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## PROVIDING QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE TO INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

## CHAPTER 4

# PROVIDING QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE TO INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

### Provision of a quality customer service to external stakeholders

#### Customer Charter

The Office has developed and published a Customer Charter, which is available on its website<sup>69</sup>. The Charter provides detail of, amongst other things:

- the Office's service standards;
- the standards that customers may expect from the Office;
- principal contact points.

#### Nature of principal engagements with external stakeholders

The Office's principal engagement<sup>70</sup> with external stakeholders includes:

- i. the provision of guidance and related material;
- ii. outreach activities;
- iii. handling queries and complaints from members of the public;
- iv. managing and developing relationships with external stakeholders; and
- v. website/social media.

Activities associated with (i), (ii) and (iv) above, which for the most part fall within the remit of the Advocacy & Assessment function, are elaborated upon in Chapter 2 of this Report. With the exception of complaints, which are dealt with in Chapter 3, the activities associated with (iii) and (v) above, which also fall within the remit of the Advocacy & Assessment function, are further elaborated upon below.

#### Public enquiries

The Office provides, to the extent practicable, information on general company law matters to interested parties. The Office is not, however, in a position to provide querists with legal advice and, in circumstances where the nature of an enquiry suggests it to be the case, querists are advised that they should consider seeking independent professional advice.

In order to further assist querists, the Office has developed a series of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and responses thereto, which are available on the website<sup>71</sup>. The FAQ section of the website is regularly reviewed and supplemented as necessary having regard to the nature of queries being received. As well as consulting the website, queries may also be directed to the Office's information email address (info@odce.ie), as well as by telephone.

While the Office deals with the majority of queries by reference to the services outlined above, some queries require a more detailed and considered response. During the year, the Office handled a total of 210 queries in this manner. Whilst queries received related to a broad range of issues, the most frequently occurring topics included:

<sup>69</sup> www.odce.ie

<sup>70</sup> i.e. excluding parties being engaged with in the context of the Office's enforcement remit

<sup>71</sup> www.odce.ie

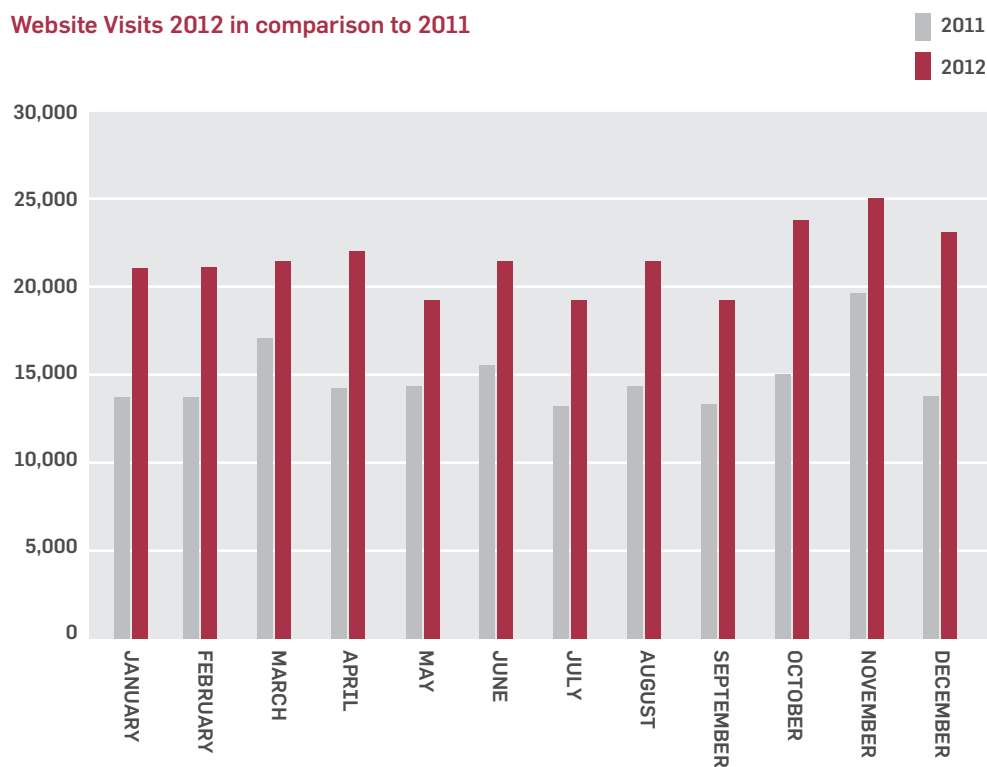
- residential property owners' management companies;
- matters relating to the appointment, powers and duties of company directors; and
- issues pertaining to the holding of AGMs.

During the year, and with the assistance of the Department's IT Unit, the Office installed a new automated telephone system. Whilst a resource is still available to assist callers, the new system has reduced by half the level of assistance required, thereby releasing resources for reallocation to other duties.

### Website

During 2012, the ODCE website ([www.odce.ie](http://www.odce.ie)) attracted 259,377 (2011: 177,872) visits, an average of 710 per day. The number of unique visitors for 2012 was 104,467 (2011: 79,623). A month-by-month comparison between 2011 and 2012 of visits to the website is set out below. As can be seen from the Chart, website visits were up on the corresponding 2011 figures in every month during 2012.

Website Visits 2012 in comparison to 2011



The Table below provides detail of the twenty most frequently visited pages on the website.

**Table 21**  
**20 most visited webpages – [www.odce.ie](http://www.odce.ie)**

Webpage	Visits 2012
General Publications	34,182
Companies / Directors / Secretaries	12,221
Company Overview	9,774
Press Releases	7,906
Our Role	5,744
Contact Details	5,524
Court Investigations	5,047
FAQ - Directorship of a Company	4,703
Functions of the Advocacy Unit	4,593
FAQ - Winding Up/Liquidations	4,104
Liquidators/Receivers/Examiners Overview	3,771
Court Prosecutions	3,639
FAQs – Main page	3,598
Court Disqualifications	3,479
Court Insolvencies	3,330
Decision Notices	3,266
Guidance on Using Office Forms	2,909
Information Notices	2,761
Accounting/Auditors Overview	2,757
Companies Acts Legislation Page	2,709

New material posted to the website during 2012 included:

- new, or updated, Office information, as well as the Office's Annual Report for 2011;
- new Statutory Instruments relevant to company law;
- copies of certain presentations made by Office staff;
- press statements, articles, announcements, etc.; and
- the results of civil and criminal enforcement cases taken by the Office.

The website provides a facility whereby users can register to receive updates as new material is uploaded to the website. At year end, almost 1,000 interested parties had registered for this service.

### Social media

The Office has continued to utilise social media to deliver its message. The Office operates on four platforms: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+. These are used to highlight and promote the Office's advocacy and enforcement activities, as well as to inform followers of developments on the wider company law landscape. By year end, the Office had attracted over 450 followers across these various fora.

### Research on the Office's effectiveness

In previous years the Office has periodically engaged the services of market research consultancies to assist it in assessing its effectiveness in promoting and facilitating compliance with company law and dissuading non-compliant behaviour respectively. Due to the general moratorium on consultancy expenditure, no such research was commissioned during the year under review. Whilst the Office seeks to gauge its effectiveness through other means, the inability to commission such research periodically does affect the Office's capacity to assess its effectiveness having regard to independently gathered data.

## Provision of a quality customer service to internal stakeholders

### Staff training & development

Performance Management applies across all Government Departments and Offices and is implemented each year by the Office. It seeks to ensure that the roles of individual staff are clear and that they are aligned with overall corporate objectives, while facilitating performance review and management. It also directly links Office training programmes and expenditure to the role of each staff member.

The Office's staff members are its most valuable resource. That being the case, to the extent practicable having regard to prevailing budgetary constraints, the Office supports staff members in their training and development needs.

Office staff received 137 days of training during 2012 (2011: 120 days). A total of 92.5 training days were provided from internal Office resources to 22 staff members. In addition, the Department provided a further 39 days of training to 22 Office staff members, with the IT Unit providing 3 days' training to 6 members of staff.

During 2012, the Office assisted staff members to undertake the following training and development:

- King's Inn's Diploma in White Collar Crime;
- accountancy staff members' CPD<sup>72</sup> requirements; and
- solicitor staff members' CPD requirements.

In addition, and with the assistance and co-operation of the Garda authorities, the Office held a 3 day training event at the Garda College in Templemore, Co. Tipperary. Topics covered during the course of the event, the content of which was delivered by a combination of Office and specialist Garda personnel, included:

- interviewing of witnesses;
- interviewing of suspects;
- collection and preservation of evidence;
- case management; and
- acting as a witness in Court proceedings.

## Customer service standards

During the year under review, the Office remained committed to providing a quality customer service to its own staff and to all members of the public with whom it has dealings. The feedback and formal complaints services, as provided for on the Office's website, are integral to that commitment.

## Compliance with obligations on foot of law, regulation and by virtue of the Office's status as a public sector entity established by statute

### Parliamentary Questions ("PQ")

The Office is regularly requested to provide information/material to the Department to assist it in preparing Ministers' responses to Deputies' PQs. In addition, the Office is sometimes itself the subject of Deputies' PQs. During the year, the Office provided material in response to 14 PQs.

### Prompt Payment of Accounts Act 1997

The Prompt Payment of Accounts Act provides for the payment of interest to suppliers whose invoices are unpaid at a prescribed date (usually 30 days after receipt of the invoice). In the current economic climate where cash flow is vital to business, Government policy is to pay suppliers within 15 days of receipt of an invoice.

As evidenced by the fact that only 1 payment was not made on time, the Office's policy of settling all invoices within prescribed timeframes was adhered to during the year under review. The interest payable as a result of the aforementioned sole instance of late payment amounted to €6.47.

### Risk management action plan

In 2012, the Office reviewed and updated its risk management plan in consultation with the Department. No significant risks crystallised during the year.

### Freedom of Information (FoI) Acts

All records of the Office (other than records concerning its general administration) are exempt from the FoI Acts. During 2012, the ODCE received more requests than usual, especially for Office records pertaining to the retirement of the outgoing Director. In all, 10 valid requests were received, 2 of which were subsequently withdrawn. Of the remainder, 7 were granted and 1, for records falling outside of the scope of the Acts, was refused. This refusal was appealed by the requester but was upheld following a review as the information sought was contained in exempt records.

### Data Protection Acts

During 2012, the Office maintained its registration as a data controller with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner. The Data Protection Acts 1988 to 2003, and associated Statutory Instruments, protect against the improper use, or disclosure, of any information held in respect of an individual. These obligations are consistent with the Office's own strict confidentiality requirements as set down by Section 17 of the CLEA.

### **Energy consumption**

The Office is responsible for approximately 44% of the energy consumed in the premises that it occupies. Approximately 60% of all electricity used in the building is for lighting and office equipment, while heating and air conditioning accounts for the remainder.

Gas consumption for the year (which is primarily used for heating air and water) was 690,624 kilowatt hours (kwh), of which the Office was responsible for approximately 315,063 kwh. Electricity consumption was 798,985 kwh, of which the Office was responsible for approximately 364,497 kwh.

While an Office "Green Agenda" has been in place since 2008, the Office sought advice from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland ("SEAI") with a view to further improving energy efficiency. At year end, a programme of implementation of the SEAI's recommendations was ongoing in co-operation with other occupants of the premises.

### **Official Languages Act 2003**

The Office drafted a second Scheme under the Act in 2011 and awaits agreement with the Coimisinéir Teanga of that Scheme. In the interim, the previous Scheme remains in force as well as the statutory requirements of the Act. The Office, therefore, continued in 2012 to monitor its compliance with the Act and with its Scheme.