

Injuries board settling claims 'faster and cheaper'

Fergus Black

THE agency set up to assess personal injury awards revealed yesterday it had delivered the same level of compensation to claimants three times faster and four times cheaper than if they had gone to court.

Since it was set up 18 months ago, the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB), which provides independent assessment of personal injury compensation for victims of workplace, motor and liability accidents, has awarded €2.7m in compensation to claimants and saved around €1m in costs, it said in its annual report for 2004.

And it said its assessment scheme had substantially

cut litigation costs, such as solicitors, barristers and experts' fees, and saved more than €1m.

Three out of four people accept the awards the board proposes although one in four rejected the offer and may decide to settle their cases in court.

Business and employers' body IBEC last night said it welcomed the success in reducing the cost of personal injury claims and said litigation should be the last resort.

Tony Briscoe, IBEC assistant director of enterprise, said the results indicated compensation for personal injury claims to those entitled to it could be delivered

much quicker and for a fraction of the cost under the new system.

Director of Consumer Affairs Carmel Foley said she was gratified to see the considerable decline in the number of High Court personal injury cases this year.

"This augurs well for the development in other areas of costly litigation for the expansion of alternative dispute resolution," Ms Foley said.

The agency revealed that the number of personal injury cases going to the High Court had tumbled this year. The number of such writs had moved from 11,245 in 2003 and 15,293 last year to 297 so far this year.

The board, which assesses

compensation without the need for the majority of current litigation costs, uses a book of quantum to reach its findings.

Highlighting the speed and cost effectiveness of its system, the PIAB revealed how in one of its biggest awards to date, a retired man who tripped and fell in a public place in January last year was awarded more than €133,000 in general and special damages within 32 weeks of the date of his accident at a cost to the respondent of €1,936.

Had he sought compensation through litigation, it would have taken three years to deliver with litigation costs of €61,502.