

Work Experience in the Northern Ireland Civil Service Policy and Guidance for Users

1. Introduction

The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) comprises 12 Government Departments, each of which plays a key role in the development and implementation of government policy and delivery of services to the people of Northern Ireland.

It is the aim of the NICS to have a workforce which is broadly representative of the population of Northern Ireland. In order to achieve this aim we recognise that it is important that individuals considering careers choices have an opportunity to learn as much as possible about the opportunities that exist in the NICS. By offering opportunities to participate in work experience/work shadowing placements organised by schools, universities or business/education links bodies we hope to promote the NICS as a career of choice.

Whilst the majority of jobs in the NICS are of an administrative or management nature, there are a great diversity of other jobs across scientific, technological, professional, legal, medical, engineering and IT related areas. Information on jobs in the NICS which are currently advertised is available on www.nicsrecruitment.gov.uk

The following are examples of positions in each Department.

2. Background to the Departments

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister

The Department supports the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Executive and leads on a number of key cross cutting policy and strategy issues across the NICS such as equality, poverty, good relations, sustainable development and European policy. The Department will consider work experience opportunities in the following areas:

- All administrative grades
- Communication grades in the Executive Information Service

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

The Department's vision is that of a thriving and sustainable rural community and environment in Northern Ireland in which the Department aims to strengthen the social and economic infrastructure of rural areas, enhances animal, fish and plant health and welfare, develops a more sustainable environment and delivers effectively its services to customers.

DARD have a number of offices throughout Northern Ireland and will consider any requests for work experience in office based environments but if a Student has more specific interests they may wish to consider placements in more specialised areas of DARD including Veterinary Service, Service Delivery Group and Rivers Agency.

Veterinary Service

The majority of opportunities will be of an administrative, management or ICT nature. Where possible these will be offered in;

- a) Administrative Work. Administrative staff perform a wide variety of functions ensuring that the work programme for Veterinary Service is carried out. These tasks may involve data input, file management, dealing with telephone enquiries, answering routine correspondence. You would work as part of a team in an environment designed to develop organisation skills, team working, effective communication and good customer service skills.
- b) First Line Manager Role- This work includes:
 - Operational type work which can involve the development of practical arrangements to give effect to policy decisions or legislation and may involve the management of services.
 - Finance work which can involve forecasting public expenditure requirements, implementing payment and producing finance reports and;
 - Policy work which can involve assisting in the development or review of VS business responsibilities
- c) ICT Specialists – This type of work is varied and includes data analysis, programming, maintenance and support of data system;

Where business needs permit, it may be possible to provide an overview of the work carried out by a Veterinarian Officer. This would be provided in an office based environment.

The work of a Veterinarian Officer is associated with controlling enzootic diseases such as bovine tuberculosis and brucellosis, disease diagnoses, undertaking surveillance for other diseases and/or stamping out epizootic diseases such as Foot and Mouth Disease and Bluetongue.

Service Delivery Group

Alongside office environments which offer a variety of basic administrative duties such as photocopying, filing, etc Service Delivery Group can provide a wide and varied range of practical work on some of their CAFRE College Campus sites. For example:

Enniskillen Campus – Equine Education

- Tending to horses in fields.
- Assisting with leading to & from exercise.
- Feeding, bedding & putting rugs on horses.
- Observing farrier, vet, dentist & physio.

Loughry Campus – Food Technology Education

- Helping the food technicians & lab staff with chemical & micro testing of food – levels of fat, protein, salt & bacteria.

- Working in the production development kitchen making food products & preparation for taste panels.
- Making Ice-cream, sausages etc.
- Cleaning.

Greenmount Campus – Beef and Sheep Development

- Feeding stock in the morning.
- Checking stock at grass.
- Milking cows.
- Cleaning.
- Moving stock within the enterprises.

Greenmount Campus – Crops & Horticulture Development

- Seed sowing.
- Taking cuttings.
- Planting in pots and soil under protected environment.
- Harvesting.
- Grading a whole new range of ornamental crops eg pot plants & cut flowers.

Rivers Agency

Rivers Agency is a civil engineering organisation that offers limited, mainly office based work experience opportunities to civil engineering students or those wishing to pursue a career in civil engineering.

Due to the health and safety restrictions on taking students out on site visits, work experience can be accommodated within Hydebank/Craigavon office locations, particularly with our design and asset management sections. Limited visits to controlled sites where no works are currently taking place are a possibility. These site visits allow students to view completed projects, particularly where works have been implemented by our Environment Section.

Work experience opportunities within Rivers Agency usually last up to one week with each day spent in a different section to demonstrate the variety of work undertaken by the Agency.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

The Department aims to achieve for society 'A confident, creative, informed and vibrant community'. It's vision is a society that develops and flourishes, becoming more informed and proud of its cultural identity, a society where we unlock our latent creativity, to become even more vibrant and confident in the future. The Department will consider work experience opportunities in the following areas:

- All administrative grades
- Curator

Department of Education

The Department of Education works together as partners in education and youth services to ensure a high standard of education for all children and young people, which will put them at the centre of education, motivate them, build their confidence and enrich their lives, and promote the foundation for a vibrant economy. The Department will consider work experience opportunities in the following area:

- All administrative grades

Department for Employment and Learning

The role of the Department is to promote learning and skills, to prepare people for work and to support the economy. The Department's objectives are to promote economic, social and personal development through high quality learning, research and skills training as well as to help people into employment and promote good employment practices.

- All administrative grades
- Careers Advisor

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

The goal of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is to grow a dynamic innovative economy, with a greater capacity to generate wealth and raise living standards. The key priorities for the Department are to improve productivity of the manufacturing and private sector, raise employment levels and develop the tourism sector. The Department will consider work experience opportunities related to the following areas:

- All administrative grades
- Health and Safety Inspectors
- Trading Standards Officer

Department of the Environment

The aim of the Department of Environment is to contribute to a better and safer environment which will support a vibrant and dynamic economy and to support the delivery of a system of strong and effective local government. The Department will consider work experience opportunities in the following areas:

- Planning Service – Headquarters Belfast, Ballymena, Belfast, Craigavon, Downpatrick, Londonderry, Coleraine, Omagh, Enniskillen (Planners);
- Press Office;
- Driver Vehicle Agency (DVA) – Testing (Vehicle Examiners), IT Section;
- Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA);
- Corporate Services - Finance Unit (Accountants);
- Environmental Protection - Industrial Pollution & Radiochemical Inspectorate, Water Management Unit (Scientists);

- Natural Heritage - Conservation Designations & Protection, Countryside and Coast, Regional Operations (Bellaghy Bawn, Castlearchdale Country Park, Coastal Zone Centre (Portrush), Peatlands Park) (Rangers).

Department of Finance and Personnel

The Department of Finance and Personnel and its Agencies are responsible for a wide variety of functions, many of which are carried out centrally on behalf of the Northern Ireland Civil Service as a whole. These include Central Finance Group, Corporate Human Resources, Departmental Solicitors' Office, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Central Procurement Directorate, Corporate Services Group; and Land and Property Services. The Department will consider work experience placements in the following areas:

- All administrative grades;
- Assistant Statistician;
- Accountants (on behalf of all NICS Departments);
- IT Professionals;
- Valuers;
- Mapping and Charting grades;
- Legal grades;
- Assistant Economists;
- Construction disciplines;
- Procurement professionals;
- Internal Audit.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

The Department's mission is to improve the health and social well being of the people of Northern Ireland. It endeavours to do so by supporting programmes of health promotion and education to encourage the community to adopt activities, behaviours and attitudes which will lead to better health and well-being and by ensuring the provision of appropriate health and social services. It aims to do this both in clinical settings, such as hospitals and GP's surgeries, and in the community, through nursing, social work and other professional services.

- DHSSPS have a range of health and social care related policy areas and will consider requests for work experience placements in suitable areas of the Department.

Department for Regional Development

The Department aims to improve the quality of life for everyone in Northern Ireland by securing transport and water infrastructure and shaping the regions' long-term strategic development. The Department will consider work experience placements in the following areas:

- All administrative grades;
- Graduate trainee civil engineer;
- PTO/HPTO Graphic Designer;
- PTO Civil Engineering Assistants;

- PTO Electrical Engineers;
- PTO Mechanical Fleet;
- TGI/TG2 (Technical Grades).

Department for Social Development

In December 1999 the Department for Social Development (DSD) was established as part of the Northern Ireland Executive. It's overall aim is to tackle disadvantage and promote individual and community well-being of the people of Northern Ireland through integrated social and economic action. It has strategic responsibility for urban regeneration, community and voluntary sector development, social legislation, housing, social security benefits, pensions and child support.

Around 8,000 people are employed by DSD, with the majority of staff working in the Social Security Agency and Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division. While the majority of staff are located in Belfast, the Department also has offices throughout Northern Ireland.

DSD Human Resources arrange placements for Work Experience Placements, Internships and Programme-Led Apprenticeships. The list below provides examples of the range of different types of work where student placements may be facilitated:

- (i) Benefit/Pension Offices:
 - Jobs and Benefits
 - Social Fund Unit
 - Employment & Support Allowance
 - Incapacity Benefit
 - Disability and Carers Service
 - Pensions Branch
- (ii) Child Maintenance & Enforcement Division;
- (iii) Belfast Regeneration Office;
- (iv) The Appeals Tribunal Service;
- (v) Human Resources Directorate;
- (vi) Learning and Development Unit;
- (vii) Voluntary & Community Unit;
- (viii) Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Department of Justice

The Department of Justice (DOJ) is a new Northern Ireland Department which came into existence on 12 April 2010 and was established by the Department of Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2010. It has a range of devolved policing and justice functions set out in the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Devolution of Policing and Justice Functions) Order 2010.

The role of the Department is to support the Minister of Justice to help keep the people of Northern Ireland safe.

In addition to its statutory functions, the department provides resources and a legislative framework for its agencies and arms length bodies (which together

constitute most of the justice system in Northern Ireland). Together with these organisations the department is responsible for ensuring there is a fair and effective justice system in Northern Ireland and for increasing public confidence in that system.

The Department has five Agencies, the Northern Ireland Prison Service, Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service, the Compensation Agency, Forensic Science Agency and the Youth Justice Agency.

The Department also sponsors a number of Non-Departmental Public Bodies/bodies affiliated with policing and justice.

Work experience requests for the Department of Justice will be considered on a case by case basis.

3. Indemnity Insurance

For unpaid work experience, the application form includes a proof of indemnity section which should be completed by the school/university or training organisation prior to the application being considered. Indemnity forms provided by the individual's school or organisation will also be accepted.

Where indemnity is not available for an individual seeking unpaid work experience the Department should assess the risk of potential personal injury, damage to property or other loss in light of the nature and location of the works. Where such risk is insignificant an application for unpaid work experience should be accepted. No individual accepted for work experience should be unsupervised and any risks should be managed in the same way as for other employees.

4. Types of work placements which may be facilitated

There are a number of routes through which work experience within the NICS can be facilitated. The following is an outline of the different routes on offer and the process involved;

4.1 Applications made via Corporate HR

These opportunities are coordinated by Corporate HR on behalf of the 12 departments. The application form captures information regarding the individual applicant, allows them to outline their career plans / interests and which department they would be most interested in attending for placement. The application also provides individual with the opportunity to outline any health conditions or special requirements that should be considered prior to placement.

Applications received by Corporate HR will be forwarded to the specified department(s) for consideration. Where there is no preferred department listed, Corporate HR will contact the department(s) determined most suitable to the desired experience to request consideration of the application.

It will not always be possible to provide placements but the NICS will endeavour to secure placements in response to all requests which are received. Whilst individuals undertaking work experience placements in administrative posts will generally have the opportunity to carry out some of the tasks of positions, there will be positions where this will not be possible. In such cases the emphasis will be on work shadowing where the student will be observing the post-holder carrying out the duties of the post in question.

(a) Work experience placements of young people who are in years 11/12 or 13/14 of full time education;

Students under 18 years of age who participate in short work experience placements will not require formal vetting but those NICS branches which provide the placements will be required to ensure that access to confidential databases/information is strictly supervised. Students on short work placements will not have a login facility to NICS databases.

The normal duration for work experience placements is one week.

(b) Students in further and higher education;

As at (a); however these may include applications to attend for placement on a 1 – 2 day basis over a number of weeks in line with the courses studied.

(c) Unpaid Internships arranged through Colleges or University;

An internship is a period of work experience arranged by a university in which the intern will be placed in a government Department. The period of the placement is likely to mirror a university semester and the placement will be in a Department which is providing a function directly related to the nature of the degree course being provided by the university and being undertaken by the student.

See Annex 1 for further legal advice for Departments on facilitating internships.

Please note:

- For placements of more than 4 weeks or where access to systems is required the student may be asked to provide a basic AccessNI clearance certificate, more information can be found on the AccessNI website: www.accessni.gov.uk.

(d) Non-UK student opportunities.

These exchange placements are sponsored by the EU, primarily under the Leonardo da Vinci and Erasmus programmes. Participants are typically graduates coming from a wide variety of vocational/educational backgrounds. They choose to do an

international placement in order to gain professional experience to develop their English language skills and to broaden their horizons.

They stay typically between 8 and 20 weeks and work placements are **unpaid**. The EU covers participants' accommodation, travel costs and provides for food/transport costs.

Non-UK applicants must enclose an acceptable Criminal Record Check from their country with their application to ensure security requirements of the NICS are met.

4.2 Applications made directly to Departments

(a) Paid Opportunities advertised by Departments

Some Departments provide one year sandwich placements for students undertaking degree courses which are vocational based. These placements are publicly advertised and the successful students become paid employees for the period of their placements. Students employed as NICS sandwich year students will require formal vetting by AccessNI.

Sandwich year or sandwich period placements are advertised as required by departments. All opportunities are advertised on the NICS recruitment website www.nicsrecruitment.gov.uk, which is updated every Monday. Advertisements also appear in the 3 local newspapers the Belfast Telegraph, the Irish News and the Newsletter.

Applications can be submitted through the above website once the position is advertised or hard copy applications can be requested from HRConnect.

(b) Department specific work experience requests made by universities or other colleges of higher education;

Some NICS Departments have well established links with universities etc in which students are offered placements, usually in a specialist area related to the course they are undertaking. Departments should continue to make placements through these existing lists links.

(c) Civil Servant Exchange Programmes

Extract from the Cabinet Office website advises – “The UK does have agreements with some other EU and Commonwealth countries for the exchange of each others' civil servants, but experience suggests that it is usually easier for individuals, or their departments, to arrange something bilaterally with the overseas counterpart or target ministry in the country concerned. Involvement by the centre usually adds delay, whereas departments tend already to have the contacts and the goodwill needed to arrange a secondment.”

4.3 Ad hoc requests

Applications can also be submitted by or on behalf of individuals who are not associated with an educational organisation or training scheme. These applications can be submitted either through Corporate HR or directly to departments and will be considered on a case by case basis.

4.4 Opportunities managed by the Department of Employment and Learning

(a) Programme Led Apprenticeships

This is a two year programme led by the Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) and which involves work placements of one day a week in a NICS Department. The placements are arranged by training suppliers approved by DEL and which requires the training supplier to have adequate insurance which will indemnify their apprentices placed within the Public Sector. Students undertaking NICS programme led apprenticeships will require formal vetting by AccessNI.

(b) Steps to Work – including the Graduate Acceleration Programme (GAP)

‘Steps to Work’ is the main adult return to work programme for the unemployed and economically inactive in Northern Ireland, replacing the former New Deal programmes. The programme provides a broader range of back to work assistance than previously available under New Deal and is tailored to individual’s needs by identifying and tackling their barriers to work.

GAP is the Graduate Acceleration Programme run by Business in the Community; it is a work placement programme, lasting up to 26 weeks, in which graduates will complete a project or piece of work and study for a graduate certificate with either Queens or the University of Ulster. More information is available at <http://www.gapni.com/>.

More information and how to apply for the above opportunities is available through <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/training.htm>, or by visiting the Careers Service in your local job centre.

5. Reporting of work experience placements

Corporate HR will be reporting annually on all work experience opportunities provided by NICS Departments. Departmental HRs should, therefore, maintain a log of all opportunities provided by their Department together with any information illustrating the benefits obtained by both the Department and those undertaking the placements.

Annex 1

Further legal advice for Departments on facilitating Internships

A person may be a “worker” even if they are not an employee if they have a contract to carry out work personally for another party. A worker does not have all the employment rights of an employee but will have certain rights such as the right to the national minimum wage and the right to various breaks under the Working Time Regulations. The basic element of all this is that there must be a contract under which the worker is required to do work and the other party is required to reward him for that. The way to avoid this occurring is to ensure that the intern is not obliged to do the work, NICS is not obliged to give them any work and no payment changes hands.

Therefore, when you are offering placement to interns the arrangements should be set out in writing. It should make clear that:

- The Department concerned is not obliged to offer the intern any work.
- The intern is not obliged to do any work which is offered to him.
- No payment of any kind will be made.
- The agreement should set out the expenses that may or may not be paid – this can include travel expenses from home but the Department can decide whatever it wants about expenses.
- The intern is entitled to apply to attend any training which the Department arranges or pays for.

Departments should be advised that as interns are not workers or employees no NICS policies can be applied to them and therefore there is no question of holidays, sickness certificates, grievances, disciplinary procedures etc. Departments must be told that if they apply any policies to the intern they run the risk of the intern being treated as a worker or employee and thereby having rights against the Department.

The intern should receive a copy of the terms under which he is engaged. He/she should not be asked to sign any agreement other than an agreement to maintain confidentiality.