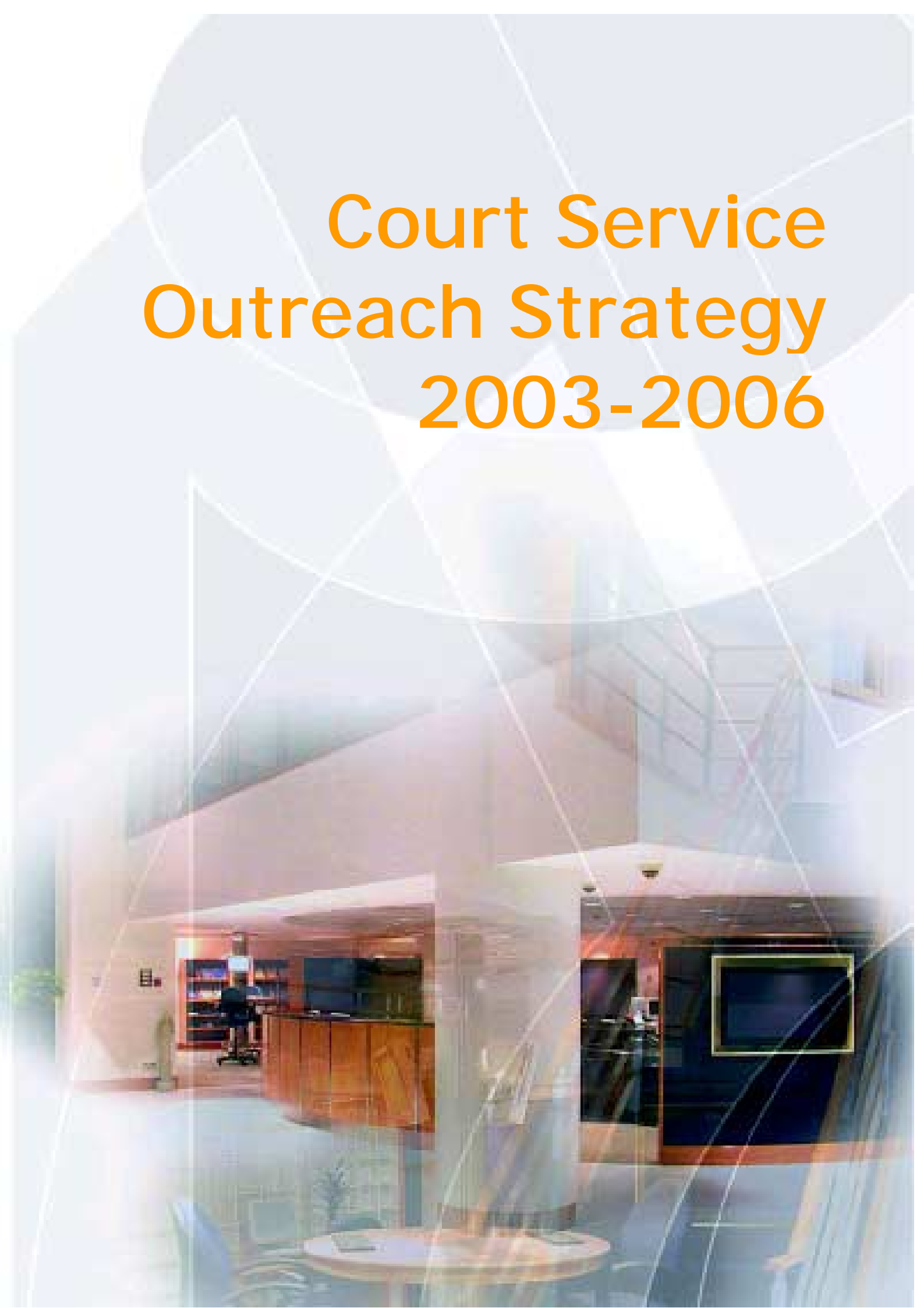


# Court Service Outreach Strategy 2003-2006



# An Outreach Strategy for the Northern Ireland Court Service

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## Background

1. The Criminal Justice Review (CJR) Report placed significant emphasis on the Court Service in the arena of public education, information and community involvement. Specifically, it recommended that the Court Service should contribute to a co-ordinated strategy of public education and information with particular emphasis on the use of visits to courts to increase community awareness and understanding. The relevant CJR recommendations are provided at **Annex A**.
2. Work has already begun, in partnership with the other justice agencies, with regard to the development of a co-ordinated public information and education strategy. The principles adopted for the development of that strategy are provided at **Annex B**. To date, a portal website, [www.cjsni.gov.uk](http://www.cjsni.gov.uk), and a logo for use on criminal justice system material has been developed.
3. The new Communications Strategy for the Court Service will be informed by the central strategy, however it is intended that the Court Service will be at the forefront of any new developments using the new Court Service Information Centre, Windsor House, 9 – 15 Bedford Street, Belfast BT2 7LT, [informationcentre@courtsni.gov.uk](mailto:informationcentre@courtsni.gov.uk), as the central focal point. The organisation's Outreach Strategy, as discussed within this document, will dovetail with the Communications Strategy.

## Charter Mark

4. Under its Service Delivery Agreement the Court Service has committed to 50% of court venues achieving Charter Mark accreditation by 2004 with the remaining 50% of venues accredited by 2006. The new National Standard brought with it modifications to the Charter Mark process which include the introduction of a new criterion based on the organisation's contribution to enhancing opportunity and quality of life in the communities its serves. It is imperative therefore that the management and development of the Outreach

Strategy is aligned to the activity associated with National Standard accreditation.

### Strategy Outline

5. The Court Service has already achieved an impressive record in relation to outreach activities. Key features of the existing programme are included below.

#### School visits

6. These have been a long-standing element of our outreach activities to date. The starting point in terms of developing a co-ordinated strategic approach is to compile a comprehensive list of activities across the organisation to date. Based on this, a formal programme for the new business year (April 2003) can be drawn up.



Time to Read, Londonderry Courthouse

7. It is proposed to support the programme of school visits through the development of information literature (e.g. school packs) which will be available from the Information Centre and on an educational section of the new website. To inform this work contact has been made with the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations, and Assessment (CCEA) to establish the type of information literature that would best support the new citizenship module of the school curriculum. This work should put the Court Service in the lead on the Public Information Working Group which is considering this issue centrally.

### **Other visits**

8. The CJR report identifies court visits as a means of encouraging wider community involvement (and not just school children). Consideration is currently being given to the promotion and use of courthouses as civic buildings e.g. art exhibitions by local school children, possible link up with the Belfast Festival 2003 etc. More detailed proposals will be submitted as part of the PR/Marketing portfolio of the Communications Strategy.

### **Junior/Senior Mock Trial Competition**

9. This nationally run competition aims to encourage greater responsibility, understanding and involvement of young people in our society. The Court Service has participated in this competition for some years now and NI schools have had considerable success. At present the competition is held at the Laganside complex (with the Senior Mock Trial Competition taking place at the High Court). Discussions are currently ongoing with the competition organisers, the Citizenship foundation, and local Business Managers with a view to expanding the competition (subject to local school interest) throughout Northern Ireland. The Information Service is co-ordinating this work and will be involved in profiling Court Service involvement.

### **Recruitment of Lay Panellists**

10. The forth-coming recruitment campaign of Lay Panellists is an excellent example of community outreach and will be a key feature in the Outreach Programme.

### **Prince's Trust Scheme**

11. This provides younger members of staff the opportunity to work within the community on a 12 week placement; normally two placements are offered each year.

### Work Experience

12. During last 12 months the organisation has facilitated 53 work placements. Potential exists to develop the range of opportunities and to provide more information to career teachers and students through both the Information Centre and the Internet. This also naturally links to the provision of school information packs described above.

### Local Heritage

13. Both Armagh and Downpatrick courthouses have been opened to the public as part of **the European Heritage Open Day Initiative**. As mentioned above it is important that courthouses are recognised, not just a courts of laws, but as civic buildings. To support this element of public education it is proposed to



develop a heritage section on the new Internet site (under the educational sphere). This would provide information on courthouses from the oldest listed buildings through to the Laganside Court complex, the 2002 Building of the Year.

Downpatrick Courthouse

### Other Possible Features

14. Staff are encouraged to participate in activities connected to education such as **membership of Boards of Governors in Schools**. To date a record of those involved is not available, further work is needed to establish the level of interest in this work.
15. During the site preparations for the new Dungannon courthouse it was necessary to fell two large oak trees. **Local conservation volunteers**

harvested the acorns and approximately 2000 were removed for propagation. This type of activity can be explored further where appropriate.

### **Links to the Volunteering Strategy**

16. This strategy has a significant part to play in underpinning the Outreach Strategy. For example, the Time to Read Initiative involves members of staff having time out to read to primary school children. It is important therefore that both strategies are promoted in tandem.



### **Recruitment**

17. The Court Service is committed to encouraging the unemployed returning to the workplace. To this end, the Court Service began a pilot Bridge to Employment programme in September 2002 in conjunction with the Department of Employment and Learning to encourage unemployed people back to work. This programme recruits participants onto a three-week government training scheme where they are given job relevant training after which they are interviewed for a permanent Level 4 job in the Court Service.

The Court Service is also committed to recruiting a workforce more reflective of the community it serves. Main trawl opportunities are promoted through ethnic community groups and disability support organisations, to encourage applications from these groups.

### **Commitment to Equality of Opportunity**

18. Any action plan emanating from this policy will be developed to reflect the organisations commitment to have due regard to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation, between men and

women generally, between persons with a disability and persons without and between persons with dependents and persons without. In addition it will have regard to the promotion of good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

### **The Role of the Information Centre**

19. The programme of Outreach provides a range of excellent opportunities to make use of the Centre and its services as intended e.g. to increase public understanding and promote the Court Service as a multi-faceted organisation. For example, it has already been agreed with colleagues from the Life Long Learning Unit to support the re-launch of the Volunteering Strategy through a promotional campaign based on:

- A dedicated Intranet section and regular space for articles in Open Court;
- The design of promotional leaflets for a targeted publicity campaign (these would also be on display in the Centre's public resource area);
- The allocation of space in the early development of the Internet site to promote opportunities;
- Promotional space on the plasma Information Screens and at the Information Kiosks ; and
- Listing the Information Centre as the contact source for further information (on all promotional material electronic and material).

20. A similar promotional package will be drawn up for the Outreach Strategy.

## **A Steering Group Approach**

21. A Steering Group has been set up to bring a co-ordinated approach to the programme of outreach activities, and to facilitate the sharing of ideas and activities across the organisation. Frank Duffy, Director of Corporate Services chairs the group with representatives from:

- Information Service (also provides the secretariat and will promote and manage the strategy)
- HRU (Life Long Learning)
- Operations Division (to include representatives from the Service Improvement Team)
- Legal Aid Division
- Policy and Legal Division

## **Further Development of the Strategy**

### **Building on Good Practice**

22. Contacts will be established with relevant counterparts e.g. LCD with regard to its published Guide to Court Visits, and DENI with regard to local school/community initiatives. Contact has already been made with counterparts in the Irish Court Service to share ideas etc.

### **New Targeting Social Need (TSN) Initiative**

23. In re-launching TSN, the Department of Finance and Personnel (the lead department) has commissioned work with regard to the development and accessibility of appropriate data with regard to areas of social need. Whilst an Outreach strategy is a 'softer' approach it can none the less be informed by the information arising from this initiative in terms of targeting community groups.

## **Northern Ireland Consumer Strategy**

24. The Court Service is involved in the development of the educational elements of this strategy with regard to debt and debt management (the Information Service and the Enforcement of Judgements Office are in the lead). Court Service contributions to the development of this strategy will also interface with its responsibilities for information and education under the CJR implementation plan.

### **The Next Steps**

25. In order to meet the needs of the CJR recommendations the first step is to put in place an annual work programme for 2003/04. The Steering Group will be responsible for developing this programme and for overseeing the consultation exercise associated with the strategy.
26. Simultaneously the strategy will be put to consultation (internal & external). In terms of the public consultation process this is a prime strategy for demonstrating the organisation's commitment to inclusiveness and involvement of the communities it serves. The Civil Service Equality Scheme has identified risk areas with regard to public access to information i.e. people with sensory and learning disabilities, young people, members of the minority ethnic groups whose first language is not English, and the use of local newspapers. Full account will be taken of these risk areas in the consultation process and the future promotion of the strategy.

**February 2003**

## **Criminal Justice Review Implementation Plan**

### **Recommendations related to Outreach Activities (Court Service Lead Responsibility)**

#### **Community Involvement**

##### **Recommendation 113**

We strongly endorse the view that efforts should be made to make the system more responsive to community concerns and to encourage lay involvement in an informal capacity. We make recommendations elsewhere about opening up courts to the public and we believe that the judiciary could make a significant contribution to this. Participating in various types of discussion for a, facilitating Court visits and seeking out the views of the public on the way in which the system works should significantly reduce the likelihood of their being 'out of touch' and should enhance confidence generally.

##### **Court Service Response**

**The Court Service already has a programme of outreach activities running now for some years. Within the new communications strategy an annual programme of activities will be drawn up each year. The first of these annual programmes will commence 1 April 2003.**

#### **Public Education Strategy**

##### **Recommendation 125**

The courts' administration system should contribute to and be fully involved in the co-ordinated strategy of public education and information about the criminal justice system.

##### **Court Service Response**

**The Court Service is a member of the Public Information Working Group which has been set up to take forward the strategy of public education and information**

**about the criminal justice system. The Court Service's new communications strategy will be informed by the work being taken forward by the wider group. The new strategy will be in place by 1 April 2003.**

#### **Recommendation 26**

We endorse the current efforts of the Northern Ireland Court Service to provide information to the public and recommend that this work is developed further.

#### **Court Service Response**

**This is being taken forward in the context of the Court Service's Communication Strategy.**

#### **Court Visits**

#### **Recommendation 128**

Visits to courts should continue to be encouraged as a way of increasing community awareness and understanding.

#### **Court Service Response**

**This will be taken forward in the outreach programmes of the Court Service's Communication Strategy.**

## Public Information for the Criminal Justice - Principles of a Strategy

The Review of the Criminal Justice System recommended (para 3.67), “ *a public information and education a strategy for the Criminal Justice System.*”

The following principles represent proposed elements of a strategy to be adopted and implemented by the Public Information Working Group (PIWG).

1. Branding. A logo based on the letters CJSNI should be adopted. This would not compete with or replace existing brands from each of the agencies. The primary use of the logo would be to identify materials specific to the Criminal Justice System as a whole. Its further use on documents provided by individual agencies would be for agreement by them and subject to discussion by the Criminal Justice Board.
2. Use of modern technology. The full range of technologies should be explored to help reach the widest possible audience. This will include web-site design, CD Rom, and video.
3. Use of publications. The suitability of the more traditional written material such as leaflets should be considered.
4. Outreach. Discussions / talks / meetings with a range of groups across Northern Ireland should be considered and a programme drawn up.
5. Use of research. Existing research and expertise should be examined and employed as appropriate and dependent upon available resources.
6. Northern Ireland curriculum. The Curriculum Council should be approached in line with recommendations 14 and 15 in order to consider the inclusion of a criminal justice module in the schools curriculum.
7. Proactive approach. In all matters a proactive approach should be adopted.

**Public Information Working Group  
4 September 2000**

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