



An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt  
Department of Justice

# End to end review of International Protection Processes

## IPAT Staff Workshop report

Prepared by the Service Design & Customer Insight team  
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## 1. Context

- 1.1 A workshop were held with staff from the International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT) on 18 and 19 February 2021. These workshops were conducted as part of the end to end review of the International Protection Process under Action 3.18 of the Catherine Day report. The workshops were designed and facilitated by the Service Design & Customer Insights (SDCI) team Aisling Brennan, Julie-Anne Dunne and Emily Davies.

## 2. Approach

- 2.1 The SDCI Team carried out the workshop on 22 February 2021, taking around 1.5 hours. Open invites to attend the workshops were issued to all IPAT staff at CO, EO and HEO grades. 11 people took part in the workshop.
- 2.2 A survey was completed by IPAT staff in January 2021. The key themes which emerged from the survey were chosen as focus areas for the workshops, namely:
  - Understanding of the Catherine Day report,
  - Communications within IPAT, and
  - Issues with the current process from staff perspectives.
- 2.3 Due to ongoing Covid-19 restrictions, the workshops were conducted over Zoom and a digital whiteboard tool (Miro). The workshops used a mix of digital post its notes and facilitated open discussion to capture people's thoughts at each stage of the workshop. This ensured that all attendees have a chance to contribute to the workshop.
- 2.4 The ideas and views in this report reflect the things people shared at the workshops, it is therefore an amalgamation of the different views, perceptions and opinions of the people who attended the workshops. If there are factual inaccuracies in what people shared at the workshop, then they have been recorded here without correction in order to accurately convey people's understanding and experience.
- 2.5 After the workshops, the SDCI team extracted all content into Excel as a record of the session, and then reviewed and categorised each piece of information from the session. That review and categorisation is the basis and reference point for the analysis presented here. The workshop extracts and analysis are the primary data source for this report.
- 2.5 The sections that follow represent a **high level analysis** and synthesis of the material from the workshops. A high-level snapshot of the workshop flow can be seen in Appendix 1.

### 3. Key insights on perceptions of the Catherine Day Report

- 3.1 A group **SWOT analysis** was carried out to examine the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats presented by the Catherine Day report in respect of the IPAT staff.
- 3.2 There is a perception from the workshop that the main **strength** of the CD report is that it will help identify many of the labour intensive processes of the protection process and realign the process so they are easily understood by all and allow for joined up thinking and connectivity.
- 3.3 The perceived **weaknesses** identified were around the length of time to complete the application and appeals process, the reaction to media coverage and the fact the report did not overly focus on resource issues.
- 3.4 Potential **threats** in relation to the CD report identified that while the suggestions in the report are good, as with previous ones, there is a risk that the recommendations are not fully acted on or implemented fully.
- 3.5 Other threats mentioned the timelines for implementing some of the recommendations are possibly unrealistic.
- 3.6 In general, people felt that the main **opportunities** presented by the report were in the chance to **improve technology, re-design** how IPAT work, to become more efficient, to modernise and improve the service, supported by the increase in staffing levels to deal with higher volumes of appeals.
- 3.7 Other general points highlighted in this part of the discussion were:
  1. Scanning of files from IPO to IPAT needs to be looked at,
  2. **Impact** on the **next unit/team** in the process is considered,
  3. General **connectivity issues** around databases, and
  4. **Communications** between the **IPO and IPAT**.

### 4. Key insights on Communications

- 4.1 There was overall a sense **internal communication** within team's works well in IPAT, goals are well communicated and there is good two way communication with management.

- 4.2 However, there was conflicting opinion from some workshop attendees around communication between the teams, so there is some scope for improving inter-team communication and ensuring information flows freely through IPAT.
- 4.3 There was a perception that Covid has impacted significantly on communications and **“turned things upside down”**. People emphasised that email and Zoom are not as effective as face to face communication.
- 4.4 There was discussion in this section in relation to the unpredictable nature of the IP process and how that can lead to delays, which are somewhat out of the control of IPAT.

#### Complexity of issues and legal issues

- 4.5 People highlighted that the legal and complex issues arising from appeals can mean IPAT staff are often engaged in long running email chains back and forth trying to clarify and resolve an issue. It was felt legal issues or particular points of law are not always clear to all involved.

#### Communications between teams

- 4.6 It appears from the workshops that communication and information is not always shared with all teams. It was put forward that sometimes the larger issues from the Member Units are not always clear to other teams.
- 4.7 It was highlighted the IPAT inbox (old RAT inbox) still uses Lotus Notes and this is not very easy to use or user friendly.
- 4.8 The issue of hard copy post not always being sent to the designated area on the day it is received was also pointed out. This impacts negatively on some teams due to operating under specific timeframes.

#### Communication with IPO

- 4.9 People felt there are occasions when communication with IPO is not working optimally and problems are often discovered later in the IPAT process. This affects appeals as it means IPAT need to clarify or resolve issues by asking IPO.
- 4.10 A related issue is that IPAT are unsure of who they need to contact in IPO to assist with issues or queries.
- 4.11 The differences in terms used by different areas was also highlighted as a communications issue. The letter for IPO Refugee status which is called a decision letter for Section 22 cases was given as an example.
- 4.12 File movement in general was discussed as an issue when registering an appeal, there are circumstances when it is held up in IPO and IPAT are not aware.

### Suggestions for improvements in communication

As part of the workshop staff are asked to put forward suggestions for improvements in communications. The following ideas were given to improve communications:

- 4.13 Staff highlighted a notice board/dashboard/internal portal for important issues.
- 4.14 Monthly meetings for staff in each section to keep everyone updated on procedures.
- 4.15 In terms of improving communication with the IPO, early communication from IPO if a file is held up for some reason or other issues similar to this to avoid duplication of effort and improve joined up thinking.

## 5. Key insights on Employee Experience

- 5.1 We carried out an employee experience mapping exercise during the workshop. The summarised output of that can be seen in [Figure 1](#). There are 4 main aspects of the map which we only looked at 4 in detail.
- 5.2 The aim of this exercise is to get a snapshot of what it is like to be a person at CO, EO or HEO grade working within the IPAT. It captures a range of perspectives – there were differences of opinions on various topics, there were differences between different teams and areas and differences depending on when people joined the organisation.
- 5.3 The experience map reflects the things people shared at the workshops, it is therefore an amalgamation of the different views, perceptions and opinions of the people who attended the workshops. If there are factual inaccuracies in what people shared at the workshop, then it has been recorded here without correction in order to accurately **convey people's understanding and experience**.
- 5.4 Overall there was a sense of a positive experience conveyed through this exercise. There were 2 particular areas strongly emerging in this section:
  - Relationship and support with line managers and management.
  - Clarity on roles, responsibilities and structures.

### Purpose

- 5.5 This section asked people to describe what they felt the purpose of their role is. There was a mix of responses in terms of the purpose depending on the unit the person works in and their grade, for example working in a managerial position.
- 5.6 They shared that their purpose is to :
  - Ensure staff are supported in their functions and can come to their line managers at all times.

- To be approachable and open to all staff
- Ensure appeals are logged, acknowledged, scheduled for hearing and passed onto the relevant teams
- Ensure appeals run smoothly, are valid, processed in a timely manner and to raise and track queries if something needs extra attention.

5.7 The overall sentiment was that people have a positive experience of working in the IPAT.

### People and Culture

5.8 This section asked people to reflect on what it is like to work in the IPAT, what they enjoy most and least about the role and area.

5.9 Overall there was significant positive sentiment towards the people and culture in the IPAT with people commenting on the support and willingness to help each other, opportunities for education and training, an open door policy for access to higher management and a good mix of youth and experience within the teams.

5.10 People expressed frustration with carrying out some of the more repetitive and labour intensive task of photocopying. When coupled with the limited resources of 3 printers available to staff this was felt to be a very unenjoyable and frustrating part of the work. The paper heavy nature of the job was also mentioned as a negative.

5.11 Some staff felt they were a little removed from the Department which makes it more difficult to establish links and contacts with other units.

5.12 Another topic that came up in this section is some would like to spend a week in other areas of the IPAT occasionally to get a complete picture of the work of IPAT overall.

### Roles and Responsibilities

5.13 This section asked people to consider how they learned about their role when they first joined and if their roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.

5.14 Attendees agreed for the most part that roles are clearly defined, are in written format and monitored and updated frequently. All new staff receive their processes in writing and learn a lot from their colleagues.

5.15 Some did comment this has somewhat changed over time and there is now less time to support the team.

5.16 People tend to learn about their role through on the job training. This is supported by guidance and feedback from supervisors and managers, for the most part. One

attendee mentioned the job shadowing aspect of training was a bit disjointed at first but this changed with new line management and structures.

- 5.17 It was noted by one attendee that more formal training should be included with new staff by setting goals involving specific areas of work and dates of when they are expected to be achieved.

#### Structures and Relationships

- 5.18 In this section we looked at how roles, individuals and teams relate to each other, and how these relationships are expressed.
- 5.19 People acknowledged structures are clear however more guidance and insights on other teams and their work processes would be beneficial.
- 5.20 There was a general feeling of support from team leaders and management are very approachable, although it was noted this has become more difficult for new members now due to Covid-19.
- 5.21 Due to the independence of IPAT, people do not always feel like a priority or part of the wider Justice family. It was noted however staff are part of the Department and should feel that way.

### Current Experience

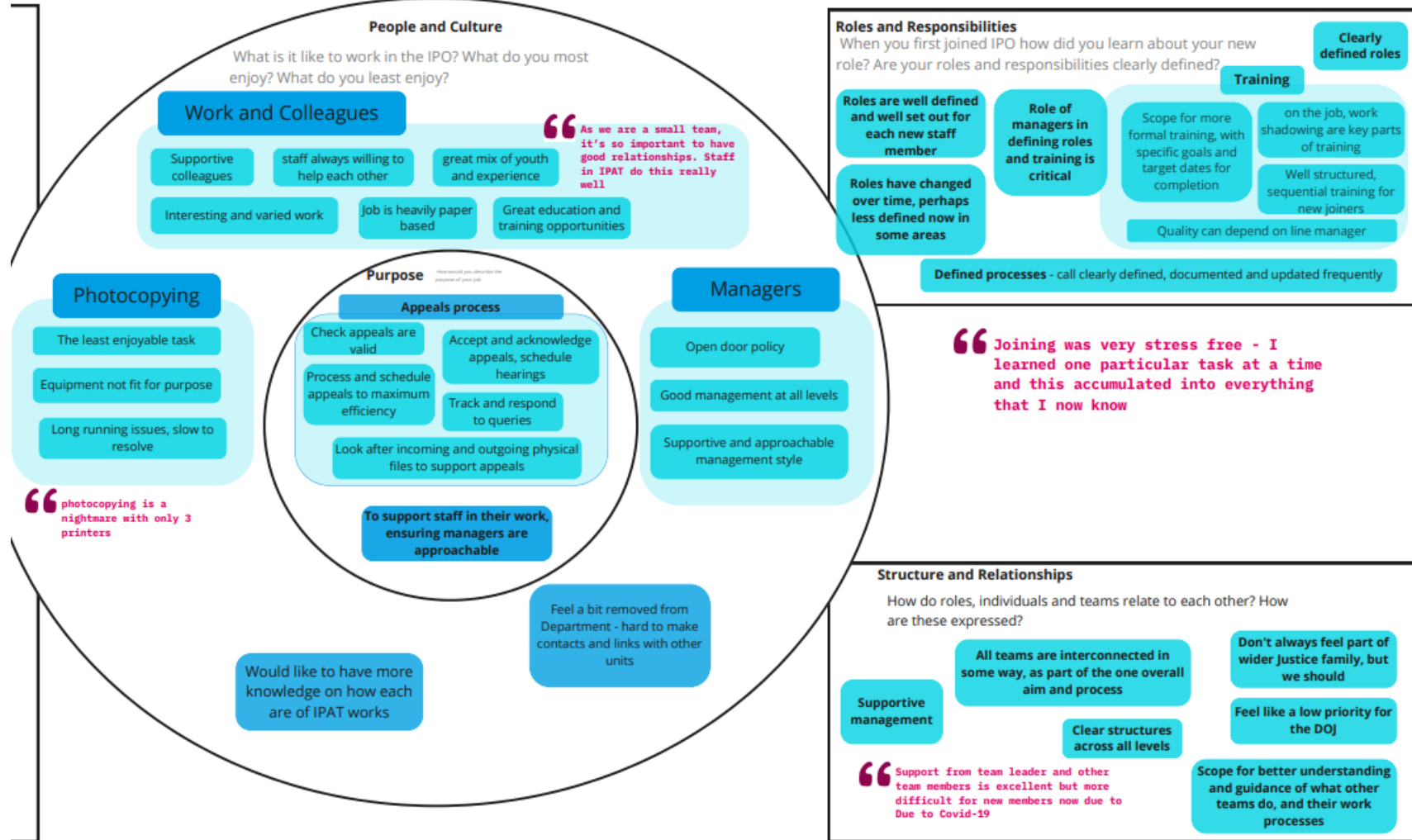


Figure 1 Staff Experience Map



## 6. Key Insights on process improvements and pain points

- 6.1 This part of the session allowed for an open discussion on pain points and process improvements. This section was structured so as to look at 4 high level phases of the process, examining staff's particular pain points as well as any ideas they had for improvements.

### Registering Appeal

#### Pain points

- 6.2 Incomplete appeals forms: This was an area of significant frustration for people. People felt that perhaps less experienced staff were filling in forms, rather than the appellant's legal representative themselves. In many cases people felt the legal representative had not filled in the form correctly, and that this introduces delays into the process. Resolving issues with incomplete forms can be quite time consuming for IPAT staff.
- 6.3 Issues around the photocopying equipment was again raised here, there is a clear view they are not fit for purpose and there is not enough available for a busy paper based office.
- 6.4 There was a feeling there is an excessive amount of paper work received as part of the submissions from legal representatives and applicants, which has to be photocopied. The Country of Origin information was highlighted in particular, where only a small amount of the information is actually relevant to the appellant. It was felt this is a time consuming task that adds extra time.
- 6.5 There can be a issues with receiving the physical file in a timely manner and this can delay assigning the case to a Tribunal Member

### Registration phase

#### Opportunities

- 6.6 Moving to an online process was identified as a means to make this phase more straightforward, with validation embedded in new system which doesn't allow a submission of an appeal unless all parts are completed fully.
- 6.7 Legal representatives could use a link to Country of Origin information for an appellant, rather than sending this information in paper form, as this leads to paper wastage and delays completing a file for the Tribunal Member.

## Pre-Hearing Phase

### Pain points

- 6.8 There was a strong sense of frustration with this phase in the process especially around the scheduling of hearings. The limitations and out of date technology available through Lotus Notes calendar was a particular source of frustration. Scheduling depends on the availability of members, the limitations of the calendar means they can only update their availability one day at a time is time consuming.
- 6.9 Appeals must be scheduled within specific timeframes, with the need to give 20 working days' notice to appellants and legal representatives. This causes significant pressure and challenges due to the logistics of organising limited interpreters (particularly Albanian and Georgian), members of the tribunal juggling other work or who may not have updated the calendar or have limited availability.
- 6.10 Inconsistencies around the procedure of requests to postpone a hearing was also highlighted as a pain point for staff. Linked to this, the fact everything has to be rescheduled is a particular frustrating point.

## Pre-hearing phase

### Opportunities

- 6.11 Service level agreements with members of tribunals and interpreters should be put in place.
- 6.12 Improving technology in terms of automation and scheduling system would help.
- 6.13 Consistency around the postponements procedure issue needs to be introduced.

## Hearing Phase

### Pain points

- 6.14 Receiving late submissions for an appeal along with the amount of paperwork received on the day was emphasized as a pain point.
- 6.15 There was significant frustration around this point, it was highlighted there is a 10 day window before the appeal date when submissions are to be sent in but these are still accepted after this date in the majority of cases.
- 6.16 Even with the expansion of remote hearings submissions are continuing to be received late which adds an additional administration burden for the team on the day.

## Hearing phase

### Opportunities

- 6.17 Continuing receipt of submissions from legal representatives and appellants through email.

## Case processing and decision phase

### Pain points

- 6.18 The cumbersome legacy database was highlighted as an issue.
- 6.19 The length of time to receive the decision from Tribunal Members is set for 20 days however this does not always happen. People felt that this target was missed in 50% of cases.

## Case processing and decision phase

### Opportunities

- 6.20 Newer IT systems would have a significant impact on improving processing times.

## 7. Conclusion and next steps

- 7.1. This workshop report was shared with all attendees of the workshop for their feedback and observations, prior to its completion and sharing with the Programme Board of the Catherine Day Implementation Working Group.
- 7.2. This series of workshops took place following the completion of user perspective and experience surveys by IPAT staff, IPO staff, IPO Legal Panel Members and IPAT Tribunal members. Overall there are 8 individual reports analysing each of these pieces of work.
- 7.3. These 8 reports have been looked at as a whole, and the insights within them used to develop one overall set of recommendations for improvements. In many cases, recommendations are based directly on or lead from ideas that people shared throughout the work. These recommendations will be based on what people shared about their experiences and their roles within the International Protection process, and so for the most part focus on what will improve the experience of working in the International Protection process.
- 7.4. These recommendations have then been cross-referenced with the overall recommendations arising from the overall body of work reviewing the end to end process review of the International Protection Process. Ultimately, this will result in one overall set of recommendations, supported by multiple strands of analysis and research. These recommendations will then be submitted to the Programme Board for consideration, approval and decisions on how to implement.

# Appendix 1 – High level workshop outline

## Catherine Day Report 0 18 min

What is your perception of the CD report? What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats?

<h3>Strengths</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>S - Well defined procedures</li> <li>S - identified many of the labour intensive methods of the IP process.</li> <li>Strengths would be to manage the IP process. One process easily understood by all, address changes like sending files by eformat.</li> </ul>	<h3>Weaknesses</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>W - length of time to complete application and appeal process</li> <li>W- Not specific to IPAT but overall a good process</li> <li>W-Report did not overly focus on resource issues e.g. staffing</li> <li>Weaknesses would be a reaction to media coverage.</li> </ul>
<h3>Opportunities</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>O - To improve technology</li> <li>O - Change to a digital process for all appeals (ie remove paper environment)</li> <li>O - identify issues and redesign how we work to be more efficient</li> <li>Opportunities would be to modernise and improve service</li> <li>O - Increase staffing level to deal with higher volume of appeals</li> </ul>	<h3>Threats</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>T - Report is a tick box (as with previous reports) and while suggestions are good, they are not acted upon by higher management.</li> <li>T - possibly unrealistic timeline for some goals</li> <li>Threats would be getting rid of direct provision and no alternatives in place.v</li> </ul>

## Communication 0 20 min

What do you think of the communication in IPAT and what would you do to improve it? 0 5 min

<h3>😊</h3> <p>0 20 min</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication good within our team but not as good between teams</li> <li>Internal communication works well in IPAT - e.g. communication between teams.</li> <li>Goals are well communicated internally</li> <li>Good communication with management and teams</li> <li>communications are good overall. From top down and vice versa. HEOs always very readily present on events. No major issues with comms in IPAT. maybe improve comms between IPAT/PO/INDU etc.</li> <li>Goals are well communicated internally</li> <li>Working well - All of the bases are covered. The process is sound as is.</li> </ul>	<h3>😡</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>IPAT inbox (that not always sent to designated area on day of receiving)</li> <li>Hard copy post not always sent to designated area on day of receiving.</li> <li>Difficult to get into the system with the system. Some issues with the system. Some issues with the system. Some issues with the system.</li> <li>Sometimes difficult to find who to contact in another area (PROVIDE) with a specific issue</li> <li>Things not always done. Some issues with the system. Some issues with the system. Some issues with the system.</li> <li>So many questions can arise around appeals that we often get bogged down in endless email round robin.</li> <li>Legal process not always clear. Some issues with the system. Some issues with the system. Some issues with the system.</li> </ul>	<h3>😞</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weekly notice board/dashboard/internal portal of important issues we can catch up on.</li> <li>Should be monthly meeting for staff for each section to keep everyone updated on procedures.</li> <li>Email communication from IPAT to say when they are working on other issues. This would ensure no duplication of effort.</li> <li>The movement for registering appeals might be helped in IPAT-communication may be no duplication of effort joined up thinking.</li> </ul>
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