

Board settling personal injury claims faster at quarter of cost

Oireachtas Committee on Enterprise

KITTY HOLLAND

Injury claims made through the new Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB) are being settled three times faster and at a quarter of the previous cost, when claims went to litigation.

Chief executive of the PIAB, Patricia Byron, also told the Oireachtas Committee on Enterprise yesterday that the board's impact on the number of personal injury cases going to litigation had been dramatic. "Last year, in 2004, there were 15,500 personal injuries cases at the High Court. This year, as of September, there were 404."

The PIAB was established in July last year to assess the value of claimants' compensation. The move was made to tackle the "compensation culture", to take

cases where there was no legal dispute out of the courts and, it was hoped, to reduce insurance premiums.

All PIAB claims are assessed within nine months and claimants do not need to use a solicitor.

Ms Byron said the board had so far received 15,500 applications. In 10,000 of these all papers had been submitted; in 3,000 papers had still to be submitted; and in 2,500 the parties settled directly.

Ten thousand cases are being processed, 3,500 have been deemed outside the remit of the board and awards have been made in 520 of the cases.

Ms Byron said claimants did not need a solicitor to make a claim through the board, that many claimants did not realise this until they were some way into the process.

Chairwoman of the board Dorothea Dowling said if one change could be made it would be that the board be allowed to make direct contact with claimants who have solicitors.

"We have no desire to undermine the solicitor-client relationship but we do wish to be able to give them information and choice. What we would really like is to change the culture to one where people do not feel they need to use a lawyer in straightforward personal injury cases."

Ms Byron said having a solicitor made no difference to the size of the award: "Eighty per cent of those who accepted awards had solicitors."

She said the board was processing claims three times faster than they were being dealt with through the courts - in nine months as opposed to an average of three years. They were also "four times cheaper".