

Improving Customer Service Standards

An Action Plan 1998 - 1999

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The Quality Customer Service Initiative is intended to improve the focus on service delivery, to establish clear standards and to help us identify ways in which improvements might be made. In the domain of customer service, the spirit of the law is probably as important as the letter. While we may not have the same volume of customers as certain other Departments and Offices, we nonetheless need to be mindful of their needs at all times and to take all reasonable steps to ensure that these needs are being fully addressed. The standards set out in our Guide, Quality Customer Service Standards, as well as the enhancements proposed in this Action Plan, together constitute a renewed commitment to quality service by the Department.

By setting out our standards in this way, we are making it easier for ourselves, not just to continue to deliver a high standard of service, but to ensure that suitable standards continue to evolve in step with the changing needs of our customers.

Each of us must become fully familiar with our service standards and apply them in our dealings with the public. In this connection, little things often count for a lot: for example, activating voice-mail before leaving your desk, acknowledging letters received, issuing final replies to letters at the earliest possible date, and informing customers of your Direct Dial-in number or the Department's LoCall number.

We have appointed a Quality Customer Service Team to support our individual and collective efforts to improve the structure of service delivery. If you have any ideas or suggestions for improving our service standards, please contact 604 5659.

P H Mullarkey

December 1997

-- An Action Plan --

Introduction

Our customer action plan is designed to set out our standards in a clear and readable form. It advances the aims of the Strategic Management Initiative by focusing on the needs of our customers and ensuring that we are all familiar with the standards in place across the Department.

The Principles of Quality Customer Service for customers and clients of the civil service were published on 9 May, 1997 -- the Principles are listed inside the front and back covers. Our action plan ensures that a suitable framework exists within the Department for implementing these principles and for making further improvements in the years ahead.

The Department's Customers

We have responsibilities to the Government, Minister and Minister of State, other Government Departments and Offices and the wider public sector. We also have contact with EU and financial institutions, international agencies, regional authorities, the social partners, journalists, academics, economists and lobby groups. While our dealings with individual members of the public may not be as extensive as those of certain other Departments and Offices, we are nonetheless strongly committed to providing all of our customers with a high standard of service.

The Department has been reviewing its organisation and practices over the past four years under the Strategic Management Initiative. Numerous improvements have been made and others are planned. This action plan sets out specific measures which should help to improve further the standard of our services and secure valuable feedback from both customers and the Department's own staff on how further improvements might be effected.

-- OUR STANDARDS --

The Department is fully committed to providing a high standard of service to members of the public and other clients.

A Quality Customer Service Team has been appointed to advise on, assist with and monitor adherence to customer service standards across the Department. The team comprises Ms Breda Scanlan, Ms Carolyn Diez Daly and Ms Maureen Bird, who may be contacted by dialling 604 5519, 604 5659 or 604 5657, respectively.

- The Quality Customer Service Team will examine complaints from the public about our standards of service delivery.

N.B. It should be noted that recourse to this complaint procedure by a member of the public will not infringe upon his/her

right to approach the Ombudsman.

Regular feedback on customer satisfaction and needs will be an essential element for ensuring that high standards of service are being maintained and further improvements identified. We are committing, therefore, to seeking regular feedback on our standards of service through the use of comment cards and occasional surveys. Commencing February, 1998, comment cards will be available in the reception areas of each of our offices.

We will undertake surveys of our customers and clients from time to time to ensure that we remain up to date on their needs and that the standards of our services are acceptable. The first survey will be carried out in June, 1998.

Personal callers to the Department's offices should be made to feel welcome, treated with courtesy, and have their business dealt with efficiently and promptly. Callers should be encouraged to make an appointment where possible in the interests of saving time on their arrival and having their business transacted as quickly as possible.

A Code of Practice for Receiving Personal Callers has been drawn up. Every member of staff is required to be thoroughly familiar with the code and to adhere fully to its standards in his/her dealings with personal callers.

The Code of Practice for Receiving Personal Callers requires, in particular, that:

- all personal callers to the Department's offices be received with courtesy
- their right to privacy be fully respected at all times
- their inquiries be dealt with efficiently and promptly
- in the event that an enquiry is not relevant to the Department, every effort be made to direct the caller to a Department or Office that can assist him/her.

The code requires also that

- reception staff wear name badges at all times
- staff expecting personal callers notify reception staff.

Under the code we are committing to further improvements over the next few years, including

- improved access to our offices for people with disabilities
- adequate signs, in both Irish and English, in all reception areas, including a list of the main sections of the Department located in that office.

An up-to-date Code of Practice for Telephone Use has been introduced. Every member of staff must be thoroughly familiar with the code.

The code requires, in particular, that we

- answer all incoming telephone calls promptly
- give our full names and sections on answering the telephone
- be as helpful and informative as we can with telephone callers
- either call back or write as soon as possible if we cannot deal with an enquiry immediately
- give our Direct Dial-In (DDI) number (i.e. 604 + extension) so that regular callers do not have to go through the switchboard.

In addition to Direct Dial-In, callers will be informed of other telephone facilities such as

- the Department's LoCall number -- 1890 661010 -- for callers outside the Dublin (01) telephone area. LoCall enables a caller to telephone the Department from anywhere in the country at local call rates;
- voice-mail through which callers may leave messages when staff are absent from their desks. Rather than leave a voice-mail message, callers can press "0" (if they are using a touch-tone phone) to return to the switchboard.

All staff are required to be fully familiar with the voice-mail facility.

A Code of Practice for handling Correspondence from Members of the Public has been introduced.

Under the code, we will

- continue to deal speedily with all correspondence: our aim is to respond to 75% of correspondence within 15 working days [Since much of the correspondence we receive requires research and consultation, it will not always be possible to issue a final reply within that period; however, in such instances we will keep the correspondent informed of developments]
- acknowledge receipt of all correspondence
- ensure that our replies carry a contact name and a telephone extension number
- ensure that our replies are clear and easy to understand.

The Department uses few forms in conducting its business but, to the extent that we do, they will be reviewed to ensure that they are as simple and as easy to complete as possible.

The Quality Customer Service Team will assess the Department's forms over the next year and suggest improvements where necessary.

The Department has a range of regular and occasional publications, all of which are the subject of media, economic or academic interest. They are now produced in accordance with the Department's Style Manual, introduced in 1996.

While the present standard of our publications will be maintained, we will also

- ensure that they continue to be both timely and accurate and that they continue to meet the needs of their intended readership
- put them on display in our reception areas
- make their details available on the Internet.

The style and general design of our publications, as well as our stationery, will be reviewed in early 1999.

- We will continue to use modern technology, including the Internet, to ensure that our services are of the highest standard
- A project is well under way to provide staff with individual Internet addresses and we aim to complete this by end-1998
- We will continue to train staff so that they get the best results from modern technology
- The Department's Information Technology Plan will include a commitment to quality customer service.

The Information Technology Unit welcomes suggestions to improve the way technology supports our services.

The Department's management fully recognises the importance of adequate training in customer service delivery for developing, maintaining and continuously improving service standards.

We will, therefore,

- carry out a Training Needs Analysis in 1998 to identify, amongst others, our customer service training requirements, and
- provide the training in question for all relevant staff.

The Department's Training Officer is also available to advise and assist staff with their training requirements, including those relating to customer service.

In April, 1998, when the Freedom of Information Act takes effect, we will be required to furnish information about our Department's structures, functions and services, as well as the rules, procedures and guidelines used for the purpose of

making decisions and recommendations.

The necessary preparatory work is well under way and the relevant information will be made available in printed form and on the Internet.

Every member of staff is required to be familiar with The Ombudsman's Guide to Standards of Best Practice for Public Servants.

Our staff, especially those in regular direct contact with the public, are a vital source of ideas and feedback on quality service. Accordingly,

- Staff dealing directly with the public will be invited to comment on how well we are meeting our service standards and how we might improve them
- Staff generally will be invited to submit suggestions for improving the quality of our services
- In consultation with staff at all levels, we will conduct a review of our service standards by 1 March, 1999.
- The Department will gladly deal with enquiries and correspondence through Irish
- Cuireann an Roinn fáilte roimh fhiosraithe agus chomhfhreagras i nGaeilge.

A number of changes are taking place within the Department, some of which are expected to take effect in the near future, to further improve customer service standards. These include:

- the introduction of a staff development plan
- the continued use of work programmes to monitor progress in achieving the Department's objectives
- the introduction in 1998 of a performance management system across the Department
- the incorporation of customer service principles into the Department's Statement of Strategy.

TELEPHONE

Switchboard (01) 6767571

LoCall 1890 661010

Direct Dial-in 604 + extension

If you are unclear as to which section or individual you should address your enquiry, please contact General Enquiries (ext. 5665).

Subject	Contact	Extension
Actuarial Services	John Reilly	5007
Administrative Audit	Ronan Fox	5544
Administrative Budgets	Emer Hogan	5582
Analytical Studies	Brian Lenehan	5017
Area Partnerships	Eugene Barry	5758
Banking Supervision	Richard Shine	5504
Budget Co-Ordination	Robert Watt	5675

C&A Scheme	Kevin Kirwan	5413
Capital Expenditure	Colm Desmond	5547
Capital Taxes	Laura Behan	5879
Civil Service Numbers	Liam Kelly	5589
CMOD	Reception	5079/5090
Cohesion Fund	Tom Ryan	5721
Consultancy Terms	Albert O'Donoghue	5545
Corporation Tax	Sinead Boyle	5622
CSF Evaluation Unit	Dave Hegarty	5333
CSF Monitoring	Betty Donnelly	5724
Debt Management	Martin Moloney	5571
Debt Mgt. (State bodies)	Ciaran Murphy	5534
Decentralisation	John White	5540
Economic Forecasting	Mary Nash	5813
Economic Statistics	Liam Reamonn	5767
Economy - International	Brenda McVeigh	5788
EIB/EIF	Mary Flanagan	5738
Employment	Marie Mackle	5768
EMU	Louisa Newstead	5508
Environment & Economy	Liam Reamonn	5767
ERDF	Tom Ryan	5721
Estimates Office	Carol Coughlan	5537
Ethics Act (civil service)	Colm Sweeney	5442
EU Co-ordination	Brian Bermingham	5449
Euro Changeover	John Conlon	5088
Exchange Rate	Dermot Mulligan	5533
Exchequer Accounts	Noel Daly	5312
Exchequer Funding	David Owens	5563
Excise Duties	Michael Swan	5805

Finance Bill	Paul Lynch	5597
Financial Mgt. System	Gerry Kenny	5061
Freedom of Information	Sean Garvey	5829
	Aine Stapleton	5827
Gaeleagras	Máire Nic Dhonnchadha	5041
Gender Equality	Tim Harrington	5440
General Enquiries	Michael Duffy	5665
Government Accounting	Deirdre Moran	5583
Human Resource Devl. Services	Reception	5124/5125
IFSC	Catherine Lumsden	5791
IMF	John Connolly	5740
Income Tax	John Burke	5617
INPUT Scheme	Breda Byrne	5018
Insurance	Michael Davitt	5690
Interest Rate	Brendan Coogan	5570
Internal Audit	Paul Gully	5345
INTERREG Policy	Dermot Keane	5473
Investment Intermediaries	Orlaith Gleeson	5560
Investor Compensation	Orlaith Gleeson	5560
IT Expenditure	Niamh Toomey	5069
IT Systems Development	Séan O'Connell	5099
IT Procurement	Niamh Toomey	5069
IT Security	Paul Murphy	5095
IT - Technical Advice	Dolores Rooney	5102
IT Unit	Liz Nolan	5454
Language Training Centre	Catriona Ryan	5043
Macroeconomic Model	Feargal Ó Brolcháin	5802
Minister's Office	Hannah O'Riordan	5626
Minister of State's Office	Gary Tobin	5644

Monetary Policy	Brendan Coogan	5570
National Lottery	Carl Marshall	5757
NTMA	Martin Moloney	5571
Organisational Development	Pat McBride	5053
PAY		
Civil Service	Kevin Kirwan	5413
Defence Forces	Marianne Nolan	5402
Garda Síochana	Joyce Nolan	5446
Health Sector	Michael Errity	5469
Local Authorities	Michael Errity	5469
Oireachtas Members	Marianne Nolan	5402
Semi-state	Gerry Quinlan	5407
Teachers	Jim Deane	5410
Paymaster General (Banking)	Dermot Clynes	5201
Paymaster General (Pensions)	Noel Daly	5312
Payroll (Unipay/CORE)	Colm McGlynn	5091
Personnel Admin. System	Colm McGlynn	5091
Personnel Function (Accomm.)	Siobhán Errity	5658
Personnel Function (Staffing)	Joan Connaughton	5663
Press Office	Michael Moran	5875
	Denise Murphy	5650
Promotions	Eamonn Geoghegan	5422
Public Expenditure	Carol Coughlan	5537
Public Procurement	Deirdre O'Neill	5787
Public Service Pay	Jim Deane	5410
Public Service Renewal	Robert Pye	5800
Quality Customer Service	Breda Scanlan	5519
	Carolyn Diez Daly	5659
	Maureen Bird	5657

Recruitment	Francis Byrne	5420
Seirbhís Phoiblí	Breda Byrne	5018
Shannon Airport Tax Cert.	Des O'Leary	5797
Staff Equity	Tim Harrington	5440
Staff Information System	Liam Kelly	5589
Staff Numbers & Grading	Stephen Kavanagh	5613
Staff Suggestion Scheme	Breda Byrne	5018
State Banks	Ciaran Murphy	5534
State Guarantees	Ciaran Murphy	5534
Strategic Management	Robert Pye	5800
Stock Exchange	Orlaith Gleeson	5560
Structural Funds Policy	Tom Heffernan	5726
Superannuation	Joe Drein	5496
TAXATION		
Tax Administration	Paul Lynch	5597
Tax Clearance	Paul Lynch	5597
Telecommunications (GTN/VPN)	Eddie McGinn	5138
Training (Civil Service)	Reception	5124/5125
Training (Dept Finance)	Annette Keane	5525
VAT	John Kelly	5812
Votes (expenditure areas):		
Agriculture & Food	Brigitta Guerin	5785
Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht & the Islands	Margaret O'Donnell	5444
Defence	T J Fleming	5780
Education & Science	Maura Conneely	5764
Energy	Jill Broe	5843
Enterprise, Trade & Employment	Brian Humphreys	5521
Environment & Local Government	Yvonne White	5782
Finance Group	Margaret O'Donnell	5444

Foreign Affairs	Fidelma Ryan	5761
Health & Children	Marguerite O'Flaherty	5688
Justice, Equality & Law Reform	John Fitzpatrick	5704
Marine & Natural Resources	Fidelma Ryan	5761
OPW	Gerry Cassidy	5614
Social, Community & Family Affair	Ronnie Downes	5882
Telecommunications	Tony Lynch	5898
Tourism, Sport & Recreation	Cormac Gilhooly	5759
Transport	Cian Ó Lionáin	5840
Unemployment	Marie Mackle	5768
World Bank Group	John Connolly	5740

Note on Taxation enquiries:

Questions regarding taxation matters should be directed to the Office of the Revenue Commissioners in the first instance - Telephone 679 2777.

Direct Dial-In: Callers may access any of the above-named directly by putting the prefix **604** before the relevant extension.

LoCall: Our LoCall number, by which callers anywhere in the country can now contact the Department in Dublin at the local call rate, is **1890 661010**.

webmaster@finance.irlgov.ie