



# Business Plan 2003-2005



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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## MISSION STATEMENT

The Asylum Support Adjudicators provide an independent appeal mechanism for asylum seekers whose applications for support have been refused or discontinued.

Appeals will be heard in a fair and just manner.

The Asylum Support Adjudicators and all support staff are committed to providing an efficient, professional and accessible service.

## FOREWORD

This is the fourth Business Plan of the Asylum Support Adjudicators (ASA). The ASA are a Tribunal whose powers are set out in Section 103 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 and who consider appeals against the refusal or discontinuance of asylum support.

The purpose of this document is to set out clear and measurable targets and service standards. In the past we have set our Business Plan targets on a yearly basis. We have found, however, that setting ourselves such a narrow timescale for growth and development has limited our opportunity for longer term planning. In particular, because much of our work is governed by the quantity of appealable decisions made by the Home Secretary, we have found that changes to practice and procedure may take some time to show real results.

In reviewing our last year's Business Plan targets, we found that although we could be justifiably pleased with our performance, there was a temptation to set new targets which were largely repetitive and somewhat narrow, since it was only these that could reasonably be achieved within a one year timescale.

We hope therefore that this new departure to a two year Business Plan will enable us to retain those targets which relate to the all important quality of service delivery to our customers but will also allow us to take a broader view and plan in the longer term for more challenging aspirations.

Our accountability will not be lessened since we will continue to internally review our performance against our Business Plan targets on a four monthly basis and to report to all our stake holders in detail in the Chief Asylum Support Adjudicator's Annual Report on a year by year basis.

Our last year's plan placed an increased emphasis on the development of the service and the training and support needs of staff. Our performance review report back which can be found at section 7 of this document shows that we have on balance been successful in meeting those targets. A full breakdown of our achievements against specific targets is set out in our Annual Report (2002-2003).

We recognise that there is always room for improvement. For example, we have found that the initial Adjudicator appraisal and development system which we drafted when the ASA was created in 2000 is not as informative and helpful as it could be, taking into account the realities of our 2003 workload.

Our revised service standards and targets therefore include work on reviewing and developing our appraisal systems. We will be applying to maintain our Investors in People accreditation this year and we look forward to receiving any comments from the quality standard review which will take place in 2003/2004.

On 11 August 2003 new Appeals Procedure Rules came into force (see Statutory Instrument No. 1735 of 2003). It is appropriate that many of our new standards will monitor the effect of these changes on the quality of our performance to our customers. Our external service delivery standards are exacting and our past performance has been of a high quality. We believe that we can maintain these good standards, while at the same time focussing on the future development of all our staff and the service they provide.

Gill Carter  
Deputy Chief Asylum Support Adjudicator

Mick Robins  
Centre Manager  
(Operational Support Staff)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 established support arrangements for asylum seekers and their dependants, replacing their previous entitlement to social security and other benefits.

Section 103 of and Schedule 10 to the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 provides for a system of appeal against decisions taken by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) to refuse or discontinue claims for support made by asylum seekers and their families. The Asylum Support Adjudicators (ASA) hear those appeals.

The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 makes some amendments to the support system. In particular Section 55(1) prohibits the Secretary of State from providing support if he is not satisfied that an applicant's claim for asylum was made as soon as reasonably practicable after that person's arrival in the United Kingdom. This provision has been the subject of challenge in the courts but is not one which falls to be dealt with by the ASA at this time since Section 55(10) prohibits the bringing of appeals on this subject to the ASA.

The 2002 Act includes other provisions relating to support for asylum seekers, such as additional offence conditions and additional provisions inserted into the conditions of support. However at the time of going to print these are not yet in force and therefore do not at present impact upon our work.

The Adjudicators do not constitute a formal body, but are expected to work collectively under the direction of the Chief Asylum Support Adjudicator (CASA) or, in her absence, the Deputy Chief Asylum Support Adjudicator (DCASA). The Asylum Support Adjudicators do not deal with asylum claims or any other immigration matters. They can only consider appeals against a refusal or discontinuance of support by NASS. The ASA are independent of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) and NASS, reporting directly to the Secretary of State. The ASA fall under the supervision of the Council on Tribunals.

The Asylum Support Adjudicators are expected to hear and determine appeals within tight time limits set by delegated legislation. The Asylum Support Appeals (Procedure) (Amendment) Rules 2003 made some amendments to these timescales. In particular appellants have one more day after the receipt of a negative decision in which to make their appeal. Nonetheless appeals must still be received by the ASA within three working days of the receipt of a negative decision. The maximum possible time for the ASA to process an appeal, from receipt of a Notice of Appeal through to the Adjudicator sending out a written judgment, can be no more than eleven working days. In the vast majority of cases the listing of an oral hearing will occur seven working days after a valid appeal has been received and a written judgment will be sent out two or three days thereafter. Cases where an oral hearing has not been requested are generally disposed of in under one week.

Adjudicators are responsible, on a collective basis, for delivering a just, accessible and efficient appeal mechanism.

The Adjudicator may:

- Require the Secretary of State to reconsider the matter;
- Substitute his or her decision for the decision appealed against;
- Dismiss the appeal.

There is no right of appeal against decisions made by the ASA, the only mechanism for challenge being by way of judicial review.

## 2 ORGANISATION

The Adjudication team consists of a Chief Adjudicator, a Deputy Chief Adjudicator, five part-time and nine sessional Adjudicators. We have lost one sessional Adjudicator due to a career move, but are in the fortunate position of having a sufficient pool to cover the needs of our workload.

The ASA completed a major recruitment campaign for support staff in November 2002. The support staff now consists of a Centre Manager, Team Leader, eight Executive Officers, six clerical support staff (including ushers) and two secretarial staff.

Adjudicators are responsible for determining cases either by way of oral hearing or on paper. It is their responsibility to send out a Reasons Statement explaining each case they determine. When oral hearings are heard the Adjudicator has three days to deliver a Reasons Statement. When a decision is made on a paper case, the Reasons Statement must be sent on the same day. Adjudicators also consider on a daily basis whether to extend the time for receipt of appeals and determine queries arising on appeals and questions as to whether appeals are valid. In addition the Chief Adjudicator and her Deputy consider all valid appeals and issue Orders for Directions where appropriate. They also decide when cases should be listed for hearing.

The support staff deliver a wide range of services including case preparation, arranging interpreters, sending out notices and Orders for Directions and ushering in Court. They are responsible for all the day to day administrative functions involved in processing appeals. Following the successful recruitment campaign we took the opportunity to re-organise the support staff structure. We now have teams that focus on caseworking, reception / court ushers and administrative and secretarial support. As a small unit it is essential that our staff are flexible and have the skills and knowledge to cover a range of tasks. Therefore to maintain our effectiveness and encourage good teamwork we have ensured that team members are properly trained and able to support their colleagues in other areas.

The ASA is located at Christopher Wren House, 113 High Street, Croydon, CR0 1QG. The site has disabled access (including wheelchair accessibility) and induction loops for the benefit of those with hearing difficulties. The building has four hearing rooms. The ASA has a freephone number for the use of appellants (0800 389 7913). We also have a website which gives details of the business we conduct and what parties may expect when they attend for hearing. The website also includes copies of all key decisions made by our Adjudicators. Reasons Statements are also published via EIN on [www.ein.org.uk](http://www.ein.org.uk) or are available from us by access to our public register or on disc by request. Our own website can be found at [www.asylum-support-adjudicators.org.uk](http://www.asylum-support-adjudicators.org.uk).

A birds-eye view of the process of a typical hearing can be observed by watching our video. We have distributed the video to interacting voluntary organisations and government departments and copies are available on request (tel. 0208 688 3977). A translated version of the video will also be shown to appellants on their arrival to Christopher Wren House.

### 3 WORKLOAD & PROJECTIONS

The Annual Report 2002 - 03 details the significant increase in the number of appeals that the ASA has received since it was established in April 2000. In 2000/01 the ASA received 255 appeals (257 determinations, 21 per month), 2,141 (178 per month) in 2001/02 and 3,813 in 2002/03. (Note: there can be more than one determination per appeal.)

The number of appeals received since April 2000 can be summarised as follows:

Financial Year	Total number of Appeals Received	Monthly Average
Apr 00 – Mar 01	257	21
Apr 01 – Mar 02	2,141	178
Apr 02 – Mar 03	3,813	317
Apr 03 – Mar 04 (estimate)	1,780	147

The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 and Section 55(1) in particular introduced significant changes to the asylum application process and this has had an impact on our caseload. In the period Jan – Mar 03 we received 864 appeals (288 per month) but for Apr-Aug 03 this had reduced to 737 appeals (147 per month). This would put projections for the current calendar year (Jan - Dec 03) of 2,149. However if we were to receive an average of 147 appeals for the full financial year (Apr 03 – Mar 04) the total number of appeals would be reduced to 1,780.

These projections are very limited and based solely on previous levels of intake. Until 2003 the Home Office Statistical Service had provided us with projections based on the impact assessment of relevant Home Office policies. Unfortunately we have been informed that they are no longer able to provide this information. They have advised us to prepare our forecasts in consultation with NASS. We are awaiting comments from NASS but in the meantime we are restricted to these basic assumptions of no change on current statistical trends. This is clearly an uncertain period, the impact of Section 55 in the longterm is as yet unknown and there are a number of underlying factors that are yet to be resolved with NASS.

However we still need to manage this downturn effectively. Therefore in this interim period we will make less use of sessional adjudicators and suspend any new recruitment of permanent adjudicators and administrative staff (wherever possible). We will continue to use temporary promotions within the service to provide suitable cover when required.

### **Budget Allocation**

The Asylum Support Adjudicators are wholly funded via the Vote of the Home Office. The initial budget allocation for the ASA was arranged via the Finance & Planning Team (FPT) of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND). The Director General of the Immigration & Nationality Directorate delegates the budget and financial authority to the Chief Asylum Support Adjudicator. The budget for the 2003/04 financial year totalled £1,715,000. These funds were split with £1m allocated to the cost of staff remuneration and £715,000 for non - pay running costs (NPRC) for the day to day running costs of the ASA.

The ASA are governed by the principles of Government Accounting and use BASS (the Business and Accounting Strategic System) and Excel as their main financial tools. The ASA are responsible for the processing and payment of running cost invoices (i.e. interpreters' fees, translations, stationery etc).

During 2002 we identified significant pressures on our remuneration costs above the allocated budget. In partnership with our sponsor department (IND FPT) we agreed an increase in our remuneration budget from £718,000 to £1m for the 2003/04 financial year.

ASA expenditure is directly related to the number of appeals we receive. This is because our major costs are staff remuneration, interpreters and the cost of translations. The more appeals we receive mean that we require more sessional adjudicators (for whom we pay a daily fee, travel and subsistence), more interpreters for oral hearings and more translated Reasons Statements. As the number of appeals had increased significantly over the past 2 years we were allocated additional funds (£100K) for running costs. As detailed elsewhere in this report it is unlikely that the projected number of appeals will be met. We have therefore identified possible savings of £168K. This will be reviewed as the current financial year progresses. In line with directions from our sponsor department we have profiled our full budget allocation as well as our forecast expenditure (which identified the savings mentioned above).

### **Budgets for 2003 – 04**

The following paragraphs and tables detail the method of calculation we have made to allocate the full ASA budget allocation for the 2003/04 financial year.

### **Remuneration**

The Remuneration budget of £1m is for adjudicators and support staff pay costs. Following the adjudicators' remuneration review and the support staff recruitment campaign we have allocated £600,000 for adjudicators and £400,000 for support staff.

### **Non Pay Running Costs**

The majority of budgets have been set in line with expenditure last year. The main items of expenditure for the ASA are the cost of interpreters and translations (both of which are directly affected by the workflow rate), stationery and printing and publicity. The main budget allocations are as follows:

### **Interpreters**

The ASA pay interpreters a flat fee of £85 per morning or afternoon session (or £125 for late bookings). This budget is allocated on the assumption that approximately 36% of the total number of appeals received will proceed to a full hearing (oral and paper cases). Historically 64% of the total number of appeals received do not require a hearing (i.e. they are no jurisdiction, invalid appeals, withdrawals by the appellant or NASS). Of the 36% we estimate that 85% will request an oral hearing and of these 95% will require an interpreter. We have allocated £200K to the interpreters' budget.

### **Translations**

At the end of every appeal (oral and paper cases) the adjudicator prepares a Reason Statement detailing their determination. If the appellant is likely to suffer any detriment or is required to do anything as a result of the determination, a translated version of the Reason Statement in the appellant's first language will be issued. About 31% of all appeals fall into this category and require a translated Reason Statement. It costs an average of £170 to translate each Reason Statement. In addition to this we also provide copies of the ASA information leaflets in various other languages and we plan to revise a number of these leaflets this year. We have allocated £200K to the translations budget.

### **Office Equipment & Stationery**

The ASA is responsible for renting its own office equipment and purchasing its own office supplies. We also arrange the printing of documents such as the Annual Report, Business Plan, information leaflets about the ASA and the Training and Development Strategy etc. We have allocated £70K to this budget.

### **Website & Publicity**

The ASA website has been a great success since its launch in July 2001. The site now includes a fully searchable database of Reasons Statements and enhanced News, Statistics and Publications sections. Along with new hosting arrangements the site will have easier access and greater functionality. We are also exploring the possibility of publishing a report detailing key decisions. We have allocated a total of £100K for these costs this year.

### **Finance Report Year 2004/2005**

Our sponsor department has issued indicative budgets for 2004/05 which total £1,500,000 for the ASA. This will be split with £1m for pay and £500k for admin costs. Negotiations are continuing and we will revise our plans in the light of discussions with NASS on future workload projections. At present the indicative budget will allow us to continue to meet our business objectives.

## 5 TRAINING

### **Time Spent on Training**

Approximately 100 days have been committed to training during this financial year. This is an increase of 70 training days on the previous year. It represents an annual average of 3.5 days of training for each permanent team member.

We publish our training priorities for the year in an annual plan, which is reviewed on a quarterly basis. We also set aside a relatively high contingency budget in order that we can meet changing training needs throughout the year and take advantage of any ongoing opportunities for training and development which our staff identify.

### **Some Examples from our Training Plan**

We have been fortunate to recruit high quality permanent workers to our support staff team. Our initial training priorities were concentrated on ensuring that these new recruits received a thorough induction process which enabled them to fully understand their work in the context of our procedures. The last few months have seen us enter into the next phase of staff development which concentrates upon refining specific skills.

To this end we have already conducted some job specific training, such as customer care training for our ushering staff involving the use of mock hearings to develop practical skills. We also plan to focus on particular aspects of customer service training such as dealing with aggression or the aggrieved client.

We recognise that such job specific training is not only appropriate for new staff but that all team members can benefit from skill sharing to improve their performance. We shall be using the format of mock hearings again in our winter training for Adjudicators. Our intention is not only to encourage a sharing of academic argument in the sessions which we will be running on the principles of judgment writing, but also to look at practical topics such as equality of access to the tribunal process.

The smooth-running of our service is very dependent on our information systems. The development of our information technology skills remains one of our key priorities for the next year. We hope again to be able to identify training that will be ASA specific and in particular we are looking to enhance the computer skills of our Adjudicators, not just in relation to word processing, but also in the use of computers as a calendar and reminder system. We have made great strides in the use of computer databases and shared diaries to streamline our listing system and further training should enable us to increase our confidence and flexibility in this area. Operational staff, having acclimatised themselves to our office systems, are also looking to enhance their skills by training on more advanced use of our IT packages. In particular we will be offering training on access databases, staff and financial management.

For the first time we intend on a quarterly basis to review and evaluate not only the content of the training courses that have been attended but also the spread of access to training. In this way we hope to ensure that there has been equality of access to our training resources and that those resources have been allocated in the way which most appropriately benefits the whole of the ASA team. We recognise that financial calculations are not necessarily the best way of assessing our commitment to training and therefore our targets for this year have moved away from purely pounds based calculations and toward a time allocation method of reviewing our training provision.

## 6 FEEDBACK

### 1. External Feedback

#### • Compliments and Complaints

The ASA have a complaints procedure which enables us to learn from any mistakes we might make. Any necessary actions arising from these comments are reflected in our Business Plan targets. This year we received 3 complaints. 2 were from appellants' representatives and the other was from an appellant. The representatives were concerned with the quality of interpreters provided by the ASA and the appellant's complaint concerned information considered at the hearing. We have met our target response times for dealing with complaints in every case.

We also display comment cards in a prominent place in our reception area. These are designed in an easy to complete pictorial format. Unfortunately, although we have taken steps to bring these cards to the attention of our users, in the past these have rarely been completed, which is understandable given the circumstances which prompt attendance at our offices. However since the introduction of our new structure and in particular our reception team we have managed a considerable increase in customer cards. From Jan – Sept 03 we received 35 comments. Of these 31 stated that the service was either very good (22) or good (9), 2 that the service was marginal and 2 that the service was unsatisfactory. In addition to this 21 commented that the staff were helpful and polite and 10 that the staff were knowledgeable. Unfortunately, as the comment cards are confidential and not traceable to individuals there is no further information on why 2 service users commented that the service was unsatisfactory. Of the general comments made there were 2 suggestions that a "drinks machine should be provided" (in addition to the chilled water already provided), 1 comment that the process was "time consuming" and 1 that "everything was perfect".

#### • User Group Feedback

We have continued to hold user group meetings at our ASA offices on an approximately quarterly basis. There has been a marked lessening of attendance compared with previous years and we have noted that as the year has progressed attendance has reduced further. This may be symptomatic of initial interest in a new service, declining as we become better known. Nonetheless a drop in attendance is of concern since the User Group provides one of the only forums for us to seek the views of our customers. In July 2003 we therefore sent out a User Group survey. We asked questions about the frequency, timing, venue and content of meetings. We have learnt from the responses received and have made some changes to the way in which we will run User Group meetings from September 2003. We have chosen an earlier start time of 5pm for our meetings and have been fortunate enough to be loaned a room in the office of the Council on Tribunals which enables us to hold our meetings in central London. Most people were satisfied with the format and content of the meetings themselves but, taking into account the majority of views expressed, we will give consideration to holding meetings three rather than four times a year. Our revised targets for 2003/2005 will monitor this change to our practice.

## 6 FEEDBACK

### • Council on Tribunals

The Council on Tribunals have continued to maintain an interest in the ASA and have made a number of visits to Christopher Wren House. We are grateful for their support to amendments proposed by the CASA to the Asylum Support Appeals (Procedure) Rules 2000 (2000 Rules). The Council were represented on the Review Group set up to consider the proposed amendments and made written submissions to the Lord Chancellor's Department in support. The resulting Asylum Support Appeals (Procedure) (Amendment) Rules 2003, came into force on 11 August 2003. In the Council's Annual Report 2003, they recognised that the amendments would go some way towards relaxing the rigidity of the time limits laid down in the 2000 Rules but expressed their disappointment that it was not possible to take forward the other proposed amendments which would have given us enhanced case management powers.

### • Customer Working Group

The vast majority of appellants using our services are one-time only attenders and their contact with us is in the main limited to little more than one week. It is therefore very difficult to gain an accurate evaluation from them as to their experience of our service. In an effort to obtain some feedback one of our Adjudicators and two members of our support staff formed a Customer Working Group in order to design a questionnaire. The design of the questionnaire took into account views expressed by User Group meetings and covered the whole range of our services from telephone and written contact, directions to the premises and the provision of interpreters through to the conduct of hearings themselves and the subsequent delivery of Reasons Statements. These questionnaires were sent out in July 2003. Due to the high turnover of our work, the fact that the majority of our appellants are non-English speakers or readers and the fact that our appellant population is often subject to a number of address changes, we took the view that little would be achieved by sending such a questionnaire direct to appellants themselves. We therefore conducted an exercise in which we identified persons or organisations who had represented appellants in appeals before us (whether by attending or by assisting in the written preparation). We mailed our questionnaire to eighty-one of those groups. This list included firms of solicitors, funded advisory agencies and voluntary organisations.

Unfortunately we have had a very low response rate. Of those returned, the common view expressed appears to be that our procedures and information are fairly clear to understand and that our staff are knowledgeable and helpful. Some useful comments were made about the accessibility of and facilities available in our building, which we will act upon. We shall discuss the low response at our next User Group meeting and will continue to seek other ways of identifying the experience of our customers. We have reviewed our database of advisory organisations and have included all of those names on the list of invitees to our User Group meeting. In this way we hope at the very least to expand our feedback basis.

### 2. Internal Feedback

Both Adjudicators and support staff operate a system of individual appraisal and development which feeds directly into our Training Plan.

The support staff system is based on a Personal Appraisal and Development Review. This starts with business planning and standard setting, identifying core competencies and individual work and development plans. The appraisals are completed annually but there are regular formal and informal discussions and reviews on performance and development.

The Adjudicators' system also uses the concept of agreed key competencies. Initially these were agreed by the Adjudicators in a team meeting, but we have now had the benefit of our Chief Adjudicator's liaison with the Judicial Studies Board in the development of their appraisal model. Following on from the work done by the Board, we have adopted their suggested key competencies, which include concepts applicable to Adjudicators across all jurisdictions. We then add to this list any competencies which we feel are specifically necessary for and applicable to work in the ASA. Our revised targets for 2003/2005 reflect our new system of continuous self-appraisal and development in addition to a supervisory system of appraisal. Our Planning Cycle shown at the Annex demonstrates how the ASA organisational targets are reflected in individual appraisal objectives and the methods by which individuals are encouraged to meet both their own and the organisation's targets by the direct feeding of any personal training requirements into the annual Training Plan.

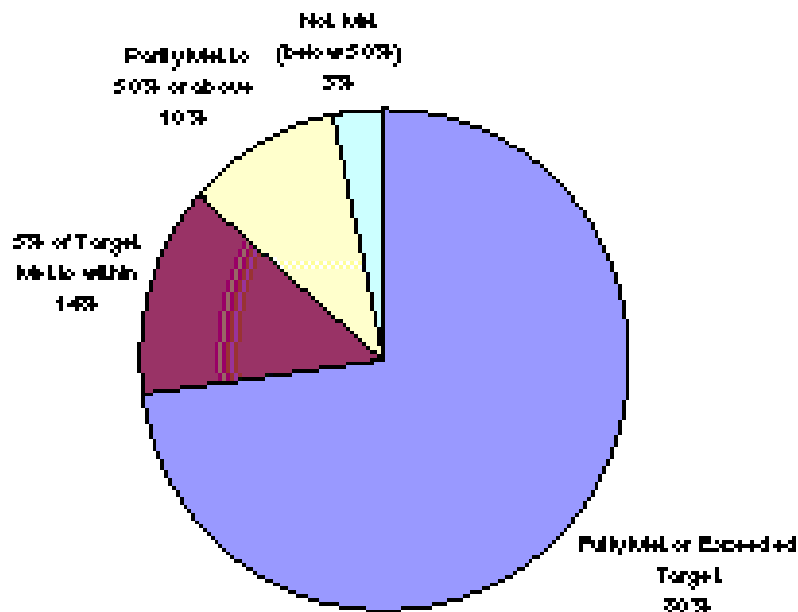
As well as individual appraisals, support staff and Adjudicators have regular team meetings and there are two formal whole team events per year which involve Adjudicators and support staff. These sessions offer an opportunity for us to analyse the individual's experience of working for us, to make the most of our strengths, to take account of our weaknesses and to build for the future. Many of the changes to our targets for the years ahead have grown out of our last review meeting in May 2003, when we participated in an exercise to identify key adjectives which we would use to describe the ASA and then progressed to an analysis of whether these attributes helped or hindered our service delivery.

## 7 ASA PERFORMANCE REVIEW 2002/2003

Our performance targets for last year were grouped into five strategic aims. The full detailed breakdown of our performance against our target standards is given in the Chief Adjudicator's Annual Report for that year. The following is intended as a summary of our overall performance:

Strategic Aim		Number of Target Standards	Fully Met or Exceeded Target	Met to within 5% of Target	Partly Met to 50% or above	Not Met (below 50%)
1	Compliance with strategic targets of delegated legislation	5	4	1	0	0
2	Efficient, professional and equipped for the job we do	18	13	3	2	0
3	Just and Independent	14	13	0	0	1
4	Responsive and sensitive to users' needs	14	8	4	1	1
5	Pro-active	8	5	0	3	0

ASA Performance Standards 2002 - 2003



## 8 KEY LEARNING POINTS FROM OUR 2002/2003 PERFORMANCE

### Introduction

Reviewing our performance provides a valuable opportunity to analyse the service we provide, to highlight opportunities for further development and improvement and to give credit to ourselves for our achievements. The Deputy Chief Adjudicator and the Centre Manager meet quarterly to review the ASA's performance against its Business Plan targets and report this information back to the Chief Adjudicator. Discussion and feedback about our findings and our progress takes place at team meetings on a regular basis. In addition there are bi-annual meetings of the whole unit to look in more detail at our performance.

### Aim 1 Compliant with strategic targets of delegated legislation

We were able to meet all our target standards to within 5% in the area of compliance. Our database confirms that 99.7% of Reasons Statements were sent out on time. These targets included key areas such as the sending of notices of hearing and the completion of oral hearings and written cases. The targets we set ourselves were an exacting 100% compliance level, so we have continued to achieve well in our primary aim of service delivery.

#### Points to note for 2003/05

New targets should seek to maintain a high level of performance.

### Aim 2 Efficient, professional and equipped for the job we do

This section was mainly concerned with our commitment to an inclusive method of planning, quality monitoring of the Adjudicators' performance and encouraging motivation and commitment throughout the team by prioritising training. We have had some successes. Time lost due to sickness was reduced, attendance throughout the whole service was 97.73%. Our performance and appraisal development system for support staff is working well, with 100% of non-agency staff having received their annual appraisal and development meetings on time.

#### Points to note for 2003/05

We have revised, implemented and adhered to a new timetable for the production of our Training Plan and the setting of our Business Plan objectives. This revision more accurately reflects the fixed points of our business year, such as the allocation of funding, the production of the Chief Adjudicator's report to the Home Secretary and the production of the Annual Report. We shall monitor the success of this revision in our 2003/05 objectives.

Although there are five target standards which we have only partially met, these all relate to one area of our work. As our workload and staffing levels have increased, monitoring and supervision of Adjudicator's has tended to develop on an ad hoc supportive level rather than to adhere to more formal appraisal systems. This has meant that targets such as twice-yearly observations and written feedback have tended to be missed in favour of providing one to one support on a daily basis. We are hopeful that our newly designed appraisal scheme, which involves less frequent formal appraisals but more frequent self examination and reporting, will combine our best practice in both areas. We will set targets which ensure that the efficacy of this new system is kept under review.

## 8 KEY LEARNING POINTS FROM OUR 2002/2003 PERFORMANCE

### **Aim 3 Just and independent**

In contrast to the preceding year when four standards remained unmet in this section we have this year only one area in which we have not met our target. We have found the use of computer-aided research to be very helpful in obtaining and disseminating relevant caselaw and have exceeded our 80% weekly trawl standard in this area. We have also benefited from last year's review of team meetings and, as a result of setting more realistic times, we have cancelled and adjourned less meetings. Adjudicators' meetings also now rotate days to ensure that all part-time staff have an opportunity to attend.

#### Points to note for 2003/05

Our new targets should include work to be done on our website and should seek to maintain a good communication structure. There may be room to explore more formal methods of communication or reporting between the Centre Manager, the Chief Adjudicator and her Deputy. The one target which we have not met is the review of the Adjudicators' Best Practice manual for internal use. Whilst the manual remains useful we are aware that it has not been reviewed since its inception in 2000. This is a target which we had hoped to achieve last year which it seemed sensible to postpone, given the delay in the coming into force of the amended Procedure Rules and the need to take some while to ensure that any fresh human rights caselaw was properly incorporated. The Chief Adjudicator will consider during the next year how best to approach this review.

### **Aim 4 Responsive and sensitive to users' needs**

This section deals mainly with our contact with users and our interpretation services. We have maintained our good record on dealing with complaints. It is a delay in taking innovative steps which has resulted in just under 50% of our targets being partially met.

#### Points to note for 2003/05

The areas where we have recorded partially met targets are in fact largely a delayed meeting of targets rather than wholly missed ones. We had expected to issue our customer survey by April 2003 whereas in fact it was sent out in July. Similarly we had hoped that observation of our incoming post would have enabled us to have revised our forms and notices in a way that was more easily understood by the user. Our target for this was March 2003 and in fact we did not complete the work until June 2003.

We now routinely issue our interpreters with questionnaires when they attend hearings at the ASA. This began on 3 July 2003. We have received our first quarter's responses and the information received will enable us to make some changes to our practice and procedure and also to improve the format of the questionnaire itself.

We received 32 responses. Overall the comments were very positive in terms of our procedures, facilities and hearing practice. We have, however, noted a need to provide the interpreters with more background information in order to clarify the role of the ASA, the hearing format and how to make a complaint if necessary.

Our target standards for 2003/05 have therefore been drafted to ensure that this ongoing work is not lost and that any results from surveys are followed up with strategic action.

## 8 KEY LEARNING POINTS FROM OUR 2002/2003 PERFORMANCE

### **Aim 5 Proactive**

It is always difficult to be proactive in a service that is essentially reactive. We hear appeals from negative decisions made by the National Asylum Support Service. Therefore our workload may vary considerably depending on the number of decisions made at any one time and the percentage of those which are appealed or appealable. This year we focused on our method of recording and reporting information and in particular on improving our database. We also looked at more flexible ways of organising our operational staff structure to best utilise the new resources available to us following recruitment. We met our targets in all of these areas.

#### Points to note for 2003/05

We had hoped to explore flexible working and listing even further but were hampered by the viability of the physical environment in which we work and in particular our need to meet the tight timescales laid down in the 2000 Procedure Rules. The 2003 Procedure Rules are newly implemented and our 2003/05 targets should be able to utilise their limited extension to our flexibility to make best use of our resources and to best meet the needs of our customers.

### **SERVICE STANDARDS**

In 2003 – 2005 we will be:

- Compliant with strategic targets of delegated legislation
- Efficient, professional and equipped for the job we do
- Just and Independent
- Responsive and sensitive to users' needs
- Proactive

## 10 KEY OBJECTIVES FOR THE ASA FOR 2003/2005

### Objective 1: Compliant with strategic targets of delegated legislation

AIM	METHOD	TARGET STANDARDS
<p>1 List hearings within statutory timescale of no later than 5 days from 'Consideration Day'. (Consideration Day is a maximum of 3 days after appeal received.)</p>	<p>We will meet this aim by measuring the volume of appeals received, producing statistics on the number of Notices of Hearing sent within the statutory timescales, reviewing results on a quarterly basis and taking action if deficiencies are noted.</p>	<p><b>100%</b> of notices sent within timescale.</p>
<p>2 Hear cases and deliver adjudication within 5 days from 'Consideration Day' (see (1) above).</p>	<p>We will meet this aim by producing statistics on the number of oral and papers hearings completed within the statutory timescales, monitoring results on a quarterly basis and reporting on them to Adjudicators and support staff.</p>	<p><b>100%</b> of oral hearings completed within timescale. <b>100%</b> of written hearings completed within timescale.</p>
<p>3 Send out Statements of Reasons not later than 2 days after date of oral hearings.</p>	<p>We will meet this aim by producing statistics on the time taken to send Statements of Reasons, monitoring results on a quarterly basis and referring to the CASA to discuss with individual Adjudicators if remedial action is required.</p>	<p><b>100%</b> of Statements of Reasons sent within timescale.</p>
<p>4 Report annually to all users on our performance.</p>	<p>We will meet this aim by publishing all figures relating to our compliance with legislative targets in our Annual Report.</p>	<p><b>100%</b> of statistical information on statutory compliance targets to be published annually.</p>

## 10 KEY OBJECTIVES FOR THE ASA FOR 2003/2005

### Objective 2: Efficient, professional and equipped for the job we do

AIM	METHOD	TARGET STANDARDS
1 Maintain and operate a planning cycle for strategic objectives.	We will meet this aim by adhering to four monthly reviews of our Business Plan. Meeting one in April/May will review our last years achievements and prepare for the next year. Meetings two and three in September and January/February will review our performance against targets and draw up an action plan for any targets not then met.	<p><b>100%</b> of objectives set in present Business Plan to be reviewed every four months.</p> <p><b>100%</b> of results of reviews to be reported to adjudicators and support staff with remedial action recommended where appropriate.</p> <p><b>100%</b> of performance against Business Plan targets to be monitored and published in Annual Report.</p>
2 Provide information to our supervisory body, the Council on Tribunals whenever requested.	We will meet this aim by allocating any requests for information within forty-eight hours of their receipt, by providing a substantive response in advance of any deadline set and by continuous review of our database to ensure that we record the information required.	<b>100%</b> of returns submitted on time and in full.
3 CASA to monitor quality and consistency of Adjudicators' work.	We will meet this aim by issuing a new appraisal system and holding seminars on the same for all Adjudicators by December 2003. Our new appraisal system will include key competencies relating to Adjudication as a whole and specific competencies relating to work in the ASA. We will ensure that newly appointed Adjudicators receive an appraisal within 6 months of appointment followed by a second appraisal 12 months thereafter. Subsequent appraisals will occur at not more than 3 yearly intervals. Adjudicators will complete an annual self-assessment form.	<b>100%</b> compliance with new appraisal system.
4 Ensure support staff and Adjudicators are motivated and committed to the aims of the ASA.	We will meet this aim by annually updating objectives in performance monitoring procedures for support staff. We will also ensure that staff and Adjudicators are encouraged to make plans for their future development.	<p><b>100%</b> of permanent support staff to have received Appraisal and Development meetings by March 2004.</p> <p><b>25%</b> minimum training allocation to include development skills.</p>

## 10 KEY OBJECTIVES FOR THE ASA FOR 2003/2005

### Objective 2: Efficient, professional and equipped for the job we do

AIM	METHOD	TARGET STANDARDS
5 Demonstrate commitment to training.	We will meet this aim by maintaining continuous evaluation of the training we offer, ensuring that we maintain our per capita hours of training commitments and setting up systems to check that needs arising from appraisal are reflected in our Annual Training Plan.	<b>85%</b> training courses to have written evaluation <b>100%</b> of permanent staff to have been offered training provision each year <b>100%</b> quarterly monitoring meetings to evaluate training take place

## 10 KEY OBJECTIVES FOR THE ASA FOR 2003/2005

### Objective 3: Just and Independent

AIM	METHOD	TARGET STANDARDS
1 Monitor and act on complaints.	We will meet this objective by maintaining a complaints database, reviewing our performance on a quarterly basis where complaints have been received and acting on the results of complaints investigations by discussing the conclusion with Adjudicators and support staff as appropriate. We will report on all complaints and relevant actions in our Annual Report.	<b>95%</b> of complaints to be acknowledged within five working days. <b>90%</b> of complaints to receive a substantive response within 20 working days.
2 Develop a culture of fairness and independence.	We will meet this aim by maintaining standards through good communication. We will hold regular team meetings and circulate minutes on e-mail to all those who are not in attendance (including sessional workers). We will ensure that a good communication structure exists between Adjudicators and support staff and between the Centre Manager and the CASA and DCASA.	<b>90%</b> of monthly team meetings for support staff take place and are minuted. <b>85%</b> of two / three weekly team meetings for adjudicators take place and are minuted. <b>100%</b> of 6 monthly team meetings jointly with adjudicators and support staff take place and are minuted. <b>100%</b> quarterly meetings between DCASA and Centre Manager take place and report back to CASA is given.
3 Publicise key decisions.	We will meet this aim by ensuring that our public register is up to date within one week of Reasons Statements being produced and by ensuring that our website is both accurate and up to date.	<b>100%</b> decisions included in public register within seven days of production. <b>90%</b> Reasons Statements published on website within fourteen days of determination.
4 Review the effectiveness and outcome of the appeal process.	We will meet this aim by reporting not only on hearings but also on cases where the respondent's decision is withdrawn after the filing of a Notice of Appeal but before an appeal hearing.	<b>100%</b> of relevant statistics reported publicly in Annual Report.

## 10 KEY OBJECTIVES FOR THE ASA FOR 2003/2005

### Objective 3: Just and Independent

AIM	METHOD	TARGET STANDARDS
5 Consistency of practice.	We will meet this aim by ensuring that a senior Adjudicator is always available to provide ad hoc supervision as and when required and by review of our internal guidance Best Practice Manual.	<b>95%</b> Best Practice Manual reviewed during the course of this Business Plan.

## 10 KEY OBJECTIVES FOR THE ASA FOR 2003/2005

### Objective 4: Responsive and sensitive to users needs

AIM	METHOD	TARGET STANDARDS
1 Publicise user comments and complaint procedures.	We will meet this aim by ensuring that user comment cards are visible in our premises and that leaflets giving details of our complaints procedure are brought to the attention of every user. We will also discuss the take up of the comment and complaints procedures at our User Group meetings.	<p><b>90%</b> of appellants to have existence of complaints procedure brought to their attention within five working days of their valid appeal being lodged.</p> <p><b>100%</b> user group meetings to note, report on and action any customer feedback.</p>
2 Identify what customers want so that realistic steps can be taken to meet and identify needs.	We will meet this aim by continuing to identify methods of communicating with those who have used our services and by recording and acting on any comments received.	<p><b>100%</b> update of representatives contact list on an annual basis.</p> <p><b>100%</b> report back on customer response to Adjudicators, support staff and user group within first quarter after response received.</p>
3 Use of high quality interpretation services.	We will meet this aim by monitoring the service standards provided by our sessional interpreters on a regular basis. Adjudicators will complete quality-monitoring sheets and interpreters who are found to be below an acceptable standard will not be recorded for repeated use on our database.	<p><b>90%</b> Quality-monitoring sheets completed for oral hearings.</p> <p><b>90%</b> of interpreters receive letter from ASA outlining expected standards and conduct.</p>
4 Equality of treatment.	We will meet this aim by focussed training on customer care and court conduct. We will monitor our success in this area by ensuring that the appraisal objectives of persons having contact with the public include appropriate competencies related to courteous conduct and the recognition of needs which might prevent equality of access to the tribunal.	<p><b>90%</b> Adjudicators and support staff to have participated in equal treatment and / or customer care training during the course of the Business Plan.</p> <p><b>100%</b> Adjudicators to have been appraised on court conduct competencies during the course of the Business Plan.</p> <p><b>95%</b> support staff having contact with the public to have been appraised on customer care competencies within the course of the Business Plan.</p>

## 10 KEY OBJECTIVES FOR THE ASA FOR 2003/2005

### Objective 4: Responsive and sensitive to users needs

AIM	METHOD	TARGET STANDARDS
5 Improve our public facilities.	We will seek continuous improvement in our public areas and our documentation with a view to making them as user friendly as possible.	<p><b>100%</b> review of published directions to the hearing centre to have been completed during the course of the Business Plan.</p> <p><b>80%</b> improvement in facilities for appellants by installation of TV and DVD in reception area to provide information about the hearing centre and the conduct of proceedings.</p> <p><b>90%</b> improvements in facilities for representatives by making a private consultation room available on request.</p>

## 10 KEY OBJECTIVES FOR THE ASA FOR 2003/2005

### Objective 5: Proactive

AIM	METHOD	TARGET STANDARDS
1 Improve sources for user feedback.	We will meet this aim by ensuring that User Group meetings take place on a regular basis and especially that we also take account of feedback received and review the format of those meetings with sufficient frequency.	<b>50%</b> of annual User Group meetings to include a thorough review of meeting practice, procedure and venue.
2 Value for money.	We will meet this aim by keeping accurate statistics and financial information, reviewing these on a regular basis and keeping transparent public accounts.	<b>100%</b> financial information available in the Annual Report.
3 Ensure continuous improvement and responsiveness.	We will meet this aim by using flexible methods of listing to ensure a spread of cases sufficient to maximise our efficiency. Wherever possible we will hear and determine cases and send out Reasons Statements in advance of the maximum period permitted by statutory instrument.	<b>100%</b> requests to list on an alternative statutorily permitted day to be considered and determined by an Adjudicator.
4 Maximise staff development and flexible allocation of work.	We will meet this aim by offering our operational staff the opportunity to experience or to shadow as many operational tasks as possible during their career with us. We will also encourage movement into management, whether on a temporary or permanent basis.	<b>80%</b> of permanent staff to be offered the opportunity to shadow colleagues and visit external organisations.

## 10 KEY OBJECTIVES FOR THE ASA FOR 2003/2005

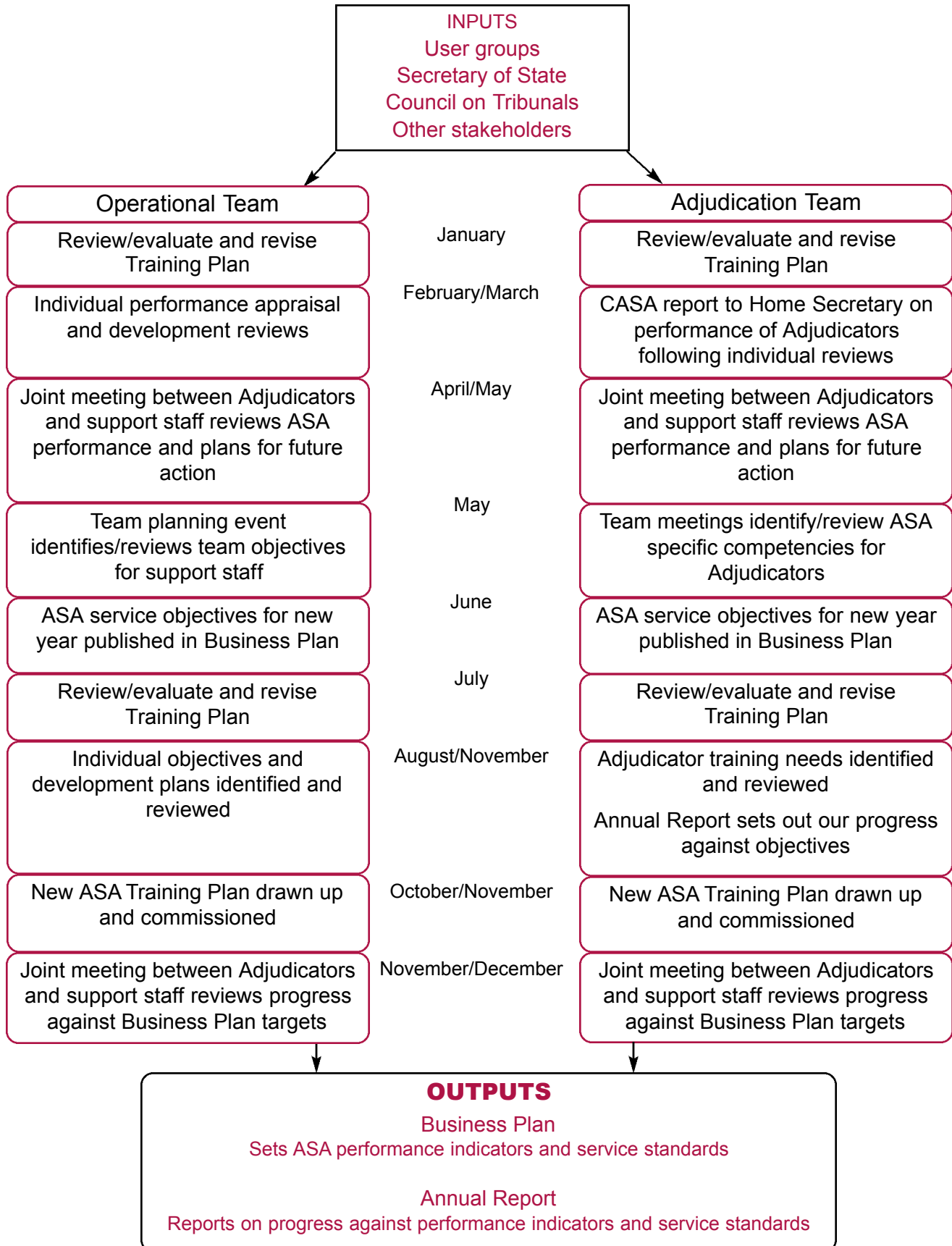
### Objective 5: Proactive

AIM	METHOD	TARGET STANDARDS
5 Highlight support needs at an early stage.	We will meet this aim by monitoring and reporting on sickness absences on a quarterly basis and taking early supervisory action.	<p><b>95%</b> of support staff attendance compliant with warning and reporting guidelines.</p> <p><b>95%</b> of support staff absence-monitoring reports completed on time and supervisory action for support staff completed.</p> <p><b>95%</b> of Adjudicators' absence reported and monitored and supervisory action taken where appropriate.</p>
6 Develop and build on legal expertise.	We will meet this aim by cascade training through circulation of relevant caselaw and discussion at Adjudicators' meetings on a regular basis.	<b>80%</b> weekly trawl and dissemination of relevant caselaw takes place.
7 Make best use of available accommodation.	We will meet this aim by ensuring that our internal environment is kept as clear and tidy as possible.	<b>90%</b> of operational staff adhere to a clear desk policy.
8 Enhance our knowledge of those who use our service.	We will meet this aim by an increased emphasis on liaison visits to other organisations and by providing training on the background and historical development of our service.	<b>100%</b> support staff and Adjudicators to have been offered the opportunity to undertake liaison visits to related organisations within the course of this Business Plan.

# ANNEX TO BUSINESS PLAN

## ANNEX

### ASA PLANNING CYCLE



Asylum Support Adjudicators  
Business Plan 2003-2005

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