

Enabling a modern approach to justice services

“Our services are now designed around customer need... Without ICOS we simply could not have modernised the administration of justice.”

Jacqui Durkin – Head of Court Operations, Northern Ireland Court Service



Challenge

The administration of justice is one of the oldest and most traditional systems in the world, and court record keeping is necessarily comprehensive and normally labour intensive. The Northern Ireland Court Service (NICtS) was established in 1979 to provide administrative support for Northern Ireland courts and certain tribunals.

Like most government organisations, the NICtS needed to modernise its applications in order to improve efficiency and meet government targets for the provision of online services. *“Our modernising agenda was set from the very top of central government,”* says Jim Coffey, Head of Business Modernisation, Northern Ireland Court Service.

“However, this was a real challenge, because it was paramount that we maintain confidence in the justice system while transforming to a more efficient of doing business – the ball could not be dropped in any way.”

The NICtS was hampered by the fact that its existing business systems consisted of over 30 fragmented databases and hundreds of manual and paper-based processes. For example, payments of some £7.4million of fines were recorded and reconciled on carbonised paper fine cards. There was also little commonality in the processes used at different courts and exchange of information was poor.

Jim Coffey continues, *“We wanted to be a modern service, with a modern IT system, but we effectively had no useable IT network or processes to start with. So, we evaluated our needs and determined that there was sufficient commonality across our Criminal, Civil and Family courts that one application could support all of our needs and the needs of a diverse range of customers in the justice system – including those that don’t want to be there! It would also reduce the risk of integration problems, ensure data commonality and simplify training.”*

Solution

In late 1999 Fujitsu was awarded a 10 year PFI contract with the NICtS for the ongoing development and management of its IT infrastructure, corporate applications and courtroom technology. As part of the agreement Fujitsu was also tasked to design and implement an Integrated Court Operation System (ICOS) that would standardise and automate its business processes, improve resource management and be accessible by all court users.

Jim Coffey says, *“We decided to create an ambitious single application to support all court business processes. In addition it needed to be flexible and provide the platform to develop online services, support wider justice integration and to transform the courtroom environment.”*

SUMMARY OF KEY FACTS

Organisation

Northern Ireland Court Service (NICtS)

Services delivered

The design and implementation of an Integrated Court Operation System (ICOS), including support for online services, wider justice integration and new courtroom technologies

Key metrics

- 21 courthouses
- 750 employees

Benefits

- **Reduced operational costs** – has cut costs, replaced inefficient systems and removed manual activities, resulting in head count savings of nearly 12%
- **Improved customer service** – more staff can concentrate on customer service and customers have a choice of ways to access up-to-date justice information
- **Increased productivity** – has accelerated the administration of justice by standardising processes and systems
- **Optimised resource usage** – greater sharing of case information enables the optimum deployment of resources
- **Achieved compliance** – has helped to meet government targets for the electronic delivery of services
- **Increased operational flexibility** – provides a secure and scalable platform capable of supporting evolving needs

CASE STUDY

NORTHERN IRELAND COURT SERVICE

The bespoke ICOS application developed by Fujitsu provides comprehensive case lifecycle management from initiation through to disposal and appeal, including access to a full case history and the integrated creation and control of all documents, such as initiating, procedural and evidential documents, results/court orders, warrants and notices. To manage any fees and fines, ICOS supports payment over the telephone by debit/credit card, Chip and Pin integration, and the electronic processing of credit transfers and is also fully integrated with the Accounts system and performs an automatic bank reconciliation.

ICOS is supported by three new centres of excellence for Customer Services (payments, warrants and queries), Juror Management and Civil Case Processing, but can be accessed by other authorised court users and judiciary at all venues. In addition, the application supports the electronic exchange of data with external parties, including the Police, Probation Service, Driver and Vehicle Licensing, the Legal Aid Registry Trust and Inland Revenue. Through its wider integration with the Causeway project, which is also being led by Fujitsu, ICOS enables real time electronic data exchange between six key criminal justice agencies in Northern Ireland.

The inherent flexibility of ICOS' design means it provides a platform on which to develop online services, such as public searches, case initiation and access to Court Orders, and transform the courtroom environment using innovative new technologies like public displays for Court Lists, Digital Audio Recording and Log Notes (FTR) and bar code readers for the automatic scanning of forms.

"ICOS is one of only a few applications in Europe, if not the world, that manages the processes across all court tiers, all venues and all types of business. As a result, Fujitsu has enabled us to transform the way we do business and foster public confidence in the justice system," says Jacqui Durkin, Head of Court Operations, Northern Ireland Court Service. *"Our services are now designed around customer need and we have adopted new efficient business processes and flexible service delivery models, supported by knowledgeable, customer focused and well trained staff. Without ICOS we simply could not have modernised the administration of justice."*

Benefits

The ICOS system developed by Fujitsu is enabling NICtS to:

- **Reduce operational costs** – centralisation of services has cut costs, replaced inefficient systems and removed manual activities, resulting in head count savings of nearly 12%
- **Improve customer service** – staff can concentrate on delivering a quality service and customers have a choice of ways to access up-to-date justice information
- **Increase productivity** – has accelerated administration of justice by standardising processes and systems interfaces, creating centres of excellence, and enabling efficient
- **Optimise resource usage** – greater sharing of case and scheduling information across the organisation optimises resource usage, including court venues and the judiciary
- **Achieve compliance** – has helped to meet government targets for the electronic delivery of services
- **Increase operational flexibility** – provides a secure and scalable platform to support evolving business needs.

"The centralisation of administrative processes and back office systems into three customer service centres has enabled our courthouse staff to concentrate on the customer and court hearings. Now 70% of civil bills are initiated through the service centres, and they issue 100% of fine warrants and manage 100% of juror administration. Our customers can also conduct their business at any of our court offices, our website or by telephone. Already 99% of public searches of court registrars and 32% of small claims are made online," explains Jim Coffey.

"In addition, NICtS can now access and produce more consistent and timely information. For example, fine notices used to take 5-10 days to produce, but are now issued within one day and court results, bail outcomes and legal aid details are all exchanged electronically within 24 hours, removing critical delays for defendants and prisoners. Query resolution has also drastically increased and we are much more transparent in our accountability."

Approach

Before commencing development, Fujitsu worked closely with NICtS to ensure that it fully understood the business drivers and requirements for the new application. Its look and feel was then developed using a workshop approach to maximise commonality, while also accommodating the unique working practices of each court system.

Delivery of the ICOS programme was phased in three modules for the Civil, Family and Criminal courts. Further projects have subsequently added the delivery of online services and integration with other criminal justice organisations through the Causeway programme.

Jim Coffey continues, *"Fujitsu's approach was modular and incremental, which reduced the risk of a 'big bang' approach and gave us confidence in the project's success. We did have a couple of bumps at the start, but overall the project was very, very successful. Once we had agreed the final implementation programme it did not slip by a day, even on the massive Criminal module for which we had allowed a tolerance of eight weeks."*

Expertise

With over 30 years experience of supporting the needs of customers, Fujitsu has a proven track record in providing complex systems integration and application development and management services that reduce costs, improve productivity and customer services and deliver a compelling return on investment. In particular, Fujitsu has considerable experience in delivering technology-enabled courtrooms in The Republic of Ireland, the UK and Australia.

Jim Coffey comments, *"Fujitsu's project management and technical skills were very good. Robust project governance was critical to the delivery of the project within time and budget. Their ability to access the right people and skills was critical to ensuring we had a quality, robust application that is flexible enough to run our business in a number of ways. In designing ICOS Fujitsu had cognisance of our vision of the future, so it is built to meet our needs today and to achieve our vision for tomorrow. It is now up to us to be bold in the design of future services so that we achieve even more benefits."*

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