

SirsiDynix and administered in-house by the Assistant Librarian.

Current Awareness and Know-How

The Library produces a bi-monthly journal titled “DPP Journal” which acts as both a knowledge management tool and a current awareness resource. To act as a KM conduit, we ask a different Legal Officer to write a keynote article for each issue which usually highlights procedural changes they have come across in the preceding two months. Further to this, each of the heads of the legal sections contribute a piece to update the rest of the Office on goings-on within their section in the previous month. Both these pieces disseminate knowledge that often doesn't find its way out of section or senior managers' meetings.

To satisfy the need for a current awareness service, the journal keeps people updated on legal information—Legislative updates; abstracts of recent court judgments; legal research notes; legal journal and legal blog articles of interest – in short, any information legal officers need or may find useful for their everyday work.

Budget Cuts

As with many Libraries, the last three years have been quite testing regarding cutbacks with the challenge of providing the same service with more limited resources. We have managed to retain the majority of services with some services being transferred in-house (serials management, scanning) and in many cases we have had to explore new and more cost-efficient ways to continue tasks we are dedicated to performing. For example, we recently launched a legal resources bookmark page on Delicious.com in order to assist our nationwide state solicitors with the minefield of online free-to-access legal resources – in years gone past we might have invested in an add-on to our own website but cutbacks are the mother of invention.

I believe over the last eleven years the Library and Research Unit has become an established and integral cog within the Prosecution Service in Ireland. Cutbacks may be here for some time to come but it is quite motivating to reflect on how we have managed to survive and grow despite that and it is very encouraging for the future.

Biography

Conor McCabe is Head of Library and Research at the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

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The Legal Aid Board and Library and Information Services

Abstract: Zoe Melling writes on the Legal Aid Board in Ireland and the work of the professional information and research unit.

Keywords: legal aid; government; information services; Ireland

The Legal Aid Board

The Legal Aid Board is the statutory body in Ireland charged with providing civil legal aid and advice to eligible clients. It also operates the Refugee Legal Service, which caters for asylum applicants. From 2012 the Board is expected to assume responsibility for the administration of

the criminal legal aid scheme, currently managed directly by the Department of Justice and Equality through the courts.

The Library

One feature distinguishing the Legal Aid Board from its UK counterparts is its professional information and

research unit, which is managed by librarians. The unit comprises two separate libraries – the eponymous Legal Aid Board (LAB) Library, which primarily caters for staff providing civil legal aid services, and the Refugee Documentation Centre (RDC), which provides an independent research and library service for agencies involved in refugee determination work. The RDC is unique internationally in its capacity as a centralised unit serving all parties in the asylum process. The two libraries share a common pool of staff, including a manager/librarian, a librarian, and a team of researchers employed in a range of paralegal and general civil service grades.

Until recently, the majority of resources in the unit were utilised by the RDC, with a small team specialising in LAB Library services. Over the past few years however, a fall in asylum applicant numbers and an increase in legal aid applications have tipped the balance, and all staff are now trained to answer queries from both client groups. The majority of queries handled by the RDC are country of origin information requests, with a smaller number of legal queries, while most LAB Library queries require a comprehensive knowledge of legal information sources.

Strategies Review

In an independent strategic review in 2003, the development of information services, library systems and legal research competencies in the Legal Aid Board were identified as priorities. This led to the implementation of a comprehensive library management system and digital archive. This system includes online access to the catalogues and electronic collections of both the RDC and LAB libraries, and since April 2011 it has also hosted the library of the Department of Justice, which provided funding for the original system. As government policy is to encourage shared services wherever possible, there may be scope in future for further co-operation amongst government libraries in sharing systems, subscriptions and other resources, particularly amongst libraries with common subject material such as legal information.

Biography

Zoe Melling has been Librarian at the Legal Aid Board since May 2007, a role which involves managing the resources and services of two libraries: The Legal Aid Board Library, dealing primarily with civil law in Ireland, and the Refugee Documentation Centre Library, which caters for agencies involved in the asylum process. Prior to her current position Zoe worked for five years at the Bar Council Law Library in Dublin, and for 10 years as a media librarian in New Zealand.

Staffing

The current moratorium on recruitment and replacement in the Irish civil service, which is set to continue, means that there is an ongoing danger of staff being deployed in other areas where there are acute shortages. To mitigate this, the Research and Information Unit has been assigned additional work formerly carried out elsewhere in the organisation, including web content management, preparation of the annual report, and the official languages scheme. As in many government organisations, training and development of staff is encouraged, and one employee is currently pursuing a professional library qualification funded by the Board. Library student interns have also been utilised, and have gained experience in a diverse range of tasks in the space of a few weeks.

We are fortunate that senior management in the Legal Aid Board recognises the value of library skills, and supports involvement in professional development activities, attendance at conferences, and membership of groups such as BIALL. The networking and information-sharing opportunities provided by such forums are particularly beneficial for staff in small libraries, who often work in isolation and may have a vast range of responsibilities – including collection management, reference work, cataloguing, system administration, budgeting, negotiating with suppliers, training, and promotion of library services and resources.

Recessionary times

In these recessionary times it is especially important to increase awareness of the cost-effectiveness of investing in library services, to ensure that libraries are seen as essential front line services, and to emphasise that they are assets rather than liabilities. This is particularly pertinent in government organisations, which are under increasing pressure to cut costs and demonstrate value for money, to taxpayers as well as other stakeholders. Whatever may be over the horizon, as information professionals we are well positioned to take the driving seat and steer the way to a well informed future.