

Public
information
leaflet

The Drug Treatment Court



COURTS SERVICE
An tSeirbhís Chúirteanna

What is the DTC programme?

The Drug Treatment Court (DTC) is a specialised court operating within the legal system that aims to treat, rather than imprison, drug users. We deal with non-violent offenders whose offending behaviour is motivated by their addiction rather than mainly for financial gain.

Why were we set up?

The link between drug abuse and criminal behaviour in Ireland was obvious by the mid-1990s. This led the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform to set up a drug court system in Ireland. The first person was referred to the new drug court (later renamed the Drug Treatment Court) in January 2001.

What is the aim of the programme?

The programme aims to provide long-term court-supervised treatment, including career and education support, for offenders who are involved in drug abuse.

The idea behind this is that, by dealing with the fundamental reason for the offending, in other words the addiction, the need to offend is no longer present.

How is the programme run?

The people on the programme are constantly under the supervision of the court. The court is supported in this role by a team which includes many people and agencies such as:

- a Drug Treatment Court Co-ordinator;
- a Drug Treatment Court Liaison Nurse;
- a Probation and Welfare Officer;
- an Education Co-ordinator;
- a Garda working at the Drug Court; and
- other people who can help, for example, a Community Welfare Officer or Psychologist.

The team meet regularly to discuss progress.

Structure of the programme

If an offender has been found eligible and is referred to the court, there is a stage during which the team assess whether the offender is suitable for the programme. If they are suitable, they then enter the programme.

There are three phases in the programme.

- ▶ Phase 1 – Stabilisation and orientation
- ▶ Phase 2 – Continuation and progression
- ▶ Phase 3 – Reintegration and self-management

Phase 1

Stabilisation and orientation

People who enter the programme keep in regular contact with the Drug Court Team and follow their agreed treatment plans and personal progression plans. By the end of phase 1, each person should have reduced their use of drugs (in particular their drug of choice), be involved in part-time education and training and be clearly showing that they are willing to make positive changes in their lifestyle.

Phase 2

Continuation and progression

At the second phase, people will have to tackle specific issues in their lives and aim for positive change in those areas. They are expected to continue in education and training programmes and have future plans for employment. They should also be showing, through their actions and thoughts, that they are involved in a process of maintaining a positive change both personally and socially. Before moving on to phase 3, people should have maintained a steady reduction in their drug use and have reduced the risks associated with offending behaviour.

Phase 3

Reintegration and self-management

During phase 3 people aim to take over full and positive control of their lives. Generally before they graduate they should have moved from maintaining a reduction in use to actually proving that they have made a positive change both personally and socially. This should be seen through practical examples, such as full-time education, employment or training and managing themselves, particularly when under stress.

The court sits twice a week and people on the programme come before the court regularly to discuss their progress and any problems. The court is less formal than ordinary court hearings. Solicitors can also come with their clients but generally this only happens at the first or final hearing. Each person on the programme speaks directly to the judge.

The DTC team goes to the hearings, but does not take part except to provide information and clarification to the judge. However, due to the team being there, the people on the programme know that the judge is aware of all aspects of their progress.

The judge discusses progress with each person. The judge then runs through any upcoming appointments, places sanctions (restrictions) or provides incentives if necessary and finally remands the person to the next appropriate court date.

How long does the programme run?

Depending on each person's circumstances, the programme lasts at least a year.

What happens if you break any conditions of the programme?

Anyone on the programme must go to the court hearings and attend all relevant appointments. The judge can use sanctions and incentives. The team can discuss the possible need for sanctions or incentives based on the person's progress, but the judge has the final decision.

What happens at the end of the programme?

If someone graduates successfully from the programme, they do not receive a prison sentence. However, if they fail to complete the programme, they go back to the original court for sentence.

Who can apply for the programme?

To apply for the programme you must:

- live in Dublin's North Inner City or postal district number 7;
- be over 17 years of age;
- want to get off drugs; and
- have pleaded guilty or have been convicted of certain offences in the district court, where it is likely you will go to prison.

If you plead guilty or are convicted of an offence, your solicitor will ask the judge to remand you to the Drug Treatment Court. The judge then decides whether to send you to the Drug Treatment Court or to deal with you in another way.

For more details, please visit our webpage at <http://www.courts.ie>

Court Sittings

The court sits every Tuesday and Thursday at 3pm at Richmond Courthouse.

Contact details

The Drug Treatment Court Office
Richmond Courthouse
North Brunswick Street
Dublin 7

Phone: (01) 888 6294

Fax: (01) 878 7728



This is an information leaflet. We are not providing legal advice. If you want legal advice, please consult a solicitor.



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