



Department of the Taoiseach

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# Customer Action Plan 2001-2004



## MISSION STATEMENT

To provide the Taoiseach and the Government Chief Whip with the policy advice, information and support essential to the effective leadership and co-ordination of Government policy formulation, decision making, implementation and monitoring.

# Department of the Taoiseach

## Customer Action Plan 2001-2004

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# Introduction and Statement of Quality Service Standards

This Customer Action Plan updates the previous plan for the Department of the Taoiseach, covering the period 1998-1999. It draws on the revised *Principles of Quality Customer Service for Customers and Clients of the Public Service*, produced by the Working Group on QCS and approved by Government in 2000. These principles are reproduced at appendix 1. The Plan also has regard to *the Ombudsman's Guide to Standards of Best Practice for Civil Servants*, reproduced at the end of this booklet.

The commitment to excellent customer service was a fundamental theme of *Delivering Better Government* (1996) and received renewed support from the Social Partners in *the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (PPF). While the Department of the Taoiseach has a relatively small client base in comparison to other departments, we are nevertheless equally conscious of the need to provide the highest level of service to our customers. We are committed to ensuring that the principles of Quality Customer Service are embedded in everything we do - in our Strategy Statement, Business Plans, and Human Resource Strategies - and that the commitment to Quality Customer Service extends to staff throughout the organisation.

There are a number of new points of emphasis in the revised Principles which take account of changes since 1997, including the development, by the QCS Working Group set up under the SMI initiative, of the three new principles on equality/diversity, official languages equality and internal customer service. Sections in this Action Plan address these issues. We have also taken measures to extend the principles to bodies under the aegis of the department.

Finally we commit ourselves to closely monitoring the extent to which we reach the standards which we set ourselves and to a process of structured and regular consultation with our customers to ensure that we are meeting their needs. The measures by which we intend to do so are set out in section 5 of the plan.

*Department of the Taoiseach, April 2001*

# The role of the Department of the Taoiseach

## **Our main roles are**

- to support and advise the Taoiseach in carrying out the various duties of that office
- to provide administrative support to the Government Chief Whip in respect of his duties
- to provide the Secretariat to Government and act as a link between the President, Taoiseach and other Government Departments
- to contribute to the development and co-ordination of policy in relation to:
  - *Economic and Social Development*
  - *Northern Ireland*
  - *The European Union*
  - *Public Sector Change and Oireachtas Reform*
- to arrange State functions such as the annual National Commemoration Day ceremony, Presidential inaugurations, and to provide a protocol service for the Taoiseach

## **Major points of contact with the general public**

Our major points of contact with the general public are

- The Department's switchboard, reception and Welcoming Pavilion
- The Private Office of the Taoiseach
- The Government Press Secretariat and Government Information Service
- Saturday tours of Government Buildings

## Bodies under the aegis of the Department

There are a number of bodies which operate under the aegis of the Department - the Law Reform Commission, the National Centre for Partnership and Performance, the National Economic and Social Forum, the National Economic and Social Council, the Central Statistics Office, the Information Society Commission and the National Millennium Committee. These bodies are aware of Principles of Quality Customer Service and will, where appropriate, implement these standards in their organisations and publish such commitment as appropriate in their strategy statements or annual reports.

# Our Commitment to Delivering a Quality Service

We are committed to providing you with a prompt and courteous service, based on the following framework. These standards will be adhered to other than in exceptional circumstances where issues of security or acute sensitivity arise.

The Department of the Taoiseach will also fulfil all relevant statutory obligations including those set out in the Data Protection Act, 1988, the Freedom of Information Act, 1997, the Prompt Payment of Accounts Act, 1997, the Employment Equality Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act, 2000.

A contact list for Services and Schemes administered by the Department is at appendix 2.

## **Commitment to equality of treatment**

The Department is committed to ensuring a quality service delivery to the groups covered by the equality legislation, as well as those socially excluded due to socio-economic and geographic factors. We will therefore strive to ensure that:

- no-one is discriminated against by virtue of gender, family status, marital status, religion, age, race, membership of the Traveller community, sexual orientation or disability, as laid down in the Employment Equality Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000
- the service we deliver is accessible to customers within the nine grounds of the Equality legislation
- staff training on the nine grounds covered by the Equality legislation is provided to help to increase awareness of these issues
- we continue to improve disabled access to the Department building and car parking facilities.

## **Commitment to provision of services through Irish**

The Department's commitment to providing services through Irish to those who require such service gives practical expression to the Government's commitment to deliver a quality service to Irish speakers made in Delivering Better Government (1996). This has been reinforced by the proposed Official Languages Equality Bill being brought forward by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands. We are committed to improving the level of services we provide through Irish by:

- providing at reception and at the switch a list of officers willing to deal with the public through Irish
- answering your correspondence in the language in which you have written
- making major publications issued since 1st January 1998, available bilingually
- facilitating telephone callers, where possible, in doing business through Irish
- making sure the signage throughout the Department is bilingual
- ensuring that advertisements placed by the Department are bilingual
- providing training to staff to increase both the level of proficiency and the number of staff capable of providing a service through Irish

## **Contacting us by Telephone**

The Department of the Taoiseach switchboard handles over 90,000 calls every year; this does not include calls made via the direct-dial-in facility. It is open from 9 am until 7 pm, Monday to Friday and may be contacted at:

*Lo-call 1890 - 227227  
or 01 - 6624888*

To facilitate you contacting us we have introduced Direct-Dial-In which allows you to telephone individual members of staff directly by dialling:

*01 619 + the 4 digit extension number*

- our target is to respond to 90% of telephone calls within 15 seconds
- people working in the Department will identify themselves to you when answering the telephone
- where it is necessary to transfer your call to another person, we will tell you the name of the person to whom you are being transferred. The person receiving your call will be acquainted with the nature of your business before your call is transferred
- when the person you wish to speak with is unavailable at the time of your call, and other members of the Division are unable to assist you, a message will be taken and your call returned within an agreed time
- Alternatively, you may wish to leave a message on the officer's voice mail or dial 0 to return to the switch.

## **Corresponding with us (in writing or by e-mail)**

The Department of the Taoiseach receives over 30,000 items of correspondence in an average year.

Our postal address is:

*Department of the Taoiseach,  
Government Buildings  
Upper Merrion Street, Dublin 2*

Our main e-mail address is:

*Webmaster@taoiseach.irlgov.ie*

The Taoiseach's personal e-mail address is

*taoiseach@taoiseach.irlgov.ie.*

For information/ referral service the address is

*Jackie\_Coogan@taoiseach.irlgov.ie.*

Press queries can be addressed to the Government Press Office at

*press\_office@taoiseach.irlgov.ie.*

For communications relating to the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI) and the Public Service Modernisation Programme, there is a special e-mail address,

*bettergov@taoiseach.irlgov.ie.*

We commit ourselves to ensuring that:

- correspondence (paper and electronic) issued by us will include both the name and contact details of the person dealing with the matter
- we respond substantively to 70% of correspondence within 15 working days of receipt
- where it is not possible to issue a full reply within 15 working days, e.g. some correspondence requires considerable research before a full reply can be issued, early contact will be made with you to advise when it will be possible to issue such a response

- if your business is more appropriate to another Department. we will transfer your correspondence to that Department and we will advise you of this.
- we will have regard to the commitment to equality of treatment detailed elsewhere in this plan.

### **Visiting the Department**

Apart from supervised public tours of Government Buildings on Saturday's, visits to the Department of the Taoiseach are normally by prearranged appointment. We undertake to maintain all access and reception areas to a high standard of cleanliness and comfort.

If you are visiting us by appointment:

- we will tell you about security arrangements, and protocols when the appointment is made
- people working in the reception area will be notified in advanced of your appointment
- you will be met punctually upon your arrival
- if there is a delay in meeting you, a member of staff from the relevant Division will advise you of this

### **Access for people with disabilities**

We undertake to ensure that access for people with disabilities is maintained to a high standard and have carried out a programme of works in recent years to further improve access. We will carry out further improvement, where possible in consultation with relevant bodies. Signage of disabled facilities will be reviewed and improved where necessary. We undertake to make material published by the Department

of the Taoiseach available, where possible, in a suitable format to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

### **Accessing our Publications**

Since 1 January, 1998 all material published by us is available on the Department's Web site ([www.irlgov.ie/taoiseach](http://www.irlgov.ie/taoiseach)). A list of our major publications at the date of publication of this booklet is given under the section dealing with the Department's web site on this page.

Our publications are also generally available directly from the Government Publications Sales Office, Sun Alliance House, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2 (Tel: 01- 6793515, Fax: 4752760), or by mail order from Government Publications Office, Postal Trade Section, 4-5 Harcourt Road, Dublin 2 (Tel: 01 - 6613111, Fax: 4752760).

### **Department Web Site ([www.irlgov.ie/taoiseach](http://www.irlgov.ie/taoiseach))**

The Department's web site is being redesigned during 2001. It is intended that the new site will be more user friendly. Since 1 January, 1998 all material published by us is available on the Department's Website, including:

- the Department's Statement of Strategy 1998-2001. A revised statement will be published later in 2001 and will in due course be added to the Web site
- guides to the Department's services, records and procedures published in accordance with Sections 15 and 16 of the Freedom of Information Act in April 1998. These advise the public on how information held by the Department can be accessed and include rules and guidelines for all schemes administered by the Department

- all Annual reports of the Department produced in accordance with the Public Service Management Act, 1997
- major policy speeches by the Taoiseach

Copies of speeches by the Taoiseach and other material may also be obtained by contacting the Government Press Service at Lo-call 1890-422622

### **Website for the Public Service Modernisation Programme**

A website [www.bettergov.ie](http://www.bettergov.ie) is now online and provides an information resource and contact point for the modernisation programme.

The information available includes the background to the Strategic Management Initiative and progress to date in each of its areas of activity, as well as key publications. The website will evolve to keep you updated on developments throughout the Civil Service. The site also acts as a link to information on Departmental / Office websites and to other sites that provide information on the modernisation agenda. Comments on the site are welcomed. The contact e-mail address is: [bettergov@taoiseach.irg.gov.ie](mailto:bettergov@taoiseach.irg.gov.ie)

# Monitoring Progress and Improving Service

The Department of the Taoiseach is committed to ongoing monitoring and review of its services. The following steps will be taken to improve the quality of the service we provide. The Management Committee (Senior Management) will monitor these arrangements on an ongoing basis.

## **Prioritising Quality Customer Service**

The delivery of a quality customer service will form an integral part of the development of the Strategy Statement 2001-2004, a new Human Resources Strategy and all of the Divisional Business Plans. In the preparation of this plan internal and external customers have been consulted and a training programme for staff on the principles of quality customer services is in place.

## **Consulting our External Customers**

Most of our customers are drawn from staff in other Government Departments or the Social Partners involved in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF). An extensive sample customer survey was undertaken in February 2001 to determine the level of satisfaction with the service provided (104 forms were issued and 55 returned). While the level of satisfaction expressed by our customers was universally very high (an average of 90 - 100% regarded the levels of service as either good, very good or excellent), some useful suggestions for improvement were made and where practicable these will be acted upon. A more detailed breakdown of the survey results is given at appendix 3. A customer panel is being established to keep under review standards of service.

### **Consulting our Internal Customers/ Staff**

This plan was developed in conjunction with the Quality Customer Service Group on which different grades and Divisions throughout the Department are represented. The QCS Group comes under the aegis of the Partnership Committee. The Group will periodically review the implementation of the QCS principles in the Department and will consider further approaches to improving the services for the internal customer. A staff survey of the services provided by Human Resources, I.T., Finance and Management Services Units is under consideration. The Partnership Committee will be consulted as part of the development of the new Human Resource Strategy.

### **Customer Service Training**

We recognise that effective training in customer service is essential if we are to achieve our goal of delivering a quality service to you. We will continue to improve and enhance our programme of training in customer service. As part of this:

- the new Performance Management and Development System (PMDS), currently being introduced in the Department, will review the necessary skills and training needs of staff to deliver a quality customer service
- the present induction course for new recruits includes a module on the Department's commitment to Quality Customer Care and clearly identifies what is expected of staff in terms of dealing with the Department's customers. It also highlights the fact that many of our staff colleagues will also be customers in some shape or form

- the provision of targeted customer service training to staff, particularly front line staff, in recent years, will continue to be a feature of the Department's overall training programme

### **Communications**

We aim to communicate well with all our customers. In support of this we undertake to do the following:

- to regularly review and update the Department's Web site to ensure that it is relevant and timely
- to continue to publish Annual Reports on the Department's activities, including a progress report on the achievement of commitments in this Action Plan
- to continue to review and reorganise internal communications systems and procedures to provide the best support for the delivery of a quality service
- to provide customer comment cards to people taking part in guided tours of Government Buildings
- to provide comment cards in the Department's reception area.

# Complaints Procedure

## **Your views on our performance**

Please tell us if you feel that you have not been dealt with in a satisfactory manner. If we are at fault we will apologise, seek to prevent a recurrence and rectify the error wherever possible. Comments, suggestions or complaints may be addressed to:

*Mr John Coleman*

*Customer Service Officer, Department of the Taoiseach*

*Government Buildings, Upper Merrion Street*

*Dublin 2*

*Tel 0 1-6194492*

*Lo-Call 1809-227227 (ext: 4492)*

*Fax: 0 1-6194427*

*E-mail: [customer\\_service@taoiseach.irlgov.ie](mailto:customer_service@taoiseach.irlgov.ie)*

You also have a right to appeal to the Office of the Ombudsman if you believe that you have not been dealt with properly, fairly and impartially by us. The Office of the Ombudsman may be contacted at:

*52 St Stephen's Green*

*Dublin 2*

*Tel 0 1 -6785222*

*Fax: 0 1-66 10507*

*E-mail: [ombudsman@ombudsman.irlgov.ie](mailto:ombudsman@ombudsman.irlgov.ie)*

*Home page: <http://www.irlgov.ie/ombudsman>*

# Appendix 1

## **PRINCIPLES OF QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE**

For Customers and Clients of the Public Service

As drawn up by the QCS Working Group

In their dealings with the public, Civil Service Departments and Public Service offices will:

### **Quality Service Standards**

Publish a statement that outlines the nature and quality of service which customers can expect, and display it prominently at the point of service delivery.

### **Equality/Diversity**

Ensure the rights to equal treatment established by equality legislation, and accommodate diversity, so as to contribute to equality for the groups covered by the equality legislation (under the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller Community).

Identify and work to eliminate barriers to access to services for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and for those facing geographic barriers to services.

### **Physical Access**

Provide clean, accessible public offices that ensure privacy, comply with occupational and safety standards and, as part of this, facilitate access for people with disabilities and others with specific needs.

### **Information**

Take a proactive approach in providing information that is clear, timely and accurate, is available at all points of contact, and meets the requirements of people with specific needs. Ensure that the potential offered by Information Technology is fully availed of and that the

information available on public service web sites follows the guidelines on web publication.

Continue the drive for simplification of rules, regulations, forms, information leaflets and procedures.

### **Timeliness and Courtesy**

Deliver quality services with courtesy, sensitivity and the minimum delay, fostering a climate of mutual respect between provider and customer.

Give contact names in all communications to ensure ease of ongoing transactions.

### **Complaints**

Maintain a well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of dealing with complaints about the quality of service provided.

### **Appeals**

Similarly, maintain a formalised, well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of appeal/review for customers who are dissatisfied with decisions in relation to services.

### **Consultation and Evaluation**

Provide a structured approach to meaningful consultation with, and participation by, the customer in relation to the development, delivery and review of services. Ensure meaningful evaluation of service delivery.

### **Choice**

Provide choice, where feasible, in service delivery including payment methods, location of contact points, opening hours and delivery times. Use available and emerging technologies to ensure maximum access and choice, and quality of delivery.

### **Official Languages Equality**

Provide quality services through Irish and/or bilingually and inform customers of their right to choose to be dealt with through one or other of the official languages.

### **Better Co-ordination**

Foster a more co-ordinated and integrated approach to delivery of public services.

### **Internal Customer**

Ensure staff are recognised as internal customers and that they are properly supported and consulted with regard to service delivery issues.

## Appendix 2

### Contact Details regarding Services and Schemes Administered Directly by the Department of the Taoiseach.

The Department of the Taoiseach is specifically responsible for the provision of the services listed below. If you require any further information in respect of these services please contact the relevant member of staff.

*\* The specific contact person referred to may change from time to time, however, the telephone/fax numbers applying to each service will remain the same.*

Service Provided	Organisation of the Taoiseach's public engagements
Customer	Members of the public, members of the Diplomatic Community, representatives of public and voluntary organisations
Commitment	A professional, efficient and effective protocol service will be provided.
Contact	Protocol Division. Síle de Burca/Mary Preece Tel: 6194142; Fax: 6194257 E-mail: Mary_Preece@taoiseach.irl.gov.ie; síle_deburca@taoiseach.irl.gov.ie
Service Provided	Processing correspondence/representations to the Taoiseach
Customer	Members of the Public and the Oireachtas
Commitment	Written correspondence will be acknowledged within five working days of receipt
Contact	Taoiseach's Private Office; David Feeney/Billy Keane; Tel: 6194020/4021; Fax: 6764048 E-mail: privateoffice@taoiseach.irl.gov.ie
Service Provided	Central focus and contact point for advice on Government decision making and communications
Customer	Members of the Government and Government Departments and Offices
Commitment	Ongoing liaison will be maintained with other Government Departments to establish and meet their needs
Contact	Gary Davis/Edel Cooke; Tel: 6194089/4036; Fax: 6194267 E-mail: Gary_Davis@taoiseach.irl.gov.ie; Edel_Cooke@taoiseach.irl.gov.ie
Service Provided	Providing information in respect of Dail Business and the Government's legislative programme
Customer	Media / Members of the Oireachtas.
Commitment	A press release will be issued at the beginning of each Dail session setting out legislation to be introduced during that session. The weekly schedule of Dail Business will be issued to all members. The Order of Business will be issued on sitting days
Contact	Alice Kearney/Cathy Bruton/David Spencer/Aileen Treanor. Tel: 6194079/80/81; Fax: 6765757 E-mail: Alice-Kearney@taoiseach.irl.gov.ie; Cathy_Bruton@taoiseach.irl.gov.ie; David_Spencer@taoiseach.irl.gov.ie; Aileen_Treanor@taoiseach.irl.gov.ie

Service Provided	Ensuring that Government policy and information is communicated accurately and effectively to the media and the public. Organising media briefings, press conferences and major Government launches. Issuing Government Statements and Press Releases
Customer	National, local and international media and members of the public
Commitment	Press releases will be faxed to all media simultaneously upon release and will also be published on the GPS web-site
Contact	Government Press Service Kate O'Toole: Tel: 6194130/4026; Fax: 6763419/6789037 E-mail: Kate_O'Toole@taoiseach.irlgov.ie; Lo-call: 1890-422622
Service Provided	Answering public queries and disseminating information leaflets on Government issues. Supplying information packs on Government related matters on request to schools and colleges
Commitment	Queries from the Media and Public will be answered fully and accurately with minimum delay upon receipt
Contact	Government Press Office; Joe Lennon (Government Press Secretary); Sarah Kearns/Nick Reddy Tel: 6194051/4098; Fax: 6763302; E-mail: Joe_Lennon@taoiseach.irlgov.ie; Sarah_Kearns@taoiseach.irlgov.ie; Nick_Reddy@taoiseach.irlgov.ie
Service Provided	Guided tours of Government Buildings on Saturdays
Customer	Individual members of the public, including foreign visitors
Commitment	Tours are provided from 10.30am until 3.30 pm on Saturdays. Customer comment cards are issued to all tour participants
Contact	Management Services - Ashley Lowry 6194116; Eilish Keating 6194141; Maighread Walsh 6194260 Fax: 6194258; E-mail: Ashley_Lowry@taoiseach.irlgov.ie; Eilish_Keating@taoiseach.irlgov.ie; Maighread_Walsh@taoiseach.irlgov.ie
Service Provided	Overseeing the implementation of the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF) in conjunction with the Social Partners
Customer	Social Partners
Commitment	Preliminary progress reports will be issued five weeks in advance of PPF Secretariat meetings and final progress reports one week before such meetings
Contact	Economic & Social Policy Division; Gerry Cribbin; Tel: 6194046; Fax: 6622163 E-mail: Gerry_Cribbin@taoiseach.irlgov.ie
Customer	Members of the Public
Commitment	Information in response to general queries on the PPF and the Social Partnership process will be given as quickly as possible
Contact	Economic & Social Policy Division; Irene O'Reilly/Carol Woodley-Byrne Tel: 6194029/13; Fax: 6622163 E-mail: Irene_O'Reilly@taoiseach.irlgov.ie; Carol_Woodley-Byrne@taoiseach.irlgov.ie

Service Provided Co-ordinating the development of the Irish Financial Services Centre (IFSC)  
Customer Representatives of the financial services industry on IFSC Working Groups  
Commitment A high level of consultation and co-ordination with the financial services industry will be maintained in the development of policy relating to the IFSC  
Contact Economic & Social Policy Division; Derek O'Neill; Tel: 6194103; Fax: 6622163  
E-mail: Derek\_O'Neill@taoiseach.irlgov.ie

Service Provided Developing policies for the future direction of the Public Service Modernisation Programme and supporting Government Departments/Offices with implementation of the programme.  
Customer Government Departments and Offices; public bodies; members of the Government and Oireachtas; academics, students, members of the public.  
Commitment Effectively support the modernisation of the Public Service Modernisation Programme.  
Contact Sinead NicCoitir / Teresa Doolan; Tel: 6194090; Fax: 6194239  
E-Mail: nic.coitir.doolan@taoiseach.irlgov.ie  
George Burke; Tel: 6194008; E-Mail: george\_burke@taoiseach.irlgov.ie  
Dermot Curran; Tel: 6194023; E-Mail: dermot\_curran@taoiseach.irlgov.ie

## Appendix 3

### Summary Results of Customer Survey February 2001

Service Telephone (including response time of main switch, sections or Divisions and to voice mail; handling of call transfers and quality of service received by phone)

% of Customers rating service good, very good or excellent 98%

Service Front Gate/ Reception (Staff helpfulness, directions and signage, parking facilities and comfort and cleanliness of reception area)

% of Customers rating service good, very good or excellent 94%

Service Correspondence (Quality of letters and contents of documents/brochures)

% of Customers rating service good, very good or excellent 99%

Service Staff attitude and speed and quality of service

% of Customers rating service good, very good or excellent 100%

## Public bodies and the citizen - the Ombudsman's guide to standards of best practice for public servants

(Published 1997)

### Dealing "properly" with people means dealing with them

- *promptly, and without undue delay;*
- *correctly, in accordance with the law or other rules governing their entitlements;*
- *sensitively, by having regard to their age, to their capacity to understand often complex rules, to any disability they may have and to their feelings, privacy and convenience;*
- *helpfully, by simplifying procedures, forms and information on entitlements and services, maintaining proper records, and providing clear and precise details on time limits or conditions which might result in disqualification;*
- *responsibly, by not adopting an adversarial approach as a matter of course where there may be a fear of litigation.*

### Dealing "fairly" with people means

- *treating people in similar circumstances in like manner;*
- *accepting that rules and regulations, while important in ensuring fairness, should not be applied so rigidly or inflexibly as to create inequity;*
- *avoiding penalties which are out of proportion to what is necessary to ensure compliance with the rules;*
- *being prepared to review rules and procedures and change them if necessary;*
- *giving adequate notice before changing rules in a way which adversely affects a person's entitlements;*
- *having an internal review system so that adverse decisions can be looked at again and reviewed by someone not involved in the first decision;*
- *informing people how they can appeal, cooperating fully in any such appeal and being open to proposals for redress.*

## Finally, dealing "impartially" with people means

- *making decisions based on what is relevant in the rules and law and ignoring what is irrelevant;*
- *avoiding bias because of a person's colour, sex, marital status, ethnic origin, culture, language, religion, sexual orientation, attitude, reputation or because of who they are or who they know;*
- *ensuring, where a service is based on a scheme of priorities, that the scheme is open and transparent;*
- *being careful that one's prejudices are not factors in a decision.*

