

STATE COURTS WORKPLAN 2019: STATE COURTS 2020 AND BEYOND FACTSHEETS

i. CENTRE FOR SPECIALIST SERVICES

The Centre for Specialist Services (CSS) is a one-stop multi-disciplinary facility for the provision of counselling and psychological services to court users. It centralises the management of various programmes for providing specialist assistance and support to court users across criminal, civil, community and court-dispute resolution cases. It is divided into three broad arms with the following key functions:



Clinical Services

- Performing preliminary psychological assessment for court users who are suspected of having mental illnesses.
- Counselling the next-of-kin of the bereaved in Coroner's Court cases.
- Conducting risk assessment and counselling for victims of crime or harassment.



Referral and Case Management

- Conducting financial and social needs assessment and providing employment assistance.
- Referring court users to the appropriate healthcare institution or community agency for specialised and longer-term treatment.
- Monitoring the progress made by court users in their follow-up.



Outreach, Research and Development

- Collaborating with universities and polytechnics to host clinical internships in the fields of psychology, counselling and social welfare.
- Partnering leading academics to research on current trends, best practices and programmes in order to develop cutting edge and more effective strategies to assist court users.

An experienced team of psychologists, counsellors and social workers, who work closely with stakeholders from other government agencies and community organisations, helm the CSS which was soft launched on 1 July 2018.

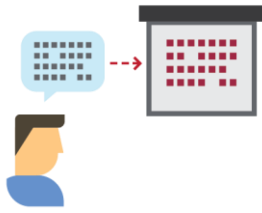
Some programmes currently managed by the Centre for Specialist Services:

- ***On-site Psychological Services***
A collaboration with the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) and the Ministry of Health (MOH), to facilitate the early identification and treatment of mental illness amongst court users.
- ***Court-directed Pre-Sentence Protocol***
A regime where the sentencing of an offender is deferred so that he or she may undergo treatment to address the underlying issues of his offending.
- ***Progress Accountability Court***
A post-sentencing order that requires the offender to attend progress reviews at stipulated intervals to monitor his progress, and reinforce his sense of ownership and personal responsibility towards rehabilitation.
- ***FRiends ENgaging and Support (FRENS) Scheme***
A befriender programme that links re-offenders sentenced to imprisonment terms of less than 12 months with volunteers who will accompany the offenders in their rehabilitation journey.

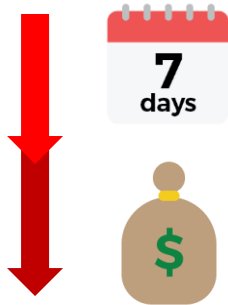


Undertake research on developments and trends in the field to enhance existing programmes, develop new programmes, and establish an authoritative subject-matter voice in local and international fora.

ii. **INTELLIGENT COURT TRANSCRIPTION SYSTEM**

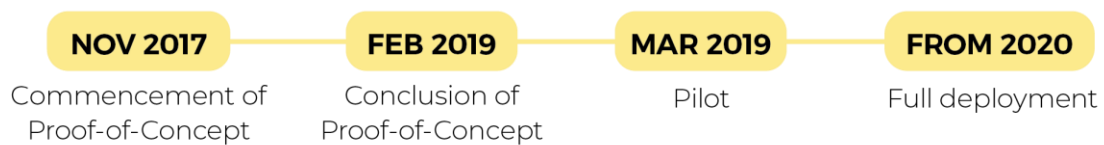


The iCTS – Intelligent Court Transcription System is a real-time transcription system that is able to transcribe oral evidence in court proceedings instantly. The system is the product of a collaboration with the Agency for Science, Technology and Research’s (A*STAR) Institute for Infocomm Research (I²R) and is powered by a speech recognition engine that is trained with court-related terms and phrases. It is able to recognise domain-specific terminology in court cases, such as legal terms and medical terms used in Coroner’s Inquiries. When it is implemented, parties will be able to view the live transcription of oral evidence in court proceedings, via a projection screen or on computer monitors in the courtrooms and hearing chambers.



Currently, audio recordings of court sessions are sent to an external vendor for transcription and typically takes 7 days, or 3 days in cases where there is an urgent request. With the iCTS, the cost and time expended in producing court transcripts can be reduced and in turn, can be provided to parties more expeditiously. Parties will also have real-time access to court transcripts which will cater for more effective participation in court proceedings and will therefore be able to conduct their cases in a more expeditious manner. The proof-of-concept concluded in February and a pilot will soon commence in two courtrooms in the current State Courts building.

Key milestones



Highlights of the iCTS

 Real-time	 Punctuation	 90% accuracy	 Pilot in 2 Courtrooms
 Multi-party	 Natural speech recognition	 Domain specific terms	 Local terms
			 Proof-of-Concept concluded

The iCTS differentiates itself from other voice-to-text technology in the market with its ability to transcribe a multi-party situation such as in courtroom proceedings where different parties are speaking in quick succession. The system has also been trained with court-specific terms as well as domain-specific terminology such as medical terms for Coroner’s Court cases, or engineering terms for cases involving industrial accidents. Today, the iCTS is also able to process natural speech, punctuation insertion, automatic text-casing, and numeric forms of dates, time and other measurements for superior readability, with an accuracy rate of 90 per cent.



Full deployment in the State Courts Towers, delivery of better, faster court services, optimisation of resources and to explore the scaling of the iCTS to other areas of work.

iii. **CIVIL ONLINE TOOLKIT**

The Civil Online Toolkit is a one-stop online resource for unrepresented litigants involved in civil proceedings. Unrepresented litigants (litigants who are not represented by lawyers) involved in civil matters make up a significant proportion of litigants at the State Courts. They often do not know what they are required to do under the rules and procedures of civil litigation, which gives rise to the risk of unrepresented litigants having meritorious claims fail, or unmeritorious claims succeed against them on procedural grounds. The Civil Online Toolkit will have the following features:

Step-by-Step Guide



- Takes the user through the various stages in the civil process, for instance, filing of pleadings, summons for directions and assessment of damages.

Self-Contained Documents



- Relevant documents linked within the Civil Online Toolkit, including forms prescribed in the Rules of Court and the Practice Directions.

Ease of Access and Navigation



- Avals the relevant information 24/7 online, anywhere, anytime, and on any device.

Plain English



- Information will be presented in plain English for ease of comprehension by the lay unrepresented litigant.

It is envisaged that the Civil Online Toolkit will enhance communication and user engagement. In terms of communication, using plain English will make it easier for unrepresented litigants to understand what they need to do in civil proceedings, thereby leading to a more efficient civil litigation process. In terms of user engagement, the information will be presented in a way that takes into account the perspective of the lay unrepresented litigant, thereby also easing the handling of queries received at the State Courts' frontline touch points. The Civil Online Toolkit is being developed and is expected to complement the new Rules of Court.



Completion of the Civil Online Toolkit to guide unrepresented litigants in civil litigation proceedings, with a view to expanding the content format to criminal and community matters in future.

iv. **ENHANCING INMATES' ACCESS TO JUSTICE: ACCESS TO COURT DOCUMENTS AND LEGAL ADVICE**

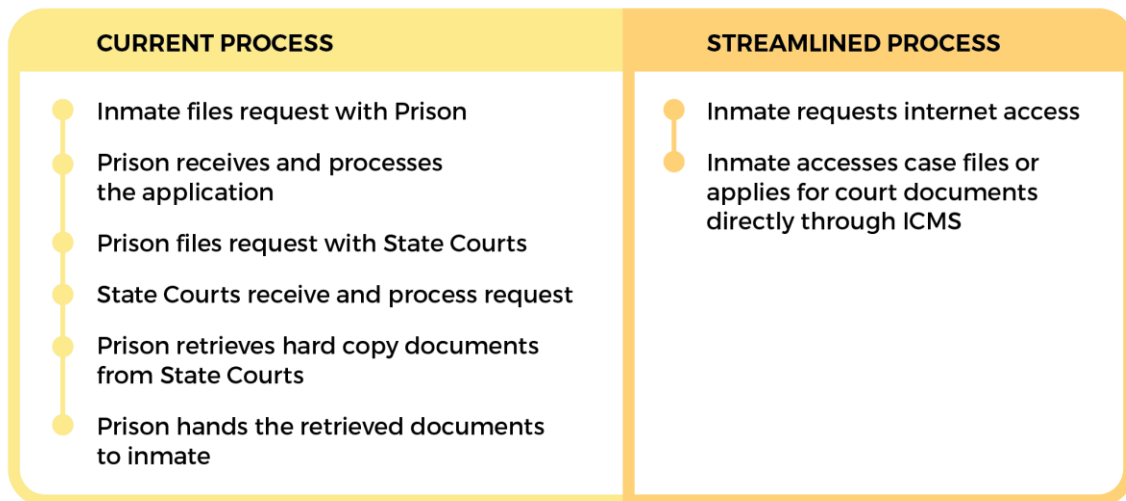
Access to Court Documents

The initiative focuses on streamlining the process for inmates to access documents pertaining to their cases with the State Courts by leveraging existing system infrastructures. Currently, accused persons are able to access their case files in the Integrated Criminal Case Filing and Management System (ICMS) to read and download documents such as charge sheets and file certain applications online. However, as they would need internet access to log in, those in remand or serving sentence are not able to access their case documents directly from the ICMS in prison. They have to make the application for court documents with the Singapore Prison Service (SPS) which will then process the application and submit it to the State Courts. When the application is received, it will be processed by the State Courts and the relevant documents will be retrieved for copies to be made. Then, the hard copy documents will be collected by the SPS officers for them to be handed to the inmates. This 6-step process takes between 5 and 10 days.

Under the streamlined process, the number of steps are reduced from six to two steps. The process begins with the inmate requesting internet access with SPS. With that and using his SingPass, the inmate will be able to access his case documents such as charge sheets directly through the ICMS



whilst in prison. For documents such as Notes of Evidence and Grounds of Decision, the inmate is able to make an application directly on the ICMS. The application will be processed online and once it is approved (subject to the relevant fees that are payable), the inmate will receive the document online.



One limitation of this initiative is that access to the ICMS is secured through SingPass which requires two-factor authentication via one's mobile phone or SingPass OneKey token. As inmates would generally not be able to comply with the 2-step verification process, the State Courts are currently working with SPS and the Community Justice Centre who are in support of the initiative, to develop a workaround solution.

Access to Legal Advice

For unrepresented accused persons who have started serving sentence and who are deciding whether to lodge an appeal, apart from having access to court documents, it is also necessary for them to have timely legal advice that can assist them to make an informed decision. To this end, the State Courts worked with the Community Justice Centre (CJC) to implement an initiative that involves inmates having access to the CJC's pro bono services when they are deciding whether there are reasonable grounds to file an appeal. The CJC's pro bono lawyers participating in this initiative are able to use the video link facilities at the Vidlink Centre in the State Courts building to communicate with the inmates once a consultation request is made by an inmate.

Pilot



PERIOD: 6 months
COMMENCEMENT DATE: 1 February 2019
TYPES OF CASES: Drug-related offences

Expected Outcomes

- Faster access to court documents and legal advice for inmates
- More informed decisions by inmates on whether to file an appeal
- Fewer appeals from inmates with mandatory or minimum sentences
- Elimination of process redundancy



Full implementation with the possibility of scaling up the initiative by extension to other offences. This, with a view to enhancing inmates' access to justice, and optimising resources.

v. **EARLY ENGAGEMENT OF OFFENDERS BELOW 21 YEARS**

The “Early Engagement of Offenders Below 21 Years” initiative is a programme which seeks to take the courts’ rehabilitative efforts towards youthful offenders upstream; before they are sentenced. This reinforces the court’s sentencing policy which is geared towards the rehabilitation of youthful offenders and helping them to become good and useful citizens.

Currently, the courts can only start the rehabilitation process after the youthful offenders have pleaded guilty to the offence and have been sentenced. However, for reasons that range from time needed for further investigations, to apply for legal aid or to make representations, the process from the time the youthful offender is charged to the time he is sentenced can at times take 6 to 9 months. It has been found that during this period, these youthful offenders are often unengaged and tend to be early school drop-outs. The programme is a voluntary one and information will be provided to suitable youthful offenders during their first court mention. Those interested in the programme can contact the Centre for Specialist Services (CSS). The CSS will assess their needs, make the relevant referrals to partner organisations, such as the MOE and MSF, and oversee their progress until the conclusion of the case. The needs of the youths will be assessed holistically. Such needs include the needs of their next-of-kin as these play a part on the outcome of the youths’ rehabilitation. The areas that will be looked into include:



CONSTRUCTIVE
ENGAGEMENT



HOUSING NEEDS



FAMILY RELATIONSHIP



FINANCIAL
CIRCUMSTANCES

The programme will seek to render the following types of interventional help:



Return to the educational track for youths of school-going age – To help them obtain basic educational qualifications with a view to enabling them to gain employment in the future and avoid falling into crime



Vocational training for youths beyond school-going age – To help them acquire skills that will enable them to find employment in the future and avoid falling into crime



Engagement in pro-social and recreational activities – To help them engage in constructive activities and to interact with peers who provide a positive influence



Housing support for youths with no home to return to or are estranged from their family – To prevent situations of youths spending time outside of the home with poor company and falling into crime



Financial support for youths who are facing financial difficulties – To help them receive the necessary social assistance and prevent the committing of crimes due to their economic reasons



Earlier engagement of youthful offenders towards sustained rehabilitation.

TARGET IMPLEMENTATION:
June 2019

vi. PROJECT RESTORE

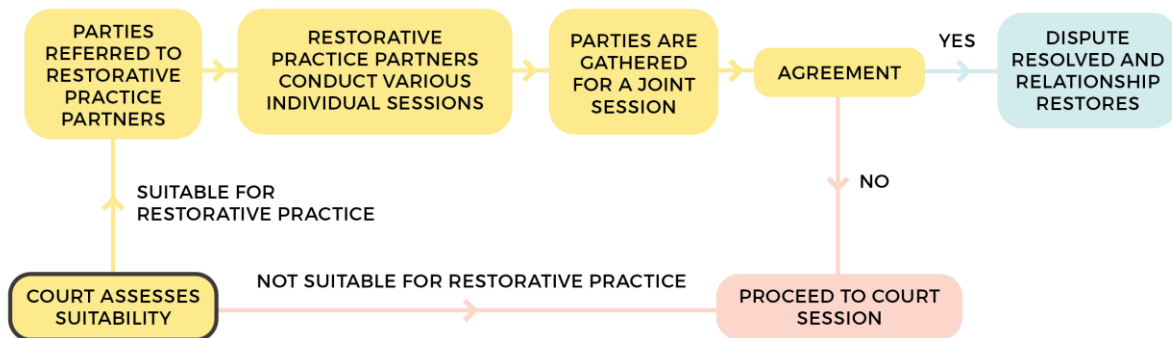
The “Project Restore” initiative involves a systematic framework to refer disputants to restorative practice as an alternative dispute resolution option outside of the courts, and to refer consenting parties to these resolution processes, so that the conflict can be de-escalated and resolved without the courts’ intervention. Restorative practice focuses not only on the resolution of a conflict, but also the restoration and healing of the relationship between the disputants and the community which has been affected by the conflict. During the first phase of this project, the State Courts will work with the Lutheran Community Care Services to introduce restorative practice as an option for disputants to resolve conflicts arising from neighbour disputes and minor criminal offences. Other potential partners in the pipeline include the Community Mediation Centre.



PILOT PERIOD: 6 months
COMMENCEMENT: June 2019
TYPES OF CASES: Neighbour Disputes, Magistrate’s Complaints

Under Project Restore, the State Courts will assess if the disputants may be suitable for referral to restorative practice as a means to resolve the dispute at hand. This will leverage the existing process stage of pre-filing assessment which disputants who are filing a community-related case at the State Courts are required to undergo. In helping the parties to explore the various dispute resolution options including non-litigious options which can preserve their relationship with the other party, the Centre for Specialist Services will provide the relevant information on restorative practice, ascertain the parties’ level of interest and make the appropriate referral if the parties consent.

Process



Expected Outcomes

- Higher rate of out-of-court and pre-filing resolution of disputes
- Lower number of disputes brought before the courts, reducing legal costs for all parties
- Greater community harmony



Full implementation with the possibility of expanding the pool of restorative practice partners. This, with a view to promoting long-lasting dispute resolution by tackling the root causes of conflict.

vii. **PRE-ACTION PROTOCOL FOR BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS DEBT RECOVERY CLAIMS**

The Pre-Action Protocol for Business-to-Business (B2B) Debt Recovery Claims provides a framework to resolve business-to-business civil claims more efficiently and economically. The State Courts see about 1,000 B2B claims annually. Often, the parties to such claims present incomplete or improper documentation for their claims, and the legal costs incurred can be disproportionate to the sums claimed. Not infrequently, proceedings have been commenced even though the debt is not disputed and all that the respondent seeks is more details about the claim or a repayment plan for the sum claimed.



TARGET IMPLEMENTATION: November 2019

The Pre-Action Protocol for B2B Debt Recovery Claims encourages the resolution of B2B debt claims before the commencement of proceedings. It assists parties to identify the material issues, ascertain the quantum disputed (including interest and other charges), encourage upfront disclosure of documents and information, and facilitate negotiations for settlement. Parties are encouraged to propose at an early stage any settlement plan and/or to consider other modes of alternative dispute resolution.

The Protocol will involve the use of standard forms and the mandatory exchange of information between parties. Annexed to the electronic forms will be an interactive repayment plan calculator that assists the parties to produce payment schedules by displaying the amount of principal and interest (if any) payable at each period. To ensure the effectiveness of the Protocol, costs consequences may be imposed for non-compliance with it.

Key Features



Expected Outcomes

- Higher rate of out-of-court settlements of B2B debt recovery claims
- Proper pleadings and narrowed issues in pleadings filed for formal court proceedings, reducing time and costs for parties
- Maintaining of good commercial relations



A streamlined process that will assist businesses (in particular SMEs) in reaching out-of-court settlements for debt recovery, saving time and costs, and maintaining good commercial relations. At the same time, optimising the courts' resources.

viii. **CLICKS: COLLABORATIVE LAW, INNOVATIVE CO-CREATION & KNOWLEDGE SHARING**

In collaboration with the Singapore Academy of Law (SAL), a co-working space for pro bono-minded legal practitioners, technologists and start-ups will be set up in the new State Courts Towers. The co-working space will be named **CLICKS @ State Courts** which stands for **Collaborative Law, Innovative Co-Creation and Knowledge Sharing**.

Aims



Drive mindset change among legal practitioners, and incubate new models for legal service delivery in the future economy.

ix. **PUBLICATIONS**

With the aim of sharing knowledge, two practitioners' publications that cover topics pertaining to the work of the State Courts will be produced.

- Guide to Judge-Led Dispute Resolution: Principles and Practice of Non-Adversarial Justice
An in-depth guide on the principles and practices of court dispute resolution, it will describe the robust, judge-driven case management strategy of the State Courts Centre for Dispute Resolution, and set out the key principles and tools employed to achieve early, cost-effective and amicable resolution of cases without the need for trial. It aims to underline and promote the use of non-adversarial, non-confrontational processes to secure optimal outcomes for parties and resolve disputes, big and small. Expected completion: June 2020
- The Law and Practice of Tribunals
A textbook on the law and practice of tribunals in Singapore to provide new tribunals with legal and practical guidance as to how to set up and run a tribunal, while providing established tribunals with high standards they can aspire to. It aims to standardise and raise the level of governance of tribunals in Singapore. Expected completion: October 2019



Promote court excellence by leading the way and enabling others through knowledge sharing.



xi. THE FUTURE OF MANAGING PERSONAL INJURY CLAIMS

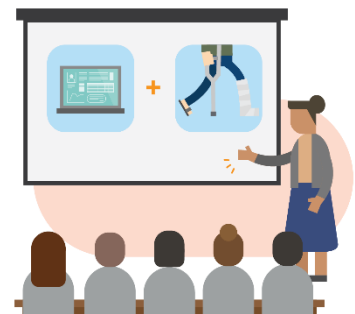
A conference “Future of Managing Personal Injury Claims” will be organised to bring together the various players and stakeholders in personal injury compensation, to consider how technology can be leveraged to improve outcomes in such claims. The increased use of technology in our daily lives and in the courts is likely to have significant impact on the way that personal injury claims will be managed and resolved.

The conference aims to look into novel issues that will arise in the future such as liability in accidents involving driverless cars and how advances in medical technology and datamining may enable better and more accurate outcomes in the assessment of injuries and in the determination of compensation awards. The conference will consider the possibility of court processes and routine hearings in personal injury claims being automated, and how the evaluation of liability and monetary damages can be made simpler, more consistent and certain by leveraging data, machine learning and Artificial Intelligence capabilities.

The conference is targeted to take place in 3Q 2020.



Promote a better public understanding of how technology can give rise to new legal issues, and how it may be leveraged to streamline and simplify how personal injury claims are managed.



xii. DATA SCIENCE STRATEGY

In an increasingly digitised and interconnected operating environment, the volume of data generated and collected is growing exponentially. It is important to be able to understand and use the data collected to maximise its value to the organisation. The Data Science Strategy will define the overarching goals, strategic objectives and the implementation plans in developing the State Courts' capabilities to understand, analyse and use data.

Aligned with the whole-of-government movement towards raising public officers' digital and data science readiness and capabilities, a training framework which will seek to create awareness, appreciation and confidence among State Courts' officers in handling and working with data will be incorporated within the organisation's master learning plan.



The knowledge and ability to harness the value of data collected will enable the State Courts to tap on new opportunities and insights to transform and enhance the State Courts' processes and service delivery.

xiii. DEVELOPING A DIGITAL WORKFORCE

Developing a digital workforce encompasses the need to train the State Courts' workforce to become confident users of technology, and to support them with the appropriate resources to apply the skills learnt. A two-pronged approach was conceived to achieve this objective:

Equipping the State Courts' workforce with digital skills and enhancing their knowledge of digital technology

How

Use of creative and engaging ways (e.g. gamification platforms) to engage and expose officers to various technological features, as well as trending and useful applications.

Execution

In the gamification platform currently under exploration, missions may be set that range from easy to advanced levels aimed at elevating the users' digital skills and technical know-how.

Providing of resources to apply the skills learnt

How

Through dedicated online platforms that provide knowledge and promote hands-on experiences

Execution

Easy and quick access to practical IT tips that can be applied at work and at home, a catalogue of useful applications and software that would be useful to both work and personal life, and staff members, who are "experts" in their respective digital fields, to approach for projects. In turn, the experts would be able to practise their digital knowledge through hands-on experience.

It is envisaged that a digital workforce would be able to:

1. Evolve and design better policies through the integrated use of data and digital technologies;
2. Execute decisions and processes in a timely manner, supported by data and automation;
3. Connect and collaborate with other public officers easily through digital means;
4. Be trained and empowered to harness technology and data in their work.



The increased awareness of State Courts' workforce of modern technologies will enable the application of such technologies to improve existing workflows and processes, expand the pool of digital experts, as well as meet the expectations of the future workforce.

xiv. TRANSFORMATION @ STATE COURTS

Transformation @ SC aims to inspire transformational mindsets and to build capabilities within the State Courts through a systematic approach to encourage innovation, e.g. through projects, programmes and new reward schemes that will have a positive impact on:

- Organisational Excellence
- Organisational Development
- Employee Engagement

The organisation will provide the avenues to incubate ideas and source for training that would enhance and inspire transformational changes. Essential training materials such as those on innovative methodologies, case studies and processes will also be made conveniently accessible. These would be the tools to.



Transformational excellence, a highly capable organisation which will improve processes and spark higher-level initiatives.