiction, previously exercised by the Courts-Martial Appeal Court:

- i. Determining appeals based on a record of the proceedings at the court-martial, with power to hear new or additional evidence or to refer any matter for report to the president or the judge advocate of the court-martial.
- ii. Affirming, reversing (in whole or in part) or ordering a new trial or varying the sentence.

- iii. Dealing with appeals limited to either the finding or sentence, including applications for review of sentence by the Director of Military Prosecutions under the Defence Act 1954 and the Courts-Martial Appeals Act 1983.
  - iv. Reviewing findings or sentences from previous appeals if new or newly discovered evidence indicates a miscarriage of justice, under the Criminal Procedure Act 1993.
  - v. Appeals from findings of courts-martial to the effect that a person charged with an offence is unfit to take his trial, under the Defence Act 1954.
  - vi. Appeals from findings of courts-martial to the effect that a person tried for an offence is not guilty by reason of insanity, under the Defence Act 1954.
  - vii. Appeals from decisions of court-martial to make or not to make orders of committal, under the Defence Act 1954.
  - viii. References of questions of law by summary courts-martial, under the provisions of the Defence Act 1954 or the Courts-Martial Appeals Act 1983, respectively.
  - ix. Applications for bail pending the determination of an appeal, under the Courts-Martial Appeals Act 1983.
  - x. Applications for the suspension of the operation of a custodial sentence pending the determination of an appeal, under the Courts-Martial Appeals Act 1983.
- D. Under the Court of Appeal Act 2014, questions of law which could previously be referred to the Supreme Court for determination (a 'case stated') are now determinable by the Court of Appeal:
- i. Consultative cases stated by the Circuit Court to the Court of Appeal under the Courts of Justice Act 1947.
  - ii. Consultative cases stated by the High Court (where that court is exercising its appellate jurisdiction with respect to a decision of the Circuit Court) under the Courts of Justice Act 1936
  - iii. Appeals against a decision of the High Court made on an appeal by case stated from the District Court, under the Summary Jurisdiction Act 1857 as extended by the Courts (Supplemental Provisions) Act 1961.

- iv. Appeals against a decision of the High Court made on a consultative case stated from the District Court, under the Courts (Supplemental Provisions) Act 1961.

### *Appeals transferred from Supreme Court to Court of Appeal*

Following the establishment of the Court of Appeal, specified appeals pending in the Supreme Court which had been initiated before the establishment day and had not been fully or partly heard by that court were directed by the Chief Justice to be heard and determined by the Court of Appeal, pursuant to Article 64.3.1° of the Constitution as inserted by the Thirty-Third Amendment. There are no outstanding 'Article 64 appeals' as of September 2024.

## **The High Court**

Under Article 34.3.1° of the Constitution, the High Court has full jurisdiction to determine all matters and questions whether of law or of fact, civil or criminal. This means, for example, that, in contrast to the other courts of first instance, there is no statutory limit on the level of monetary compensation it can award. Its jurisdiction also extends to the question of the validity of any law having regard to the Constitution.

### *Composition of the High Court*

The High Court comprises the President and 50 ordinary judges. The Chief Justice, the President of the Court of Appeal, and the President of the Circuit Court are also *ex-officio* members of the High Court.

Matters coming before the High Court are normally heard and determined by one judge, but the President of the High Court may decide that any cause or matter or any part thereof may be heard by three judges in what is known as a divisional court.

In terms of criminal trials, they are conducted by a single judge sitting with a jury of twelve people, but the President of the High Court may direct two or more judges to sit together for the purpose of a particular trial.

### *Jurisdiction*

As noted above, the High Court has a very extensive jurisdiction as a court of first instance. In addition, it acts as an appeal court from the Circuit Court in civil matters. It has power to review the decisions of certain tribunals. It may also give rulings on questions of law submitted by the District Court.

A person granted bail in the District Court may apply to the High Court to vary the conditions of bail. If the District Court refuses bail, application may be made to the High Court. A person charged with murder can only apply to the High Court for bail.

### *Sittings*

The High Court sits in Dublin to hear trials and applications at first instance. It also hears personal injuries and fatal injury actions in several provincial locations, such as Cork, Galway, Limerick, Ennis, Waterford, Kilkenny, Sligo, and Dundalk), at specified times during the year. In addition, the High Court sits in provincial venues to hear appeals from the Circuit Court in civil and family law matters. The High Court also sits to hear other types of civil cases such as Non-Jury/Judicial Review and Chancery actions, in provincial locations, including Cork and, from time to time in other venues.

### *Appeals*

Appeals in civil proceedings from the High Court can be taken to the Court of Appeal, except for those cases in which the Supreme Court has permitted a direct appeal to it (a 'leap frog' appeal).

An appeal against conviction or sentence by the Central Criminal Court may be taken to the Court of Appeal.

## **The Central Criminal Court**

When the High Court is dealing with criminal cases, it is known as the Central Criminal Court. It tries the most serious criminal offences, such as murder and rape, which the Circuit Court cannot deal with. A judge and jury try these cases. Until recently the Court sat only in Dublin. In recent times the Court has travelled to a number of other venues including Cork, Limerick, Sligo, Waterford, Naas, Kilkenny, Mullingar, Monaghan, Letterkenny and Castlebar.

## **The Special Criminal Court**

The Special Criminal Court consists of three judges<sup>2</sup> sitting without a jury and mostly deals with criminal charges involving terrorist organisations, and more recently, charges relating to organised crime. The Court was established by the Government to hear cases that the ordinary courts might be unable to deal with, because of fears of the possibility of jury intimidation. Its establishment was provided for by the Offences Against the State Act 1939.

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<sup>2</sup> Selected from a panel of judges of the High Court, Circuit Court and District Court appointed by government

## The Circuit Court

### *Composition of the Circuit Court*

The Circuit Court comprises the President and 45 ordinary judges. The President of the District Court is also an *ex-officio* judge of the Circuit Court. The country is divided into eight circuits with one judge assigned to each circuit except in Dublin where ten judges may be assigned, and Cork, where there is provision for three judges.

### *Jurisdiction*

The Circuit Court is a court of limited and local jurisdiction. The work can be divided into three primary areas of law: civil, criminal, and family. The Circuit Court sits in venues in each circuit.

#### **A. Civil Business**

The civil jurisdiction of the Circuit Court is a limited one unless all parties to an action consent, in which event the jurisdiction is unlimited. Legislatively, the monetary limit of the Court's jurisdiction relates mainly to actions where the claim does not exceed €75,000 or where the market value of the property at issue does not exceed €3,000,000. However, in practice the Court exercises a wide jurisdiction which has substantially increased in recent years such as, for example in insolvency, mortgage repossessions, injunction applications, for example, under the planning laws, defamation, probate, licensing, landlord and tenant and company matters such as for example court examinership for small companies. The Circuit Court is “the Court” for the purposes of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 which deals an increasing number of applications in respect of vulnerable persons. As many applicants to court are lay litigants, it requires specialist judicial expertise.

#### **B. Criminal Matters**

In criminal matters the Circuit Court has the same jurisdiction as the Central Criminal Court in all indictable offences except murder, rape, aggravated sexual assault, treason, piracy and related offences. This jurisdiction is exercisable in the area where the offence has been committed or where the accused person has been arrested or resides. However in Circuit Courts outside Dublin, the trial judge may transfer a trial to the Dublin Circuit Criminal Court on application by the prosecution or the defence and if satisfied that it is unjust not to do so. Criminal cases dealt with by the Circuit Criminal Court begin in the District Court and are sent forward to the Circuit Court for trial or sentencing.

## C. Family Law

The Circuit and High Court have concurrent jurisdiction in the area of family law. The Circuit Court has authority in a wide range of family law proceedings (judicial separation, divorce, nullity and appeals from the District Court). In hearing such cases, the Circuit Court has authority to make related orders, including custody and access orders, maintenance and barring orders. Applications for protection and barring orders may also be made directly to the Circuit Court. Applications to dispense with the three month notice period of marriage are also dealt with by the Circuit Court.

### *Appeals from the District Court*

Decisions of the District Court can be appealed to the Circuit Court with some exceptions. Appeals proceed by way of a full rehearing and the decision of the Circuit Court is final. The Circuit Court also acts as an appeal court for appeals from the decisions of the Labour Court, Unfair Dismissals Tribunal, the Employment Appeals Tribunal, Mental Health Tribunals, Data Protection Commission and Country Registrar, such as for example taxation of costs.

## The District Court

The District Court is a court of local and limited jurisdiction. The business of the District Court can be divided into four primary areas of law: civil, criminal, family, and licensing. The District Court dealt with 73% of all civil matters and 89% of all criminal matters before the Courts in 2023.

The District Court provides service in all districts from Monday to Friday apart from the month of August, and short vacations at Christmas and Easter. Importantly, an emergency out of hours service is provided nationwide 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, including during vacations.

### *Composition of the District Court*

The District Court comprises the President and 71 ordinary judges. The country is divided into twenty-three provincial districts with one or more judges permanently assigned to each district and the Dublin Metropolitan District.

### *Jurisdiction:*

#### A. Civil Business

The civil jurisdiction of the District Court in contract and most other matters is where the claim or award does not exceed €15,000. The District Court also has a jurisdiction in certain landlord and tenant and housing matters.

The District Court has jurisdiction to deal with the enforcement of judgements and orders.

## **B. Criminal Business**

The District Court exercising its criminal jurisdiction deals with the following:

- i. Summary offences - these are offences for which there is no right of trial by judge and jury. This makes up the bulk of the criminal work of the District Court, these offences are exclusively statutory in origin. A considerable portion of the District Court summary jurisdiction deals with road traffic offences. The District Court can impose sentences of up to 12 months for a single offence, and consecutive sentences of a further 12 months for second/subsequent offences, but no longer than two years in total.
- ii. Certain hybrid offences can be tried summarily with the consent of the accused and the Director of Public Prosecutions and the judge believing the facts constitute a minor offence.
- iii. Certain prosecutions in respect of indictable offences can be determined in the District Court where the accused pleads guilty, the Director of Public Prosecutions consents, and the judge accepts jurisdiction.
- iv. The District Court also has a role in relation to indictable offences which are tried in the Circuit Court, Special Criminal Court or the Central Criminal Court. Regarding these offences, a Book of Evidence is served on the accused and the accused is sent forward for trial by the Court to the Circuit Criminal Court, the Special Criminal Court or Central Criminal Court as appropriate.
- v. The District Court also deals with applications for bail in most criminal cases except for some more serious offences.

## **C. Family Law**

The District Court has a wide jurisdiction in the area of family law. Proceedings are not heard in open court and are as informal as is practicable.

1. *Domestic Violence:*



Under the Domestic Violence Act 2018, there are two main types of remedies, safety orders and barring orders, with interim protection orders, interim barring orders and emergency barring orders.

2. *Guardianship of Children:*

Under the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964 (as amended), the District Court can make custody and access orders and appoint guardians. It also has jurisdiction to establish paternity in relation to any child, with regard to an application for custody, access or maintenance.

3. *Maintenance and Enforcement of Orders:*

Under the Maintenance of Spouses and Children Act 1976 (as amended) the District Court can award maintenance to a spouse and/or child(ren). The maximum that can be awarded to a spouse is €500 per week and for a child €150 per week. To enforce the order the Court can direct that all payments be paid through the District Court office, make attachment of earnings or issue a warrant for the arrest of the defaulting debtor.

4. *Child Care*

Under the Childcare Act 1991, the Child and Family Agency can make a number of applications to the District Court for orders taking children into the care of the State or the supervision of the Child and Family Agency.

#### **D. Licensing**

The District Court has wide powers in relation to intoxicating liquor licensing and gaming and lottery licensing.

#### **E. Small Claims Court**

The Small Claims procedure is an economical method of dealing with a consumer civil dispute where a solicitor need not be involved. Claims cannot exceed €2000. This procedure covers consumer, business, minor property damage, and rent deposit claims. The Registrar will seek to negotiate a settlement but if the matter cannot be settled, the claim will be brought before the District Court. The District Court also deal with claims under the European Small Claims procedure - a service to handle consumer or business claims not exceeding €5000 where one of the parties lives in another EU country.

#### **F. Miscellaneous**

The District Court also deals with a very wide range of actions including actions taken under the Control of Dogs Acts, applications for citizenship, applications under the

Mental Health Acts relating to children, applications under the food safety legislation, applications under the Environmental Protection Act 1992 for orders in connection with noise reduction and applications under the Employment Equality Act 1998 and Equal Status Act 2000. It also deals with a wide range of regulatory prosecutions, such as planning, litter, pollution, fisheries, vehicle safety, employment and many others.

### *Appeals*

The District Court has a limited jurisdiction in respect of decisions made by statutory bodies and in these appeals, the decision of the District Court is final except where a point of law is at issue. In such instances an appeal can be taken by way of case stated to the High Court.

# JURISDICTION SPECIFIC LONG-TERM STRATEGY OF THE DISTRICT COURT

## NOTE

The District Court's Strategic Plan is to be understood in the context of the Irish Courts' Long-Term Strategy, in particular the Judiciary's mission and core values. The goals set out below are those which apply specifically to the District Court.

## District Court

### Vision

To provide fair, high quality, efficient and timely access to justice, having due regard to the mandate of the Court, and to take account of the complexity or urgency of any individual case.

### Purpose and Values

The purposes and values applicable to all jurisdictions apply equally to the District Court. While acknowledging the overarching importance of independence, excellence and integrity, the core values of equality before the law, fairness, and accessibility at local level are of particular relevance to the work of the District Court.

### Operating Environment

The District Court is the first, and in many cases the only court in which 85% of all court cases are dealt with. It must provide access for litigants, Gardai and the Child and Family Agency on an emergency basis 24 hours per day, 365 days per annum. The Court deals with very significant volumes of work in the areas of criminal law, family law and child care law, as well as civil cases and the majority of licensing applications. As a court of local and limited jurisdiction, it provides service in venues all over the country.

### Progress to Date

The number of judges on the Court has increased to its current, record level of 72 judges. A further 6 are due to be appointed in 2025. This has enabled the Court to eliminate backlogs arising from the pandemic period, address systemic delays, and reduce waiting times for many types of cases.

## Key Strategic Goals of the District Court

### Goal 1: To list and hear cases with the minimum possible delay

Priority Actions	Key outcomes
1. Implement external and internal protocols to ensure cases are listed and heard as soon as practicable, subject to necessary resources being in place (both in terms of numbers of judges and numbers of support staff).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. It is the Court's aim that first return dates for all classes of business should be available within 8 weeks of correct documents being lodged and/or served.</li><li>b. In contested cases, it is the Court's aim to provide trial dates within 12 weeks of cases being called on for hearing or certified as ready for hearing. These target period will vary between different categories of business.</li></ul>
2. Adequate time should be made available for cases to be disposed of fairly, and court users should be entitled to expect that judges will deal with their cases fairly and efficiently.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Enhance user experience of court processes.</li><li>b. Provide judges with more hearing time to assist with decision making</li></ul>
3. Issue Practice Directions setting reasonable timetables (e.g., for disclosure, exchange of documents) so that delays and unnecessary adjournments are avoided.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Minimise adjournments;</li><li>b. Increase in efficiency</li><li>c. Avoid procedural delays</li></ul>

## Goal 2: To improve access and facilities for District Court users

Priority Actions	Key outcomes
1. Every effort should be made to ensure that cases are listed and heard as soon as possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. As the busiest Court in Ireland (and the Court which is likely to be the court the majority of court users first experience), the Court should be accessible to litigants, easily quickly and cost-effectively.</li><li>b. Over time, online access should become available where appropriate.</li><li>c. Online filing of court documents should also be available to litigants.</li><li>d. All court documents and guidance should be provided in clear, jargon-free, and easily understood language.</li><li>e. Staff should be available during normal office hours (both online and in-person) to assist in answering reasonable queries.</li></ul> <p><i>Note: These targeted outcomes are subject to the ongoing implementation of the Courts Service Modernisation Plan and the availability of sufficient resources.</i></p>
2. Work with the Courts Service to ensure court buildings and facilities meet the needs of litigants and court users.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Litigants should be able to do business in the District Court in court buildings which are fit for purpose, accessible and safe.</li><li>b. Court venues and facilities should be adequately equipped, furnished and located to ensure that access to justice is available locally, and that resources necessary for court users, practitioners, staff and judges are in keeping with the dignity of all individuals and sufficient to enable the work of the Court to be done effectively.</li></ul>

- 3. Provide services that reflect the diversity of court users.
  - a. Service in the Irish language should be available where practicable.
  - b. In so far as practicable, assistance in accessing the Court should be available to those under disabilities (including those with impaired sight or hearing) or those who speak a foreign language.

**Goal 3: To ensure that both judges and court staff have ongoing IT training and appropriate IT equipment and related assistance**

Priority Actions	Key outcomes
1. Provide ongoing I.T. training for judges and Court staff to maintain a high level of professionalism and ensure efficient court operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. All judges of the Court should receive not only adequate IT training immediately following their appointment but should receive and avail of ongoing annual training as required either by the President of the Court or the Chief Justice.</li> <li>b. All staff of the District Court should receive adequate I.T. training. Ongoing refresher training should also be available to assist them in keeping up to date with relevant legislative developments and changes in the way that services are provided or accessed.</li> </ul>
2. Equip the Court with modern IT systems and resources to enable efficient case management and service delivery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>c. Case management systems and associated resources (IT equipment, back up staff) should be available to the judges to enable cases be listed and dealt with efficiently, fairly and in a timely manner</li> </ul>

#### Goal 4: Maximising efficiencies

The fourth strategic objective is to maximise the efficiencies achievable by the digitisation of court processes as they are implemented by the Courts Service and to utilise, where it is in the best interests of the administration of justice, the possibility of conducting virtual or hybrid court hearings, while maintaining the in person hearing of cases as the default procedure, save for good reason as determined by the Court.

Priority Actions	Key Outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Engage with the Courts Service to ensure that appropriate IT resources are available to effectively carry out both administrative and judicial functions in line with Courts Service's Strategic Plan.</li><li>2. In so far as this can be achieved by the Courts Service, facilitate the digitisation of court processes.</li><li>3. Be in a position to hear cases either remotely or on a hybrid basis where that form of hearing is shown to be appropriate for a particular case or where it is necessary to do so.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Availability of effective and suitable IT support services to assist in the efficient discharge of judicial functions.</li><li>b. Continuity of court business in the event of emergency such as unavailability of courtroom or illness.</li><li>c. Ease of access for parties and their representatives to the District Court without having to attend court in appropriate circumstances.</li></ol>



## Goal 5: Fostering ongoing training and skills development

The fifth strategic objective is to foster and develop the skills and expertise of the members of the court by encouraging all judges to avail of the judicial training courses which are now and in the future will be made available to judges. Courts staff should also receive training to support themselves and the judges in their work.

Priority Actions	Key Outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Contribute to and participate in the Judicial Council's programme of continuing education &amp; professional development for members of the Judiciary.</li><li>2. Where practicable, encourage and facilitate members of the Court to attend and participate in relevant courses of training and conferences organised by other bodies both in Ireland and abroad.</li><li>3. To meet with judges in other jurisdictions and to promote international exchanges/visits.</li><li>4. Provide training in the areas of the Court's work for both office staff and registrars</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. To assist members of the Court to keep up to date with relevant developments in law, procedures, and methods of working.</li><li>b. To foster the development of new procedures and methods of work informed by the most up to date expertise and experience.</li><li>c. To encourage dialogue with other jurisdictions with a view to keeping up to date with international best practice and to learn of developments in other jurisdictions which may be of assistance in this jurisdiction.</li><li>d. Courses should also be available to assist both staff and judges in improving their proficiency in the Irish language.</li><li>e. To assist staff in the efficient discharge of their duties.</li><li>f. To develop a pool of staff trained across all areas of the Court's work to assist the judges and court users.</li></ol>

## Goal 6: Planning for the future

To ensure that the District Court remains capable of dealing with future increases in workload arising from population increases, new areas of business, changes to and additional legislation, and to review the structure of the Court and its organisation to take account of demographic changes and movement of population.

Priority Actions	Key outcomes
1. Ensure a sufficient number of judges are assigned to the District Court to meet operational targets effectively.	a. The number of judges in the District Court should be reviewed periodically to account for factors such as population changes, additional work streams, increases in waiting times for first appearances and substantive hearings, and the frequency of out-of-hours hearings. b. Reviews of judicial numbers should take place as required by these factors but should occur not less frequently than every 3 years.
2. Conduct regular reviews of the District Court's structure and venues to align with modern needs.	c. Districts and venues should be reviewed at similar intervals to take account of similar factors and to ensure that the District Court is structured to align with 21 <sup>st</sup> century needs.

# JURISDICTION SPECIFIC LONG-TERM STRATEGY OF THE CIRCUIT COURT

## Note

The Circuit Court's Strategic Plan is to be understood in the context of the Irish Courts' Long Term Strategy, in particular the Judiciary's mission and core values. The goals set out below are those which apply specifically to the Circuit Court.

## Circuit Court

### Introduction

This Michaelmas term 2024, the Circuit Court has its full complement of 46 judges including the President of the Circuit Court. This is the first time in over 5 years that the Circuit Court has had its full complement. Prior to 2023, the full complement was 38 Ordinary Circuit judges including the President of the Circuit Court. There were invariably vacancies due to retirements which regrettably were not always filled in a timely manner. In addition, between July 2019 and January 2024 there was a judge who was on long term leave.

### Vision

To deliver high quality, reasoned decisions in a timely fashion, having due regard to the constitutional mandate of the Court, the complexity, urgency, and systemic significance of any individual case.

### Purpose and Values

The purposes and values applicable to all jurisdictions apply equally to the Circuit Court. While acknowledging the overarching importance of independence, excellence and integrity, the core values of equality before the law, timeliness and efficiency and certainty and clarity are of particular relevance to the work of the Circuit Court.

### Operating Environment

The country is divided into eight circuits with one judge assigned to each circuit except in Dublin where 10 judges may be assigned, and Cork where there is provision for 3 judges.

On the provincial circuits, the assigned judge and the office managers fix the calendar of the Circuit Court sittings a year in advance. Due to the fact that the Circuit Court did not have its full complement of 38 judges in any year, sittings in the past had to be cancelled.

Since 2023, 8 additional ordinary Circuit Court judges have been appointed.

The Circuit Court also has two new large tranches of work; these are applications under the insolvency legislation and applications under the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015. Previously there were 6 specialist judges dealing with insolvency. There are now no specialist judges which leaves the ordinary judges to carry out that work. The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 commenced in 2023. It is anticipated that applications

will increase dramatically in the near future particularly when the final date for applications to discharge wardships in the High Court approaches. This will result in a substantial increase in court applications for decision-making representatives, co-decision-making representatives, interim orders, and related court orders.

The number of indicatable criminal matters coming before the Circuit Court has increased by 20% since 2019. This resulted in holding extra court sittings and also longer sittings in provincial venues. These initiatives have been constrained by the lack of venues and Courts Service staff. One extra court, at least, is required in the Criminal Courts of Justice in Dublin to deal with Circuit Court criminal trials, to avoid a large backlog of cases.

### Progress to Date

The recent introduction of remote call overs throughout the circuits has been used to great effect for the public benefit. Sittings have now been extended to 5 days on all circuits.

A judge is on-call 7 days a week throughout the country to deal with urgent applications on all circuits. A roster system is in place to cover any out of hour applications.

The Circuit Court judges have attended seminars organised by the Judicial Education Committee with particular extensive seminars in insolvency matters and Assisted Decision-Making Capacity ('ADMC') applications, during term time and during the vacations.

## Key Strategic Goals of the Circuit Court

**Goal 1:** To reduce waiting times, case times and ensure that procedures result in an effective and efficient administration of justice.

Priority Actions	Key Outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. To reduce waiting times, particularly in criminal matters.</li><li>2. To provide consistency with the assignment of judges to a particular venue for a minimum of 2 years to deal with, for example, family law.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Continue to engage with the Courts Service regarding the possibility of opening up further venues for Circuit Court business including existing venues used in the past but now unused.</li><li>b. Continue to engage with all stakeholders in respect of reducing waiting times and other measures to improve the efficiency of the Court.</li><li>c. Explore the possibility of an increasing role for County Registrars, particularly in insolvency and ADMC applications.</li><li>d. Ensure applications under Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 to be heard on separate days in venues similar to family law lists.</li></ol>

## Goal 2: Optimise the use of technology in court proceedings and working practices

Priority Actions	Key Outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Consider remote hearings where possible and appropriate.</li><li>2. Legislative change to allow judges sitting outside normal court times to sit remotely to deal with urgent criminal matters.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. More efficient management of lists.</li><li>b. Reduction of costs for parties.</li><li>c. More efficient use of court time.</li><li>a. Substantial decrease in subsistence and mileage expenses when a judge has to travel long distances out of hours and at weekends to deal with criminal matters.</li><li>b. Ensure a more efficient service for all stakeholders if these measures were legislated for and implemented.</li></ol>

## Goal 3: Enable members of the Court to maintain standards of excellence in the administration of justice.

Priority Actions	Key Outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Engage with the Judicial Council's programme for continuing professional development through the Circuit Court.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Continuing professional development for Circuit Court judges.</li></ol>

## Goal 4: Work collaboratively with the Courts Service to identify means to improve the administration of justice in the Courts.

Priority Actions	Key Outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Work collaboratively with the Courts Service to secure disabled access for all court users.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. A physical work environment that enables proper and efficient work practices.</li></ol>

# JURISDICTION SPECIFIC LONG-TERM STRATEGY OF THE HIGH COURT

## Note

The High Court's Strategic Plan is to be understood in the context of the Irish Courts' Long Term Strategy, in particular the Judiciary's mission and core values. The goals set out below are those which apply specifically to the High Court.



## High Court

### Vision

The High Court's vision is to be a modern superior court which is accessible to and trusted by all, and which fulfils a fundamental role in our democratic society and delivers high-quality reasoned decisions in a timely fashion, having due regard to the constitutional mandate of the High Court and the complexity, urgency and systemic significance of the cases before it.

### Purpose and Values

The goals, purposes and values described in the core values set out in the Irish Courts Strategic Plan: 2024 – 2027 apply equally to the High Court. This strategy sets out the High Court's essential goal of ensuring that the Court is characterised by the user-centric administration of justice with a focus on accessibility, simplified services and processes, and the timely and efficient administration of justice by judges who benefit from ongoing education and training in accordance with best international practice.

The High Court's purpose is to serve the community by upholding the law through just, independent and impartial decision-making and dispute resolution. That purpose is underpinned by the core values identified in the overall strategy including independence, excellence, equality before the law, integrity and transparency, modernisation and accessibility, the treatment of court users with dignity and respect, timeliness and efficiency in the performance of its functions, certainty and clarity, training and continuing education and the fostering of health, well-being and respect among all judges and court staff.

This strategy for the High Court sets out the commitment of the High Court judiciary to a modern court system in Ireland which is just, user-centric, accessible and timely, efficient and effective in the administration of justice.

### Operating Environment

The High Court should consist of 51 judges (including the President). It is currently operating with 50 judges pending the appointment of a replacement for a judge who was recently elevated to the Court of Appeal. Six additional judges were due to be appointed in 2024 on foot of the report of the Judicial Planning Working Group ("JPWG"). It is hoped that these additional judges will now be appointed in 2025.

The High Court sits five days a week during court terms. High Court judges are expected to work outside court sitting hours and during court vacations and are also expected to provide night time and weekend cover (on a rostered basis) for urgent and emergency applications. High Court judges are also expected to perform other public duties in addition to conducting

court hearings, such as serving on committees and giving speeches, if requested by the President.

The High Court conducts civil and criminal business. The High Court's criminal jurisdiction is exercised by the Central Criminal Court which deals with the most serious criminal offences, such as murder and rape. High Court judges sit with a jury in the Central Criminal Court. The Central Criminal Court sits in Dublin and at other venues around the country.

The civil business of the High Court is divided into various court lists according to the type of case involved. Those court lists include the Personal Injuries, Commercial, Chancery, Family, Non-Jury/Judicial Review/Asylum and Immigration and Planning & Environment Lists. The President appoints a judge to be in charge of each of those lists and assigns judges to the lists. Most of the lists involve judges having to deliver reserved judgments which judges work on outside court sitting times during the week and over weekends. In some but not all lists, judges may be given a limited number of writing weeks in order to work on reserved judgments.

## Key Strategic Goals of the High Court

### Goal 1: Hear and determine criminal and civil cases within a reasonable time

The first strategic goal is to maximise the impact of the appointment of additional judges to the High Court, through effective allocation of judicial resources and list management, with a view to reducing the waiting times for cases to be heard and determined in civil and criminal matters before the High Court and by the delivery of judgments within a reasonable time.

Priority Actions	Key Outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Continue to press for the appointment of additional judges, including those recommended by the JPWG.</li><li>2. Monitor the allocation of cases to individual judges and judgment backlogs to avoid excessive load on individual judges.</li><li>3. Strengthen mechanisms for expedited hearings in lists where that is considered necessary and appropriate, including the implementation of the Protocol to expedite rape and murder cases involving victims and defendants under 18 years of age (the “Protocol”).</li><li>4. Introduce rules of court for new court lists such as the Planning &amp; Environment List.</li><li>5. Facilitate an appropriate balance between sitting and writing time and other duties for judges especially in document-heavy court lists with significant writing commitments.</li><li>6. Facilitating writing time and ensuring each judge has capacity to complete all judicial duties, including committee and outreach work.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. All cases can be listed for hearing and heard and determined within a reasonable period of time.</li><li>b. Implementation of the Protocol in the Central Criminal Court to provide for the expeditious determination of rape and murder cases involving victims and defendants under 18 years of age.</li><li>c. Each judge is in a position to deliver judgments within a reasonable time for the ultimate benefit of litigants, practitioners and other court users and for the benefit of the public.</li><li>d. Urgent or strategically important cases can be heard and determined in an expedited fashion.</li><li>e. The welfare of judges and all court staff is supported and enhanced.</li><li>f. Relevant rules governing new court lists will be in place.</li></ol>

## Goal 2: Promote the most effective use of judicial resources

The **second strategic goal** is to foster and develop the effective use of the judicial resources available to the High Court by embracing innovative ways in which to maximise the use of its resources.

Priority Actions	Key Outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Encourage the delivery of judgments on an <i>ex tempore</i> basis in appropriate cases and ensure Courts Service data captures such judgments.</li><li>2. Review the Pilot Project for the “Long Vacation”.</li><li>3. Consider continuing the Pilot Project and assessing the merit of expanding the project to other court lists.</li><li>4. Identify areas where rules and court practices can be improved to allow more effective and efficient use of those resources.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Quicker judgments for litigants.</li><li>b. Courts Service data captures such <i>ex tempore</i> judgments to more accurately reflect the work done by the High Court.</li><li>c. Greater use of courtrooms and court facilities.</li><li>d. Greater flexibilities in the listing and hearing of cases.</li><li>e. More efficient and effective rules of court and court practices.</li><li>f. An overall better experience for litigants and other court users.</li></ol>

## Goal 3: Create a modern, user-centric and technologically advanced High Court

Insofar as sufficient resources are available, the **third strategic goal** is to create a modern, user-centric, accessible and digitised High Court which embraces advances in technology, to ensure that court users benefit from the technological advances in courtrooms, including virtual courtrooms and electronic filing, where available.

Priority Actions	Key Outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Continue to support advances in technology for judges and court users.</li><li>2. Continue to press for sufficient resources to ensure the court and court users benefit from advances in technology.</li><li>3. Continue to afford, where appropriate, the opportunities for hybrid hearings.</li><li>4. Support digital platforms to enable file sharing to enable paperless hearings to take place, where appropriate.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. More efficient use of court time and resources.</li><li>b. Access to justice for litigants and their representatives and other court users.</li><li>c. Paperless hearings in appropriate lists.</li><li>d. Use of remote/hybrid hearings for routine procedural matters.</li></ol>

#### Goal 4: Provide and promote specialist flagship courts

The fourth strategic goal is to continue to provide Ireland with specialist flagship courts to provide a world class service in the resolution of disputes in strategically important areas.

Priority Actions	Key Outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Continue to support the work of the Commercial, Planning &amp; Environment Lists and other specialist court lists in the High Court.</li><li>2. Adopt and keep under review rules of court for those strategically important court lists.</li><li>3. Introduce and continue working with user groups in these specialist flagship courts.</li><li>4. Continue to develop relationships with similar specialist courts in other jurisdictions to explore the ways in which the business of Ireland's specialist flagship courts can be developed and improved.</li><li>5. Monitor closely the caseloads of the judges assigned to those specialist flagship courts and seek additional resources where necessary.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Maintaining the excellent reputation which the specialist flagship lists of the High Court, such as the Commercial and Planning &amp; Environment Lists, enjoy.</li><li>b. The proper resourcing of those and other divisions of the High Court.</li><li>c. Effective user groups for these and other court lists to ensure the current and emerging needs of litigants and their representatives and other court users are identified and, as far as possible, met.</li><li>d. Effective and mutually beneficial relationships with similar specialist courts in other jurisdictions.</li><li>e. Putting into practice learnings from other jurisdictions as to how the work of Ireland's specialist courts can be made even more efficient.</li></ol>

## Goal 5: Enhance access to, and public understanding of, the High Court

The **fifth strategic goal** is to work with relevant stakeholders to make the High Court an accessible and inclusive environment for its users and visitors and to work to ensure that Court users and visitors are aware of the role the High Court plays in the broader societal goals of access to justice.

Priority Actions	Key Outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Continue efforts to ensure the process and procedures of the High Court are clear, consistent, user-friendly and non-discriminatory.</li><li>2. Collaborate with user groups and other stakeholders, especially those representing minority groups and persons with disabilities, as well as the Courts Service Inclusion Group, to seek to ensure, as far as possible, equitable access to justice in the High Court.</li><li>3. Learn from and seek to apply research into the global best practices relating to accessibility and inclusion in court settings, subject to available resources.</li><li>4. Support judges in training endeavours which seek to develop a better understanding of inclusion of minority groups and persons with disabilities in a court setting.</li><li>5. Develop and implement a policy to support litigants in person, in the High Court.</li><li>6. Actively promote information about the work of the High Court in the public domain through appropriate channels, nationally and internationally.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Court users and visitors will recognise the High Court as an inclusive and accessible place, as far as possible.</li><li>b. Broader public understanding of the work of the High Court.</li><li>c. Achievement of best practice in recognising and implementing measures to foster accessibility and inclusion in court settings.</li><li>d. Specific measures will be taken to address the needs and requirements of litigants in person and the way in which cases involving such litigants are managed by the High Court.</li></ol>

## Goal 6: Foster ongoing training and skills development

The sixth strategic goal is to ensure that the High Court judiciary continues to engage with training in accordance with international best practice and to benefit from professional development opportunities. This includes attendance at conferences, formal judicial training in workshops, and the mentoring of newly appointed judges by more experienced judges who are trained as mentors. The training of new and existing judges ensures judicial excellence, and makes the High Court a more effective court and a more inclusive place for all litigants, practitioners, court staff, members of the public and for the judges themselves.

Priority Actions	Key Outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Maintain very high attendance at national conferences and encourage increased attendance by High Court judges at other conference and training events including international events to benefit from international best practice.</li><li>2. Encourage the dissemination by High Court judges of training and materials acquired at such conferences and training events.</li><li>3. Ensure the continued specialist training of High Court judges as judicial trainers, making them available to lead judicial training events both nationally and internationally.</li><li>4. Promote international exchanges/ visits where this will benefit the work of the High Court and the professional development of its judges.</li><li>5. Support judicial participation in national and international judicial bodies, and on relevant committees and increase public engagement and other appropriate roles.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. An expanded national programme of judicial training, led by national judges and attended by judges of all jurisdictions and seniority.</li><li>b. Increased participation in national and international events, including as speakers and judicial trainers.</li><li>c. The development of new procedures and methods of work informed by experiences learnt from judges from other court jurisdictions in order to improve and make more efficient the work of judges.</li><li>d. Increased public engagement by judges with the community and with the public, both nationally and internationally.</li></ol>

# JURISDICTION SPECIFIC LONG-TERM STRATEGY OF THE COURT OF APPEAL

## NOTE

The Court of Appeal's Strategic Plan is to be understood in the context of the Irish Courts' Long Term Strategy, in particular the Judiciary's mission and core values. The goals set out below are those which apply specifically to the Court of Appeal.



## Court of Appeal

### Vision

To deliver high quality, reasoned decisions in a timely fashion, having due regard to the constitutional mandate of the Court, the complexity, urgency and systemic significance of any individual case.

### Purpose and Values

The purposes and values applicable to all jurisdictions apply equally to the Court of Appeal. While acknowledging the overarching importance of independence, excellence and integrity, the core values of equality before the law, timeliness and efficiency and certainty and clarity are of particular relevance to the work of the Court of Appeal.

### Operating Environment

The Court sits four days a week in three panels of three judges, one to hear criminal appeals and two to hear civil appeals. Wednesdays are kept free for reading and for urgent appeals. The appeals are case managed and the judges are furnished with the papers in advance (typically four weeks in the case of civil appeals) so that the judges may familiarise themselves with the issues in the appeal. This allows for focused oral hearings which typically are shorter than trials in the High Court. The members of the Court are rotated to facilitate writing time and to assign judges with particular expertise to sit on particular appeals. Each term, writing weeks are set aside to allow the judges to have uninterrupted extended time to write more complex judgments which otherwise would have to await vacations in order for the writing judge to make meaningful progress.

### Progress to Date

When the Court of Appeal was established on 28 October 2014, it started with a backlog of 1360 appeals which were transferred from the Supreme Court to the Court of Appeal under Article 64 of the Constitution. Also, from that date, it became the court of appeal from all decisions of the High Court and all criminal appeals previously heard by the Court of Criminal Appeal. It had both to deal with new appeals and clear the historic arrears. Initially there were only ten judges on the Court. Experience showed that this was insufficient to enable the Court both to list appeals in a timely fashion and to deliver the judgments in respect of the appeals heard. As a result delays in hearing and deciding appeals inevitably arose. The numbers of the judges on the Court were increased to facilitate the court sitting in three panels, one for criminal appeals and two for civil appeals. As a result the time for listing appeals has been greatly reduced and generally the time for delivering reserved judgments has also come down. In September 2024 the last of the appeals transferred from the Supreme Court concluded.

The court adopted a Judgments Protocol in Michaelmas 2023 which was recently revised in Michaelmas 2024 to assist judges to deliver judgments in a timely manner. Section 111 of The Courts and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2023 authorises the President to direct that certain appeals may be heard and determined by one judge sitting alone, which allows for a more efficient use of the judicial resources of the court. As part of its outreach mandate the Court heard appeals in Cork and Limerick.

## Key Strategic Goals of the Court of Appeal

### Goal 1: Hear appeals in a timely fashion

Based on its experience, the Court has come to the view that the time frames set out in the table below should be adopted for the hearing of appeals. While expedited hearings of urgent appeals are facilitated, the below time periods are considered to be optimum as they ensure a timely hearing of an appeal while, at the same time, affording both the parties and the Court the time required to prepare the appeal for hearing. Currently, these listing times are largely achievable but, if the number of appeals greatly increases in number and/or complexity, this objective may be challenging to achieve.

Priority Actions	Key Outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hear civil appeals within the optimum period of 5-8 months from the date of the filing of a notice of appeal, where resources permit. At present, this is the case for most civil appeals.</li> <li>2. Hear criminal appeals within 3 months or sooner once the appellant indicates that they are in a position to proceed. At present, this is the case for most criminal appeals.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Timely hearing of appeals and enhancing access to justice.</li> <li>b. Parties will have adequate time to prepare for the hearing of appeals.</li> <li>c. Court panels will also have adequate time to prepare for hearings.</li> <li>d. Court users will have clarity and certainty in relation to the progress of appeals.</li> </ol>

### Goal 2: Promote the most effective use of the judicial resources of the Court

The Court's objective is to foster the effective use of its judicial resources.

Priority Actions	Key Outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Encourage the delivery of judgments on an <i>ex tempore</i> basis where an appeal properly admits of such form of judgment, thereby speedily disposing of the appeal.</li> <li>2. Where appropriate, list civil appeals which qualify in accordance with s. 111 of the Courts and Civil Law</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Efficient and early disposal of appeals.</li> <li>b. Maximising use of available judicial resources.</li> <li>c. Enhancing the administration of the Court.</li> </ol>

(Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2023 for hearing before a single judge sitting alone, thereby freeing up judicial resources which would otherwise have been assigned to hear the appeal.

3. Consider amendments to the Rules of Court pursuant to s. 111 of the Courts and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2023 with a view to expanding the types of appeals which may be heard by one judge sitting alone, thereby maximising the appropriate use of the judicial resources of the court.

- d. Reducing judgment waiting times.
- e. Building on the utility available under s. 111 of the Courts and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2023 to enable more single judge sittings in respect of appeals from interlocutory orders of the High Court thereby allowing such appeals to be disposed of in early course and ensuring that the progress of the underlying proceedings in the High Court will not be delayed

### Goal 3: Provide support to judges to deliver timely judgments

The third strategic objective is to support the judges to deliver reserved judgments in as timely a fashion as is compatible with the role of the Court of Appeal as the final court of appeal in most cases and its role in providing clarity and guidance as to the interpretation and application of the law.

Priority Actions	Key Outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Conduct regular reviews of the balance between the reading, writing and sitting time of individual judges.</li> <li>2. Implement the Court’s recently adopted protocol governing reserved judgments and regularly review it to ensure that it is kept up to date and fit for purpose. It is anticipated that the task of monitoring outstanding judgments and the workloads of individual judges will be facilitated by the greater availability of relevant data provided by the Courts Service as part of its modernisation programme.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Ensuring that sufficient writing time is available to judges to enable judgments to be delivered as early as practicable.</li> <li>b. Maintaining a high standard of judgment writing.</li> <li>c. Providing clear guidance to the lower courts, the legal profession and the public at large in relation to the meaning and application of the law.</li> <li>d. Fostering the collaborative nature of the work of the Court.</li> </ol>

### Goal 4: Maximising efficiencies

The fourth strategic objective is to maximise the efficiencies achievable by the digitisation of court processes as they are implemented by the Courts Service and to utilise, where it is in the best interests of the administration of justice, the possibility of conducting virtual or hybrid court hearings, while maintaining the in person hearing of appeals as the default procedure, save for good reason as determined by the Court.

Priority Actions	Key Outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Engage with the Courts Service to ensure that appropriate IT resources are available to effectively carry out both administrative and judicial functions in line with Courts Service’s Strategic Plan.</li> <li>2. In so far as this can be achieved by the Courts Service, facilitate the digitisation of court processes.</li> <li>3. Be in a position to hear appeals either remotely or on a hybrid basis where that form of hearing is shown to be appropriate for a particular appeal or where it is necessary to do so.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Availability of effective and suitable IT support services to assist in the efficient discharge of judicial functions.</li> <li>b. Continuity of court business in the event of emergency such as unavailability of courtroom or illness.</li> <li>c. Ease of access for parties and their representatives to the Court of Appeal without having to attend court in appropriate circumstances.</li> </ol>

### Goal 5: Improving accessibility and efficiency of appeals involving litigants in person

The fifth strategic objective is to implement those recommendations of the Judicial Litigant in Person Working Group as are adopted and insofar as they relate to the Court of Appeal and are within the competence of the Court. By this means the Court aims to improve the accessibility and efficiency of appeals involving litigants in person.

Priority Actions	Key Outcomes
1. Implement the recommendations of the Judicial Litigant in Person Working Group insofar as they relate to the Court of Appeal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Develop a Court of Appeal handbook for litigants in person.</li><li>b. Develop liaison between the Central Office of the High Court and the Office of the Court of Appeal in respect of litigants who are subject to orders restricting the circumstances in which they can litigate in the Courts.</li></ul>

### Goal 6: Fostering ongoing training and skills development

The sixth strategic objective is to foster and develop the skills and expertise of the members of the Court by encouraging all judges to avail of the judicial training courses which are now and in the future will be made available to judges.

Priority Actions	Key Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Contribute to and participate in the Judicial Council's programme of continuing education &amp; professional development for members of the Judiciary.</li><li>2. Where practicable, encourage and facilitate members of the Court to attend and participate in relevant courses of training and conferences organised by other bodies both in Ireland and abroad.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. To assist members of the Court to keep up to date with relevant developments in law, procedures, and methods of working.</li><li>b. To foster the development of new procedures and methods of work informed by the most up to date expertise and experience.</li></ul>

3. To meet with judges in other jurisdictions and to promote international exchanges/visits.

c. To encourage dialogue with other jurisdictions with a view to keeping up to date with international best practice and to learn of developments in other jurisdictions which may be of assistance in this jurisdiction.

# JURISDICTION SPECIFIC LONG-TERM STRATEGY OF THE SUPREME COURT

## NOTE

The Supreme Court's Strategic Plan is to be understood in the context of the Irish Courts' Long Term Strategy, in particular the Judiciary's mission and core values. The goals set out below are those which apply specifically to the Supreme Court.



## Supreme Court

### Vision

To deliver high-quality, reasoned decisions; to provide timely administration of justice for court users; to promote the accessibility of and public understanding of the work of the Court and its special role in interpreting and upholding the Constitution and the rule of law in our democratic society and to enhance the international standing and reputation of the Court.

### Purpose and Values

The constitutional and statutory mandate of the Supreme Court is outlined on pages 12 and 13 of the Long Term Strategy applicable to all courts.

The purpose of the Supreme Court is to make final decisions on appeals in all areas of law in Ireland when a case meets the threshold for leave to appeal to the Supreme Court, and bring finality to interpretation of the Constitution and the law. The Supreme Court is an apex court with a wide jurisdiction to hear and determine cases with systemic implications for the administration of justice in Ireland.

### Operating Environment

#### Internal environment – state of play and court business trends

The appellate jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of Ireland was reformed in 2014 and which now, following ten years of its operation, is well embedded. Legislation provides for ten members of the Court (the Chief Justice and nine ordinary members) but the Court has been operating with nine members in total since April 2024.

Prior to the establishment of the Court of Appeal in 2014, there was an almost automatic right of appeal to the Supreme Court. Since the establishment of the Court of Appeal, the Supreme Court has determined what appeals it will hear in accordance with a constitutional threshold as set out a page 11 of this strategic plan. The Supreme Court has since disposed of a backlog of appeals and there is no delay in cases being finalised by the Court other than the time litigants and their representatives require to undertake the necessary procedural steps. Any such procedural requirements are set out in the Superior Courts Rules and Practice Directions, which are available on the [Supreme Court website](#).

Statistics in relation to Supreme Court cases can be found in the [annual reports of the Supreme Court](#), and on the [Courts Service website](#). The number of incoming applications for leave to appeal to the Supreme Court has ranged from 142 to 229 since 2019. In 2023, the number of incoming applications for leave to appeal was 160; a 10% increase in comparison with 2022. Of the 160 applications for leave to appeal determined in 2023, the

Court granted leave in relation to 55 applications (35%) and refused leave in relation to 98 (61%). Figures in 2024 so far indicate that the pattern of increasing AFLs will continue for this year, with 171 applications for leave filed, and 174 determined as of 16<sup>th</sup> December.

As at the end of 2023 the expected wait time for appeals for which leave had been granted was 20 weeks. On average, it took 4.5 weeks for the Court to issue a Determination of an application for leave to appeal from the filing of complete documents by the parties.

Following 100 years of the existence of a Supreme Court of Ireland and ten years of experience operating under a reformed jurisdiction, the Court is well placed to set out its vision and strategic goals.

## External environment – opportunities and challenges

### *Opportunities*

In formulating this strategic plan, the Supreme Court has had particular regard to the following opportunities which the external environment in which it operates presents.

**The Judicial Planning Working Group and study of the OECD on Modernising Staffing and Court Management Practices in Ireland** - While the Supreme Court was outside of the scope of the reports, both provide a basis for considering the structures and processes currently employed by all courts, including the Supreme Court.

**The Courts Service's Long Term Strategic Vision**, supplemented by its Corporate Strategic Plans and being implemented through its Modernisation Programme promotes digital transformation and working collaboratively with the judiciary to define and prioritise resources needed by judges.

**The Review of the Administration of Civil Justice report** is another reform initiative which provides an opportunity for modernisation.

**The Judicial Council** established in 2019, is made up of all members of the Judiciary of Ireland. Its functions of promoting and maintaining excellence in the performance of judicial functions, high standards of judicial conduct, an independent judiciary and public confidence in the judiciary and administration of justice, align with the strategic goals of the Court.

### *Challenges*

Some key challenges in fulfilling the goals set out in this plan are:

- Court business trends can be difficult to predict and are dependent on trends in the Court of Appeal and in the High Court. If the Supreme Court receives a reference

under Article 26 of the Constitution, there are strict time limits for the delivery of a judgment which can impact delivery in respect of other court business.

- The potential knock-on impact of the addition of more judicial resources in other court jurisdiction on the Supreme Court is not yet known.
- Other than judicial salaries which come from the Central Fund, the financial resources of the Supreme Court and consequently the implementation of the strategic goals below are dependent on adequate resources being provided to the Courts Service and Judicial Council under the Department of Justice vote.
- There are constraints associated with the location of the Supreme Court in the Four Courts complex and challenges in improving collaborative working practices and business activities.

### Progress to Date

Although this is the first long term strategy of the Supreme Court, the Court has consistently implemented reform and made progress in areas relevant to its purpose, values, vision and strategic goals set out in this strategic plan.

In particular the Supreme Court has:

- Continued to ensure that its judgments are of a high quality;
- Set out expectations in its Determinations of what cases will meet the constitutional threshold for leave to appeal to be granted to ensure clarity, transparency and efficiency for parties bringing an application;
- Reviewed its procedures in 2018 in consultation with legal practitioners and introduced new procedures;
- Further review and amendment to procedures in 2021, including refinement of case management procedures ((including the introduction of a Statement of Case and Clarification Request procedure) to ensure that cases are managed to a just and efficient determination.
- Formulated external and internal protocols on judgments to promote transparency and efficiency in the judgment process, while maintaining the primary requirement of high quality judgments;
- Implemented voluntary assistance/representation agreement with the Bar of Ireland and Law Society to ensure access to the Court in appropriate cases;

- Commenced publishing a summary of every judgment of the Supreme Court simultaneously with the delivery of the judgment;
- Worked to enhance public understanding of the Court by expanding its outreach programme with second and third level educational institutions, introducing sittings outside of Dublin, launching a new Supreme Court website and publishing its activities in an annual report.
- Utilised technology introduced under the Courts Service's modernisation programme to conduct court business where appropriate.
- Introduced a modern office productivity toolset including new desktop technology to improve communication and the sharing of documentation.

### *Strengths*

The key strengths of the Supreme Court which enable it to fulfil its constitutional and statutory functions and will allow it to achieve its vision and strategic objectives are:

- The experience, expertise, independence and commitment of the members of the Court to delivering high-quality, reasoned decisions, provide timely administration of justice for court users;
- The capacity of individual members of the Court to carry out their judicial functions independently while working together collegiately;
- The flexibility and adaptability of the Court in dealing with a constantly evolving legal and court system;
- The strong relationships of the Court with courts of similar jurisdiction in other jurisdictions and with the Court of Justice of the European Union and the European Court of Human Rights;
- The support provided by the Courts Service in fulfilling its statutory objective of providing support services to judges, its commitment to modernisation, and an effective and competent Supreme Court Office.

## Key Strategic Goals of the Supreme Court

**Goal 1: To deliver high quality, timely decisions on applications for leave to appeal and appeals.**

Priority Actions	Key outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Implement external and internal protocols on judgments.</li><li>2. Conduct review of Court's Practice Directions, protocols and guidance notes in consultation with court users.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. More streamlined procedures based on feedback from court users to meet the current and emerging needs of litigants and their representative.</li><li>b. Simplified processes leading to enhanced access to justice.</li><li>c. Transparency for court users and members of the public in relation to the process leading to the delivery of judgment.</li><li>d. Delivery of decisions in as timely a manner as possible whilst maintaining high quality of decisions.</li><li>e. Clarity in the law for court users, members of the public, other organs of State and the international community.</li><li>f. A continued culture of collaborative working environment for members of the Court that respects the core value of judicial independence.</li><li>g. Maintenance of public confidence in Court decisions and the rule of law.</li></ol>

## Goal 2: To enhance access to and public understanding of the Supreme Court

Priority Actions	Key outcomes
1. Review and improve outreach and education programme, including Comhrá, summer placement programme for law students and other engagement with educational institutions.	a. Greater understanding among students and the public of the role of Court, its work and its place in our democratic society.
2. Consider and review accessibility of judgment summaries.	b. Maintenance of public confidence in the Judiciary.
3. Collaborate with legal professions to enhance the Supreme Court's voluntary legal assistance / legal representation scheme.	c. Enhanced diversity in the legal professions and consequently the Judiciary through outreach.
4. Recommence sittings outside of Dublin.	d. Greater understanding of Supreme Court judgments through simplification of judgment summaries.
5. Pilot the general broadcasting of Supreme Court proceedings.	e. Better access to legal representation in Supreme Court through Supreme Court Legal Assistance Scheme
	f. Increased accessibility of Supreme Court proceedings through broadcasting.
	g. Facilitation of fair and accurate media reporting of Supreme Court cases through broadcasting.
	h. Greater understanding of the role of its Court and improved access to court decisions via website.

**Goal 3: Optimise the use of technology in court proceedings and working practices.**

Priority actions	Key outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Consider whether technology enabled courtroom can facilitate remote attendance in further appeal proceedings and/or as a business continuity measure in emergency circumstances and/or as a tool for the Court to engage in further outreach.</li><li>2. Further contribute to newly launched Supreme Court website.</li><li>3. Engage with the Courts Service to ensure IT resources available to effectively carry out judicial functions in line with Courts Service's Strategic Plan.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Ease of access for parties and their representatives to Supreme Court without having to attend court in appropriate circumstances (particularly in relation to case management hearings; the Court continues to regard personal attendance at the substantive appeal hearing to be the default requirement).</li><li>b. Continuity of court business in the event of emergency such as unavailability of courtroom or illness.</li><li>c. Efficient, effective and suitable IT support services to enable fulfilment of judicial functions.</li></ol>

**Goal 4: Enable members of the Court to maintain standards of excellence in the administration of justice.**

Priority actions	Key outcomes
1. Contribute to and participate in Judicial Council's programme of continuing professional development for the Judiciary.	a. Continuing professional development for court members to meet the demands of making high quality decisions in an increasingly complex and changing legal environment.
2. Collaborate with newly established Judicial Appointments Commission to ensure skills, qualities and attributes of members of the Court identified for the purposes of judicial appointments application process.	b. Appointment of persons with requisite skills, knowledge and attributes to fill any vacancies on Supreme Court.
3. Work with Courts Service to secure appropriate office accommodation for members of the Court and support services to work collaboratively.	c. Sharing of knowledge and experience with courts outside of Ireland to promote an understanding of and inform each other's decisions.
4. Maintain and strengthen close relationships with other Apex courts, both in and outside of the EU, and with the Court of Justice of the European Union and European Court of Human Rights.	d. A support staff model that best meets the support needs of the members of the Court.
5. Work collaboratively with Courts Service to identify human resource needs to better support the Court.	e. A physical work environment that enables maximum collaboration, and efficient working practices.

### Monitoring

The implementation of these strategic goals will be monitored and reviewed through regular meetings of the Court.