

# Review of a Civil Service Traveller Internship Pilot Programme

## Executive Summary



DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE,  
EQUALITY AND LAW REFORM

*Working for a Safer, Fairer Ireland*

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# Executive Summary

## Review of a Civil Service Traveller Internship Pilot Programme

### Introduction

The Traveller Internship Pilot Programme is a special work experience initiative, which consisted of placing 23 persons of Traveller Community origin in Clerical Officer or General Operative positions in the Civil Service. The goal was to enhance the skill sets and range of work experience of Travellers in line with the commitment of the Department of Finance to diversity within the Civil Service. The Department of Finance has a central role in developing, promoting and monitoring equality of opportunity in the Civil Service.

The programme was built on experimental experiences of the then Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, and pilot schemes of, amongst others, South Dublin County Council together with some Traveller representative organisations. The design and implementation of the Initiative involved close cooperation between the Civil Service Equality Unit in the Department of Finance, FÁS, the Public Appointments Service and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR). The DJELR had issued a report of the High Level Group on Traveller Issues in March 2006. The Initiative was supported and closely monitored by a Working Group involving the major civil and public service stakeholders.

Traveller Interns were placed in posts in 12 different Departments of Government. The placements ranged from Departments in the heart of Dublin to a site of the Office of Public Works on the outskirts of Dublin city.

### Method of conducting the review

In April 2007 a review of the Initiative was commissioned and managed by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The review submitted a final report in August 2007.

The review undertook its work by face-to-face interviews with Traveller Interns, group and individual discussions with Civil Servants in Departments of Government, discussion with a Traveller Representative organisation, some members of the Working Group and an examination of printed data and materials.

### Internship applicants

A detailed examination of the backgrounds of applicants (see Table 1) to the programme showed that while 25 had attended second level education, just two had reached Leaving Certificate level and 15 had completed the Junior Certificate. This profile is consistent with educational levels among the wider Traveller community, as evidenced in Census 2006.

However, a high proportion had already completed some vocational training. About one in five had work experience in clerical work and some had completed work experience or training in manual work. This suggests that while young Travellers have been availing of post school vocational training and work experience, this was not converting into permanent jobs for them.

**Table 1**  
Selected stated education and training  
characteristics of 43 of the 50 applicants to  
the Internship Programme

Response	Primary Level	Second Level	Junior Cert	Leaving Certificate Level	Vocational Training	Training Manual	Work Experience Manual	Work Experience Clerical
Yes	34	25	15	2	32	5	7	8
No	4	14	18	31	11	38	36	35
Unknown	5	4	10	10	-	-	-	-
Total	43	43	43	43	43	43	43	43

Source: Extracted from anonymised data of the Civil Service Equality Unit 2006

'I thought it would be a group of Travellers all in a room like usual. It's usually like that, like at FÁS. They didn't explain that. It was different. *Not like usual.*'



### Pilot Programme Design

The initiative was designed carefully at the promotion, mobilisation, recruitment and programme stages. A programme co-ordinator in the Equality Unit of the Department of Finance was with the initiative from the outset. An extensive outreach action was conducted with Traveller organisations across the greater Dublin region to advertise and promote the initiative and to respond to questions about the Initiative. The Public Appointments Service adjusted its procedures slightly, so that application forms, for example, were more accessible. Twice as many applicants sought entry to the programme than places were available. Departments of Government, once asked, were quick to volunteer to participate in the Initiative.

### The Interns at work

Travellers had real concerns initially at taking up their new posts. Here is what they described:

*'I expected massive long words that I wouldn't know how to spell because it was a Government building'*

*'I worried about words I might not understand and I would be embarrassed.'*

*'I was worried about dress and that you have to dress respectful'*

Traveller Interns were provided with clerical or general operative level work in the Civil Service for a period of six-months. Their assignments offered a range of clerical work tasks such as data entry, answering the phone, reception work, preparing rooms for conferences, basic carpentry, painting, maintenance and horticulture. Jobs were full-time and pay was fixed at the Clerical Officer or General Operative rate.

### Positive features in the Pilot Programme

The Review identified a number of positive features in this initiative, some of which are identified below:

- Readiness of Senior Civil Servants to engage with this initiative
- Readiness of Departmental units to volunteer to host an Intern
- Enthusiasm of Traveller organisations for this style of initiative
- Interest of members of Traveller families in availing of the new opportunity
- General competence of interns for tasks provided to them
- Permanent co-workers and Travellers having first chance to work together and get to know each other face-to-face
- Absence of any reports of incidents of discrimination or prejudice

In the words of one participant:

*'It's the first time I felt close with the other people and the boss. It's the first time I ever had that in a job'*

A number of specialised supports appear to have added depth to the Initiative. These were:

- The experience and expertise of the members of the Working Group
- The knowledge of diversity policy within the Civil Service Equality Unit of the Department of Finance and within the Diversity and Equality Law Division of the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform
- The appointment of a dedicated staff member as Programme co-ordinator
- The large scale recruitment experience of the Public Appointments Service

- The hands-on knowledge of labour market functioning of FÁS
- The knowledge of Traveller life of Pavee Point and other Traveller Representative or support organisations.

### Skills improvement during the Internship

Many, but not all, Interns got the opportunity to go on formal training courses organised by the Civil Service. Interns expressed satisfaction at the chance to attend basic courses in areas such as telephone and communication skills, specific computer skills and understanding bullying in the workplace.

In addition to formal skills, Interns learnt how a modern workplace operates. Interns mentioned learning about flexitime, leave arrangements and social events. In addition some young Travellers said that their confidence improved and they were in a better financial situation.

One young woman described the Programme as a welcome change from previous courses and programmes:

*It was a great experience. I loved the office work.. definitely want to do it. Was in [training programme] before and it was like school... would not go back. Travellers need to do other things instead of being together all the time. Have to go out in the real world. Settled people got to know me and see we're [Travellers] not all the same. There's no difference (between Travellers and settled people).*

### Issues that arose in the Programme

A number of issues arose which posed questions or challenges to the Programme at the time or afterwards. Many of these were identified in the course of the Review. The following paragraphs give some examples.

Interns who had incomplete secondary education, nevertheless needed a good general standard of education to keep up with a Clerical Officer posting. A number of Interns needed improvements in their spelling and grammar in order to maximise the opportunities offered by the Internship.

The availability of the Interns for work for 26 consecutive weeks and on a full-time basis, arose. A number of Interns were absent from work frequently or for prolonged periods due to calls on their time from family or family responsibilities within their wider family network. The extent of this issue had not been foreseen at the outset of the Programme.

A small number of Interns considered that they had insufficient work to do and could have worked more or been provided with a more consistent stream of work.

Revision of the CVs of Interns before they ended their Internship did not take place as a planned activity. As a result many of their CVs were not updated and did not display the full range of tasks that they had undertaken and which would be of interest to prospective employers.

In the course of the Internship, there was some unintended 'drift' in the stated objectives. Some of those engaged in the Programme attempted to place Interns in Civil Service jobs at the end of the six-month work experience. This did not always work out as intended and disappointment on the part of the some Interns ensued. It signals the importance of a more structured response to the ending of the Internship.

‘Travellers need to do other things instead of being together all the time. Have to go out in the real world. Settled people got to know me’



### Recommendations

The Review made a number of Recommendations for future Internship Programmes.

A selection of these are provided below.

- A future roll out of the Programme in another region will benefit from an experienced, full-time coordinator for that region
- The six month Internship in the Civil Service should be back-to-back with a six month Internship in the Public Service
- A two-week intermediary or bridging course for Interns prior to entering the Civil Service workplace should be designed and implemented by FÁS with a view to obtaining a good skill match between Intern and placement and identifying some training programmes from which Interns would benefit
- Appropriate formal training programmes should be made available to all Interns
- The promotion of an Internship should ensure that all Travellers in the region or vicinity have access to information materials
- More specific efforts should be made at recruitment stage to identify whether the applicants have a genuine interest in manual or clerical work
- Civil Servant Internships involving manual work should get specific encouragement so that young men are attracted to such initiatives
- Mentoring of Interns from among volunteer Clerical Officer grades of staff should be considered
- Traveller organisations involved in Programme recruitment should also be involved in measures at the close of a Programme
- Traveller Interns leaving a Programme should have a pre-arranged appointment with a FÁS placement or guidance officer

