



Comhairle na mBreithiúna
The Judicial Council

Judicial Wellbeing Strategic Action Plan

June 2025

Purpose

The purpose of this strategic action plan is to outline a phased and tailored strategy that will support the wellbeing of members of the judiciary to facilitate the fair and independent administration of justice in Ireland. The strategy moves beyond individual level resilience and addresses the systemic, cultural, and environmental conditions in which judges work. It outlines a holistic

approach to judicial wellbeing. This is the first strategic action plan to be initiated in respect of judicial wellbeing. It recognises that changes require different levels of planning and resourcing and therefore fall to be implemented over the short, medium and long term. This plan will be subject to periodic review and will require to be adapted to respond to identified needs and better data.



Rationale

Judicial wellbeing is a vital component in ensuring that judges are able to perform their role responsibly and effectively. Accordingly, while judges are entitled to expect a healthy and safe working environment, this is not merely a personal matter, but one with direct implications for the proper functioning of the judiciary as a whole. It is particularly relevant in light of the guarantees laid down in Articles 34, 35 and 38 of the Constitution regarding the administration of justice and judicial independence; guarantees also found in Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

Empirical studies confirm that if judicial stress and the causes thereof discussed below are ignored, the consequences extend far beyond the individual. Judicial burnout can lead to compromised decision-making, delays in justice and a weakened judiciary to the detriment of litigants and the administration of justice.

In the Commitment to Judicial Wellbeing already adopted by the Judicial Council in January 2025, the shared global interest in having a judiciary that functions with integrity and optimum effectiveness was acknowledged by reference to the Bangalore Principles on Judicial Conduct and the Nauru Declaration on Judicial Well-being. The Nauru Declaration on Judicial Well-being (July 2024) emphasises the vital role of judicial wellbeing in upholding integrity and effectiveness within the judiciary and reflects an international commitment to judicial wellbeing.

In further global recognition of the importance of this issue, in March 2025 the United Nations General Assembly formally resolved to declare 25 July of each year as the International Day for Judicial Wellbeing.

Further, the Judicial Planning Working Group,

which reported in 2023, recommended that measures be put in place to support the welfare of the judiciary. The Judicial Council decided that it was best placed to progress that recommendation through its Judicial Support and Welfare Committee.

The Consultative Council of European Judges (“CCJE”) has addressed the impact of judicial wellbeing on the judicial role in several key respects:

- a. Quality of decision-making:** A judge’s mental and emotional wellbeing influences their capacity to focus, assess evidence impartially, and deliver well-reasoned judgments. High levels of stress or burnout may compromise this ability (CCJE Opinion No. 11 [2008, para 25] and Opinion No. 26 [2023, para 79]).
- b. Judicial independence:** Wellbeing supports a judge’s autonomy and resilience. A judge experiencing significant stress may be more susceptible to external pressures, potentially undermining their independence (CCJE Opinion No. 26 [2023, para 56] and Opinion No.25 [2022 para 60]).
- c. Ethical conduct and judicial temperament:** Judges are expected to exhibit patience, dignity, and respect. Poor wellbeing may result in irritability, impatience, or even lapses in ethical behaviour (CCJE Opinion No. 3 [2002]).
- d. Efficiency and case management:** Judges in good physical and mental health are better equipped to manage their workload effectively and maintain efficiency in courtroom proceedings (Opinion No. 6 [2004, para 20]).
- e. Public confidence in the judiciary:** When judges are able to function optimally, the judiciary is seen as competent and fair, which in turn strengthens public trust in the justice system (Opinion No. 2001 [2001, para 12]).

Context

This strategy emerges at a time of significant and increasing global, social, and geopolitical change. To date, Ireland has not faced the direct challenge to judicial independence and the rule of law experienced by other jurisdictions. Nor, however, can we expect to remain immune to such trends. In any event, the professional environment is becoming more exposed. While judges continue to carry out the increasingly challenging work of administering justice within the State, their role and decisions are open to misunderstanding and misrepresentation in an increasingly politicised global environment. The mounting challenges include rapid advances in technology, ever increasing numbers of parties who do not have legal representation, increasing levels of work, the widespread influence of social media, and advancements in AI. Expectations to act as guardians of society are often accompanied by unrealistic projections from the public, and perhaps from judges themselves, of perfection and invulnerability, with limited consideration for the human cost borne by individual judges - and by the judiciary as a collective.

Against this backdrop, the focus on judicial wellbeing by the Judicial Council and the Court Presidents offers an important opportunity. It creates space for the integration of professional wellbeing supports across the judicial lifecycle in a way that is structured, sustainable, and aligned with judicial independence. As part of developing this strategy for supporting judicial wellbeing, the Judicial Council is grateful to the Law Society Psychological Services for support and insight from their “Well Within the Law” – a flexible model of reflective practice, strategic consultancy services, specialist training, and confidential consultation, tailored to high-performing legal environments.

This strategy is the product of engagement between Law Society Psychological Services and members of the judiciary, including the Judicial

Wellbeing Steering Group. It draws on findings from the 2025 Judicial Conference, attended by 120 judges, during which facilitated group discussions and anonymous input revealed a shared experience of chronic pressure and under-addressed psychological strain. These themes were further validated and refined during the cross-jurisdictional Judicial Wellbeing Strategy Workshop held in April 2025.

Professional wellbeing is a complex phenomenon. It is shaped by a constellation of personal, psychological, emotional, social, structural, cultural, political, and economic factors. To be of practical and enduring value, this strategy is informed by a clinical and organisational psychology lens to focus on the particular environment in which the judiciary carry out their role in the administration of justice. This ensures a deep analysis of conditions influencing the wellbeing of individual judges, the judicial community, and the systems and structures in which this work is undertaken.

This Plan represents a high-level analysis, building on the Confidential Judicial Conference Report submitted on 20 February 2025. While the findings of that report have informed the development of this first strategic plan, it is anticipated that the Judicial Council will conduct additional and ongoing qualitative and quantitative research to ensure that the evolving judicial wellbeing strategy accurately reflects the needs of the judiciary as a whole (but also of subsets within the judiciary, such as judges in different jurisdictions, practice areas, working environments or physical locations) so that the strategy appropriately addresses the changing wellbeing needs of the judiciary throughout Ireland.

Core data insights from the informal small group work completed at the 2025 conference:

- ▶ Caseload pressure as a primary stressor
- ▶ Insufficient time between cases to mentally recover or to optimally prepare
- ▶ Fatigue and sleep disruption as significantly affecting wellbeing
- ▶ The emotional toll of hearing distressing cases, particularly in family and criminal law
- ▶ Challenging interactions with litigants or legal professionals
- ▶ Concern about burnout and physical health risks
- ▶ Insufficient administrative, infrastructural, and IT/technical support, leading to increased workload pressure, frustration and inefficiency
- ▶ Isolation and lack of peer support as ongoing challenges
- ▶ Perfectionism and procrastination as drivers of stress
- ▶ Concern about personal security and lack of public respect

These quantitative insights were explored at greater depth as part of the Strategy Workshop where participants shared experiences of:

- ▶ Being physically and emotionally exhausted upon reaching the end of term
- ▶ Ruminating on unfinished judgments, carrying cases mentally into evenings and weekends
- ▶ Dealing with the emotional toll of the judicial role including traumatic subject matter and high stakes litigation, the tension of balancing competing interests, particularly in criminal and family matters
- ▶ Difficulty in finding time to recover or reconnect socially due to travel and work demands and judicial isolation
- ▶ A sense that prioritising professional wellbeing is equated with personal weakness
- ▶ A (perceived) unrealistic demand for perfection, at any cost
- ▶ Recognition that public and media misunderstanding of the judicial role/decisions often contributes to psychological strain and particularly in high profile cases with extensive media coverage
- ▶ Shared desire for peer connection, feedback, and spaces where judges can speak honestly and confidentially while continuing to respect the principles of independence and impartiality

Strategic Implications

The insights gathered suggest that, without thoughtful and sustained support, the demands of judicial work may place increasing strain on those who serve. Addressing this proactively is not only a matter of individual wellbeing, but also of professional sustainability and institutional integrity. When wellbeing is under pressure, there can be wider implications for:

- ▶ The clarity and consistency of decision-making, particularly where cumulative fatigue, emotional load, or time compression begin to affect focus, reflection, and judgment.
- ▶ Judges' psychological and physical health over time, especially in environments where sustained exposure to high-stakes cases, distressing material, or prolonged isolation is not balanced with adequate recovery or support.
- ▶ Collegiality and team morale, particularly where informal peer connection, shared learning, or opportunities for honest reflection are diminished by workload intensity or structural isolation.
- ▶ The capacity to attract future judges, as well as to retain experienced judges across the span of their careers.
- ▶ Public understanding of and confidence in the justice system, particularly in relation to challenging judgments, or where there are perceived delays, or any form of disengagement occurs.

This strategy seeks to anticipate and mitigate these pressures, ensuring judges are supported to work with clarity, balance, and longevity.

Recommendation

Implement a phased wellbeing strategy that starts with practical, low-disruption initiatives, while developing the governance and systems change required to sustain impact over time. The work in developing the governance and systems change required to drive and sustain enhanced judicial wellbeing longer term should commence immediately in order to achieve improvements within a meaningful time frame.

Guiding Principles

- 1. Wellbeing and independence are complementary, not competing values** - Psychological wellbeing underpins clear thinking, measured judgment, and sustained judicial independence.
- 2. Wellbeing enables sharper reasoning and fairer process** - Cognitive clarity, emotional regulation, and ethical leadership are supported, not hindered, by wellbeing practices.
- 3. Support must match the demands of the role** - While high performance is integral to judicial identity, it must be underpinned by structures that enable recovery, reflection, and psychological sustainability, much like those embedded in the fields of aviation, psychiatry/medicine, psychotherapy and other demanding, high-stakes professions.
- 4. Confidentiality, dignity, and discretion are foundational** - Any effective approach to wellbeing must respect the complexity of the boundaries and cultural norms of judicial life.
- 5. Judicial wellbeing should be embedded, not exceptional** - Supports must be practical, integrated into the rhythms of judicial work, and framed as essential to high-quality, sustainable justice.

Strategic Focus Areas

Focus Area 1: Sustaining Judicial Capacity and Clarity

Action / Initiative	Timeline	Lead	Notes / Dependencies
Provide specialist wellbeing focused sessions to all judges so that the 'science' behind and the importance of judicial wellbeing is understood by all	Quick Win	Court Presidents	This could take place at the National Conference or over a series of bespoke seminars
Include specialist wellbeing focused content in judicial induction. These courses should be offered to judges within a period of 3 to 6 months after appointment	Quick Win	Judicial Welfare Committee with Judicial Studies Committee	Include bespoke wellbeing-focused content in judicial induction
Integrate psychological recovery strategies into Judicial Training	Medium-Term	Judicial Welfare Committee with Judicial Studies Committee and Psychological Services providers	With specialist providers input; positioned as supporting clarity and focus
Commence the development of optional confidential counselling/ psychotherapeutic supports (going beyond what is available on the Wellbeing App), prioritising early availability of supports for judges sitting in lists dealing with disturbing subject matter	Short-Term	Judicial Welfare Committee and Psychological Services providers	Offered through a reputable external partner or some other suitable method
Encourage/promote post-court processing/decompression time (30 mins/day)	Quick Win	Collective & Personal Responsibility	Requires minor scheduling changes; framed as Reflective Practice i.e. link with enhancing judicial practice. These could be joint sessions in person or online as appropriate to court/venue
Provide somatic and nervous system regulation sessions incorporating movement and mindfulness, led by trained facilitators to support stress relief, mental clarity, emotional regulation, and sustained decision-making capacity	Quick Win	Psychological Services providers	Provided by trained facilitator, options to take place once a month/ bi-weekly in convenient location
Provide a trauma-informed practice micro-credential (15 hours) focused on sustaining clarity, wellbeing, and fairness in emotionally charged contexts.	Short-Term	Psychological Services providers	

Focus Area 2: Building A Connected Judicial Community

Action / Initiative	Timeline	Lead	Notes / Dependencies
Intentional scheduling of regular peer engagements e.g. social events such as lunches, including 'virtual' lunches as appropriate	Quick Win	Court Presidents	Peer-led
Pilot a confidential peer support panel	Medium-Term	Judicial Welfare Committee with Judicial Council Secretariat	Voluntary and confidential; peer-led model ideal. Potential to bring in external facilitators with established model such as Law Society Psychological Services. Would require appropriate administrative scaffolding/training.
Integrate professional wellbeing into existing induction and mentoring programmes	Medium-Term	Judicial Welfare Committee with Judicial Studies Committee	Assessing needs with a focus on professional wellbeing, identifying training gaps, and/or informal support
Explore possibility of providing a communal space in larger court complexes to facilitate regular peer interactions through provision of coffee/tea making facilities and newspapers in a congregational setting	Short-Term	Judicial Welfare Committee	The under used Judges' canteen in the CCJ could be considered as an appropriate venue
Establish periodic judicial Away Days/Retreats designed to cultivate reflective practice, strengthen collegial bonds among like-minded peers, and provide a structured environment for strategic dialogue and targeted professional development in support of a connected and future-ready judiciary.	Medium-Term	Judicial Studies Committee with Psychological Services providers	Voluntary participation that has potential to link with Judicial Training and Education

Focus Area 3: Managing Judicial Workload with Sustainability in Mind

Action / Initiative	Timeline	Lead	Notes / Dependencies
Investigate and implement systems that will protect preparation reading time before hearings and judgment writing time at the conclusion of cases	Medium-Term	Courts Service/ Presidents	Requires strategic input
Define and protect reading/writing days for focused work	Long-Term	Judicial Council/ Presidents	Requires significant cultural shift and institutional support
Specifically, and strategically referencing the professional wellbeing benefits of expanding the numbers of judiciary and creation of additional roles such as “floating judges” to alleviate personal/system-wide pressure	Long-Term	Judicial Welfare Committee supported by the Judicial Council	Policy submission to Department of Justice; supported by data
Streamline administrative processes and systems through effective use of technology and other supports	Medium-Term	Judicial Welfare Committee/ Judicial Modernisation Committee	Consultation with Courts Service IT
Consider and develop, if appropriate, a programme to support judges in preparing for disruption during hearings and for review of such hearings afterwards	Medium-Term	Judicial Welfare Committee supported by the Presidents/ Judicial Council	Consultation with judiciary is imperative

Focus Area 4: Enhancing Public Understanding of Judicial Work

Action / Initiative	Timeline	Lead	Notes / Dependencies
Launch information (‘storytelling’) project	Medium-Term	Judicial Council	Framed around public education
Expand school outreach with all judges	Medium-Term	Judicial Council (including engagement with relevant Committees)	May require curriculum liaison with the Judicial Council. To be led by committed champions, retired members of the judiciary (enhancing their sense of purpose and wellbeing)
Participate in national and international initiatives focused on wellbeing in the legal profession – such as the Law Society’s Well Within the Law programme, the Consultative Council of European Judges (CCJE), and the International Bar Association – to showcase Ireland’s leadership in judicial wellbeing and share emerging best practices from the Irish context	Short-Term	Court Presidents/ Judicial Council	Event may tie in with 25 July 2025 the newly established International Day for Judicial Well-being

Implementation Pathways

The success of this wellbeing strategy will depend on how it is implemented. While the identified focus areas bring some structure to the implementation plan, each identified action will require further work to agree practical steps, to allocate responsibility to drive and implement those steps and to measure results achieved.

Start Simple, Build Momentum

- ▶ Appoint leads for each focus area and allocate responsibility for implementation of specific actions.
- ▶ Identify implementation steps and relevant pilot projects (e.g. peer-led initiatives, post-court processing, regular (externally facilitated) Reflective Practice groups).

Lead Boldly, Embed Deeply

- ▶ Run structural pilots (e.g. judgment time reform, peer support panels) on identified agreed practical steps and initiatives at each court level.
- ▶ Integrate specialist and bespoke content that addresses specific aspects of wellbeing into training, and induction (e.g. trauma informed judging).
- ▶ Develop long-term partnerships (mental health and wellbeing, media and policy).

Who Needs to Be Involved

- ▶ **All members of the Judiciary** – Ensure collective buy-in and ongoing engagement recognising that wellbeing is an individual and collective responsibility as well as a systemic responsibility.
- ▶ **Court Presidents** – Hold responsibility for caseload management, judicial culture, and setting implementation norms.
- ▶ **Judicial Council, Judicial Welfare Committee and Judicial Studies Committee** – Governance, strategic oversight, education, communications, engagement with members, and public messaging.
- ▶ **Judicial Council Secretariat** – Operational coordination, working group facilitation, measurement, and reporting.
- ▶ **Psychological Services Provider** – Specialist facilitation, training design/delivery, reflective practice, and consultancy services are available. Opportunity to connect the Irish Judicial Council with international Judicial Wellbeing Committees via the International Bar Association Professional Wellbeing Commission.

Strategic Risks and Mitigation

Risk	Impact	Mitigation Strategy
Post-workshop momentum fades	Loss of strategic drive	Appoint an implementation lead within the Judicial Welfare Committee to coordinate progress. Agree a 6 month check-in milestone to maintain accountability and visibility.
Cultural resistance to vulnerability framing	Slower adoption of actions	Use performance framing (high levels of personal and professional wellbeing support leads to sharper, more sustainable decision-making)
Public misinterpretation of openness	Reputational risk	Coordinate controlled messaging through a judicial communications function
Lack of clear accountability	Fragmentation of efforts	Assign pillar-specific leads potentially in partnership with upcoming HR structures and use stakeholder mapping to maintain clarity

Measurement Dashboard

Strategic Focus Area	Indicative Measure	Suggested Tracking Method
Sustaining Judicial Capacity and Clarity	Self-reported levels of workload manageability and recovery	Set up annual anonymous survey process. This could include training evaluation or a Judicial Council engagement survey but with the aim that judicial wellbeing could be measured over time and that change in the concerns of the judiciary could also be tracked and the specific needs of subsets of the judiciary could be identified and addressed.
Building a Connected Judicial Community	Perception of access to informal and structured peer supports	Feedback forms at training events and conferences; optional evaluation of Reflective Practice Groups (anonymised)
Managing Workload Sustainably	Frequency of protected judgment writing time and recovery windows	Internal review of scheduling practices (Court Presidents/List Judges); qualitative input from all court system users e.g. solicitors and barristers and other professionals
Enhancing Public Understanding	Increased public clarity about judicial roles and responsibilities	Media scan and sentiment analysis; optional inclusion of questions in existing public justice perception surveys

Closing Note

This strategy is presented following a considered and collaborative process. It draws on the insights of over 120 judges from all levels across this jurisdiction, beginning with the 2025 Judicial Wellbeing Conference and culminating in the Strategy Workshop held in April 2025.

The complexity inherent in the nature of the judicial role must be respected in the implementation of this strategy. It does not offer simple fixes, nor does it assume a single pathway forward. Instead, it incorporates the lived experience of the judiciary into an informed, structured and phased roadmap for action.

The conversations held throughout this process affirmed that judicial wellbeing is no longer a peripheral concern. It is a professional imperative. The systemic challenges are far-reaching, and the emotional, cognitive, and ethical pressures judges face are complex and

cumulative. Addressing this effectively requires a multifaceted response delivered over time.

This strategy offers an informed starting point with which to engage with our programme and with external service providers. It endeavours to synthesise the ideas and data shared into a practical, evidence-informed strategy that reflects the realities of judicial work and offers a credible path forward.

This work is not simply about sustaining the individual judge. It is about protecting the long-term integrity of the justice system itself. Turning insight into action will require focus, continuity, and shared leadership. It also requires a shared recognition that judges are not immune to pressure, nor bound to carry impossible loads alone. As one enduring legal principle reminds us: *“Impossibilium nulla obligatio est: There is no obligation to do the impossible.”*





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