

ANNUAL REVIEW 2013-14

Introduction

This Review summarises the work of the Citizens Information Board and our delivery partners in 2013 and into 2014.

About us

The Citizens Information Board (CIB) is responsible for providing information, advice (including money and budgeting advice) and advocacy services to citizens. 'Citizen' means citizens of Ireland and everyone who lives in Ireland and who may use or need our services.

The Citizens Information Board makes a simple commitment – that citizens will receive quality, independent, reliable information, advice, advocacy and budgeting services wherever they are located in Ireland and in a way that suits their needs.

To deliver on this commitment we provide the citizensinformation.ie website and work with a nationwide network of delivery partners:

- The network of Citizens Information Services (CISs)
- The Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS)
- The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS)
- The Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS)
- The National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS)



The National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities was established as a nationwide service with a National Manager in 2014. NAS employs advocates across Ireland to be an independent voice for people with disabilities in vulnerable and isolated situations. In 2013 NAS worked with **1,063 people**, some of whom have been living in institutions for many years. NAS hosted its first conference, *My life, My say, My way* in September 2013.

In 2013...

The **citizensinformation.ie** website had over 14 million visits. Over **600,000 people** visited a Citizens Information Service with almost a million queries.

Over **150,000 people** telephoned the Citizens Information Phone Service.

Over **40,000 people** got help with problem debt from MABS offices and the MABS helpline.

In the first six months of 2014...

Over **300,000 people** visited a Citizens Information Service with over **480,000 queries**.

MABS had **9,319 new clients** and the MABS Helpline answered **11,269 calls**.



Pictured at the NAS conference were, from left: Louise Haughney, Tony McQuinn, Chief Executive, Jane Fennessy, Minister for Social Protection Joan Burton TD and Mary Sullivan.

Citizen centred
 Impartial Community
 Non-judgemental
 Flexible
 Dignity
 Information
 Trust
 respect
 Available to all
 Confidential
 Service Public
 Support

Our remit

We ensure that people have accurate, comprehensive and clear information on social and public services.

We support the provision of information and advice on budgeting and money management.

We help vulnerable people, in particular people with disabilities, to identify and understand their needs and options.

We provide advocacy services for people with disabilities.

We promote greater accessibility, co-ordination and public awareness of social services.

We give feedback to government on the effectiveness of current social policy and services and we highlight issues of concern.

EFQM



EFQM Gold Star Service Excellence Quality Mark

All our services and delivery partners are going through a quality assurance programme. The project is facilitated by the Centre for Competitiveness and the quality mark is awarded by the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM). The EFQM Gold Star Service Excellence Quality Mark shows that services have reached

specified quality standards of customer service excellence. Services undergo a rigorous in-depth assessment to measure their performance against the EFQM principles.

By October 2014, 82 CIS and MABS services had achieved the EFQM Gold Star Service Excellence Award.



Noreen McGowan and Deirdre McGauran from Leitrim MABS, with Tony McQuinn, Chief Executive, receiving their EFQM Gold Star award from Matt Fisher, EFQM, Brussels.



Kevin Keenan, Richard Regan, Teresa McSweeney, from Co. Roscommon CIS, with Tony McQuinn, Chief Executive, receiving their EFQM Gold Star award from Matt Fisher, EFQM, Brussels.

Citizens Information

Citizens Information

We deliver information through three channels: online, telephone and face-to-face. These three channels work together to ensure that the public can access information, advice and advocacy services in the way that suits them best.

Citizens Information Services (CISs)

Citizens Information Services (CISs) provide a face-to-face service to anyone who needs information, advice or advocacy. The service is free, impartial and confidential.

In 2013, **637,804 people** visited Citizens Information Services (CISs) with almost **a million queries**. Social welfare questions accounted for **45%** of all queries.

Advocacy services in CISs

Information providers support customers to act on their own behalf. They also advocate on behalf of customers – for example, by attending meetings, hearings or appeals.

The Advocacy Support Worker Programme works to build advocacy capacity and skills in Citizens Information Services. Over **2,600 people** received an advocacy service in a CIS in 2013.

Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS)

The Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS) provides a national telephone service on **0761 07 4000** from **9am to 8pm**.

CIPS answered **162,080 telephone queries** in 2013 which took an average of **5 minutes** per call.

Citizens Information Online

Citizensinformation.ie provides comprehensive online information for citizens. In 2014 citizensinformation.ie was updated to be fully responsive so that it adapts to mobile devices such as tablets and smartphones. New content on the Local Property Tax, new personal insolvency mechanisms, the Home Renovation Scheme, changes to One-Parent Family Payment and driving licences was added in 2013.



Citizensinformation.ie had **14.1 million visits**, **46.5 million pageviews** and an average of more than **719,000 unique visitors** per month in 2013.

Microsites



Keepingyourhome.ie had **136,047 visits**, **398,075 pageviews** and an average of **7,696 unique visitors** per month.

Gettingbacktowork.ie

Getting back to work is a new website that gives information on supports for jobseekers and people who want to start a business. It replaced losingyourjob.ie and selfemployedsupports.ie in mid-2014.

In 2013, losingyourjob.ie had **135,423 visits**, **285,463 pageviews** and an average of **8,949 unique visitors** per month.

Selfemployedsupports.ie had **127,025 visits**, **320,584 pageviews** and an average of **8,166 unique visitors** per month.

The Money Advice and Budgeting Service

The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) offers free, confidential and independent assistance for people in debt or in danger of getting into debt. National Traveller MABS is a separate MABS company that advocates for the financial inclusion of Travellers and promotes access to legal and affordable savings and credit.

MABS services worked with **20,552 new clients** in 2013.

The MABS National Helpline dealt with **23,127 calls** in 2013.

In the first six months of 2014 the MABS Helpline received **11,269 calls**.

Contact the MABS Helpline on **0761 07 2000** or visit **mabs.ie**

In 2013 the Citizens Information Board was responsible for:

- The Mortgage Arrears Information Helpline
- The **keepingyourhome.ie** website

The helpline received **6,881 calls** in 2013. In 2014 the helpline was merged with the MABS helpline.

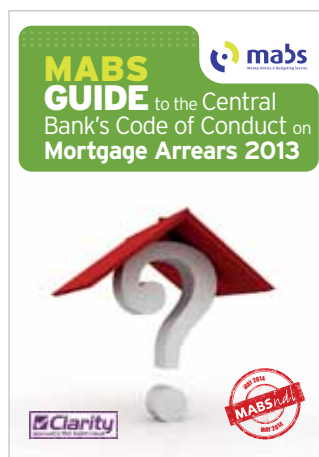
The Approved Intermediary Service

The new Approved Intermediary Service (which operates through MABS) started work in 2013. With the help of an Approved Intermediary, an eligible debtor can apply for a Debt Relief Notice which allows for a write-off of qualifying unsecured debt after three years.

With the University of Ulster, MABSndI developed an accredited training module for Approved Intermediaries. Fourteen Approved Intermediaries are now working in MABS services. A debtor can be screened and an appointment arranged through any local MABS office or the MABS helpline.

The first Debt Relief Notice (DRN) was granted in January 2014. By September 2014 **148 DRNs** had been granted and over **€1, 700,000** of unsecured debt had been frozen (until the conclusion of the three-year supervision period when it will be written off).

MABS Guide to the updated Central Bank's Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears



The Central Bank of Ireland issued a new Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears that took effect on 1 July 2013. The Code sets out a Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process (or MARP), MABS published a booklet *MABS Guide to the Central Bank's Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears*

to help borrowers understand their rights under the Code, and reach an affordable and sustainable payment arrangement with their lender.



NATIONAL ADVOCACY SERVICE

FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The National Advocacy Service

The National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS) provides an independent, confidential and free, representative advocacy service. NAS works to ensure that when life decisions are made, due consideration is given to the preferences of people with disabilities and that their rights are safeguarded.

NAS has supported people with disabilities to achieve many positive outcomes. People have been supported to articulate their wishes, make decisions about relocating from residential care to independent or community living, question charges levied in residential services, question Ward of Court committees and challenge decisions that affect their lives.

In 2014 the National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities moved to one national service under a National Advocacy Service Board.

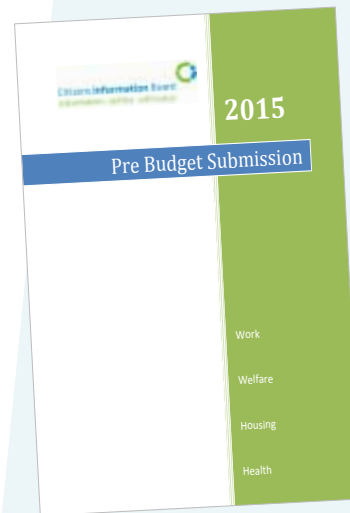


Maria Walls, NAS
National Manager

Maria Walls joined the National Advocacy Service as National Manager from her former post of Director of Research and Policy Development with the National Federation of Voluntary Bodies where she worked for over 12 years.

Over 1,000 vulnerable people with disabilities were supported by the service in 2013. In the first 6 months of 2014, 833 vulnerable people were supported by NAS.

Contact NAS on **0761 07 3000**.



Social policy and research

We provide information on the effectiveness of current social policy and services, and highlight issues which are of concern to users of those services.

During 2013 CIB made a number of policy submissions and carried out research

into client casework in MABS and the role and contribution of employment support schemes to information provision in CISs. Our Pre-Budget Submission is based on feedback from delivery partners and sets out the policy concerns and related issues identified by these services.

MABSndI also published *A Profile of MABS clients in Mortgage Difficulty*.

In 2013, 3,140 social policy returns were submitted to CIB. Over half concerned social welfare issues.



In 2014 the Citizens Information Board joined the nationwide Green Ribbon Campaign to promote open discussion of mental health.

"Participating as an organisation raised awareness amongst our staff and clients about the importance of being open and

positive when dealing with mental health issues."
Kerry MABS

"There was a realisation that depression and mental health issues need to be openly discussed at every opportunity if any real change is to happen."
Ballyfermot CIS

assistireland.ie provides information on assistive technology (aids and appliances) for older people and people with disabilities. It contains the details of nearly 7,000 products and of suppliers selling those products. Assistireland.ie was re-launched in 2013 with a new responsive design that allows the website to adapt to mobile devices such as tablets and smartphones.

In 2013 **assistireland.ie** recorded **478,715 visits**, more than **2.4m pageviews** and an average of **25,835 unique visitors per month**. The assistireland.ie support service dealt with more than **1,100 queries** by telephone, email and SMS.



Citizens Information and CIB staff outside the EU Commission offices in Brussels.

Citizens Information visit to the EU Commission

The EU Commission office in Dublin hosted a visit to Brussels for Citizens Information providers. This visit was one of the many activities marking the European Year of Citizens 2013 which aimed to foster active participation of citizens in the life of the European Union.



European Year of Citizens 2013
www.europa.eu/citizens-2013

Focus Ireland teams up with the Citizens Information Service

In 2014 Focus Ireland launched a new information guidebook: *Working to end homelessness*. The guidebook aims to stem the growing problem of homelessness and support people at risk of losing their homes. Focus Ireland teamed up with the Citizens Information Service to help distribute the guide through the network of Citizens Information Services.



Pictured at the launch were Mike Allen, Director of Advocacy, Focus Ireland, Jan O'Sullivan TD, and Tony McQuinn, Chief Executive.

Publications

We published a range of leaflets, booklets and journals in 2013 and 2014. All our publications are available online at citizensinformationboard.ie.



Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS)

The Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS) is the national agency for the provision of sign language interpreting services in Ireland. It is an independent voluntary body with its own board of management and is funded and supported by the Citizens Information Board.

Contact SLIS on **0761 07 8440** or visit **slis.ie**.



At the official launch of the Irish Remote Interpreting Service (IRIS), at Deaf Village Ireland were, from right: Niall Doyle, SLIS, Fiona Ward, Department of Social Protection, Ann Marie O'Connor, Senior Manager, Tony McQuinn, Chief Executive, Anne Coogan, Chair of SLIS, Minister for Social Protection Joan Burton TD, Sandra O'Brien, Chair of IRIS Subgroup, Elfrieda Carroll, Manager of SLIS and Aidan Reddy, Department of Social Protection.

Training services

We provide training services nationwide to Citizens Information Services (CISs), the Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS) and other voluntary and statutory bodies to enhance their information-provision capabilities.

In 2013 the new two-year Information Advice and Advocacy Programme (IAAP) which leads to a level 6 QQI Advanced Certificate was delivered for the first time. In 2014, 139 learners received certificates as part of the IAAP.

In 2013 **over 1,600 people attended training events** organised by the Citizens Information Board.



Sylva Langford, Chair of CIB, Tony McQuinn, Chief Executive and members of the training team with Geraldine Cullen, Manager, who was presented with a special award before her retirement. Geraldine was involved with the delivery of IPP and IAAP programmes from their inception in 2003.

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Tony McQuinn with Minister of State for Social Protection Kevin Humphreys TD and Eileen Fitzgerald, Senior Manager.



To mark the occasion, a special *"This is your life"* book compiled by work colleagues was presented to Tony by Shona Geraghty, his PA.



Tony McQuinn retires as Chief Executive of the Citizens Information Board

An event to mark the retirement of Tony McQuinn as Chief Executive of the Citizens Information Board took place in CIB's head office in Townsend Street, Dublin in August 2014. The event was attended by family, friends, staff and distinguished guests who worked with Tony throughout his career.

A native of Co. Carlow, Tony began working in the area of information provision with the National Social Service Board (NSSB) in 1980. He was appointed Senior Manager in the then Comhairle in 2002 and became Chief Executive of the Citizens Information Board in 2008.

During Tony's long career in the public service he led a range of innovative initiatives including the development of the Citizens Information website and the introduction of accredited training and quality assurance in Citizen Information Services. He was also involved in setting up the Sign Language Interpreting Service.

As Chief Executive, Tony was deeply involved in shaping the strategic direction of the Citizens Information Board. Tony steered the Citizens Information Board through change and reform, including the extension of its remit to include MABS in 2009. He ensured that the focus remained on the provision of excellent services to citizens, many of whom are socially excluded, or have been profoundly affected by unemployment, problem debt and mortgage arrears.



Following her speech on Tony's career, Eileen Fitzgerald made a presentation of gifts on behalf of all CIB staff.



Anne Vaughan, Director General, Department of Social Protection spoke about Tony's years of dedicated work on behalf of the citizens of Ireland.



Tony with his wife Eleanor, sons Cormac and Eoghan and daughters Aoife and Siomha, cut his retirement cake.



Tony with former National Social Service Board (NSSB) colleagues from left: GERALYNN McGARRY, KATIE BOYLE, SALLY KEOGH, IMELDA DUFFY, ANNE COX, GWYN GRACE and MARIE NOLAN.