

# Costs cut as injuries board sidelines solicitors

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THE State injury assessment board set up to slash solicitors' fees has achieved substantial savings without any diminution in injury awards, it was claimed yesterday.

The independent study by Dr Vincent Hogan of UCD estimates that the Personal Injuries Assessment Board reduced the cost of processing personal injury claims by €24m since March 2005.

The author of the report says that this estimate was calculated using "extremely conservative assumptions and is almost certainly an underestimate of savings".

With the legal period for lodging personal injuries now shortened by 12 months to two years, this means that the volume of cases coming before PIAB "will increase dramatically".

The cost-benefit analysis suggests total savings will be "many multiples" of the estimated €24m, with PIAB itself suggesting savings of €40m-€45m per annum from 2007.

But despite this, the existence of PIAB has not entirely stopped people from using lawyers when making injury claims.

As the *Irish Independent* recently revealed, some 90pc of all claims being made are being handled by solicitors, while a sizeable batch is also being settled directly between the insurer and the claimant.

Up to the end of November, PIAB received some 40,000 applications, of

which just 6,000 have gone to assessment.

The difference between the two figures is not as dramatic as it seems since only 40pc of applications will get through to assessment stage. Some fall by the wayside, more are settled by companies offering claimants money up front.

Dr Hogan said the saving on a typical case that would have gone to the Circuit Court was €6,373, or an 88pc saving on court costs.

The average savings for cases that would otherwise have ended up in the High Court he calculated at €27,703, representing a 97pc saving.

His assessment stressed that PIAB awards have been made without any reduction in awards for injured people - even though so many claimants are still using solicitors.

The public perception seems to be that you can never be sure with PIAB that you are getting as good an award as in the courts.

Dr Hogan's analysis seems to nail this view once and for all. He argues that "there is some evidence to suggest the awards may even be higher under PIAB".

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment Michael Martin, said at the cost-benefit analysis launch yesterday that PIAB had played a critical part in reducing insurance premiums and making it easier and less stressful for people to make claims.

**EDDIE HOBBS ON  
THE PIAB: PAGE 14**



Patricia Byron at the launch of the board's report.