

**Irish Traveller Movement  
National Traveller Women's Forum  
Pavee Point Travellers' Centre**



**Report on  
Consultations with Traveller  
Learners and Parents**

**Towards the Development  
Of the  
Traveller Education Strategy**

**Funded by the Gender Equality Unit Project as part of the Pilot Ethnic Identifier, Dept of  
Education and Science**

**Prepared by**

**Gearóid Ó Riain  
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## **Funding body**

This consultation document has been funded under the **Gender Equality Unit** pilot ethnic identifier project that Pavee Point Travellers centre has been funded to undertake.

### **The main activities of the project will involve:**

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- This consultation document which explores Traveller learners experience of education
  - Research on good practice in other fields in relation to data collection
  - Consultation with representatives of ethnic groups as well as Traveller groups
  - Identification of a data mechanism
  - Identification, negotiation with and buy in of education providers
  - Piloting a mechanism and collection of available data on access, participation and outcomes
  - Analysis of data
  - Identification of data gaps; evaluation of the effectiveness of data mechanism
  - Consultation with stakeholders on identified issues
  - Making recommendations
  - Writing a report on the pilot
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## **INTRODUCTION**

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### **Decision to Devise a Strategy**

2.1 Since the publication of the Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community in 1995 the Advisory Committee on Traveller Education (ACTE, established in 1998) has been the main forum where Traveller organisations have engaged with the Department of Education and Science (DES) in relation to Traveller educational issues.

2.2 One of the main issues they have advocated has been the development of a comprehensive Traveller Education Strategy. In 2000 they tabled the first document making the case for the development of a Traveller Education Strategy. This was discussed by ACTE and agreed in principle in 2001.

2.3 The period was one of restructuring of Traveller education with DES, welcomed by the Traveller organisations. Responsibility for Traveller education was moved to the Social Inclusion Unit under the stewardship of a designated High Level Official. Another significant advance was the establishment on a statutory basis of the Education Disadvantage Committee. After these important developments the decision to initiate the strategy was taken and DES set in train a process to that end.

### **Timeframe for Development of Strategy**

2.4 The initial target set for the completion of the strategy document was set for the end of summer 2004. This ambitious target has since been revised to early 2005.

### **Stages in the Process**

2.5 The development of the strategy was seen as a process involving several distinct stages. These stages were:

1. Contracting a Consultant to lead the process and write the strategy document.
2. Contracting an External Resource Person to assist in that process.
3. Establishing a Joint Working Group to involve the key stakeholders in the process.
4. Calling for submissions.
5. Carrying out a survey of current Traveller education provision.
6. Consulting with Traveller learners and parents and where possible with children.
7. Drafting, finalising and submitting the strategy document.

2.6 Mr. Seán Mac Conmara was engaged to lead the process and Mr. Gearóid Ó Riain was contracted to assist him in the role of External Resource Person.

2.7 A Joint Working Group (JWG) was established drawing a membership from the statutory Education Disadvantage Committee (EDC) and the ACTE. This group consists of officials from the Social Inclusion Unit of the DES, the National Traveller Education Officer, the National Co-ordinator for Senior Traveller Training Centres, representatives of each of the three national Traveller organisations, (Irish Traveller Movement, National Traveller Women's Forum and Pavee Point), representatives of the teacher unions (A.S.T.I., I.N.T.O.), and representatives from the Visiting Teacher for Travellers Service, the Joint Managerial Body (school managers) and the EDC.

2.8 Submissions from interested groups or individuals were invited through the national press and almost forty submissions were made. These submissions came from a wide range of interests, including teacher representatives, Traveller organisations, trade unions, human rights organisations, service providers, individual members of the public, etc. Some groups, e.g. the Visiting Teacher Service and the INTO organised their own internal consultation leading up to the development of their submissions.

2.9 An evaluation of education provision for Travellers had already been proposed and agreed in principle by the ACTE when it was decided to move on the strategy, but this was likely to take several years before it could be done. In order to expedite the matter, DES, through the Evaluation and Research Support Unit (ERSU) carried out a survey of schools to ascertain, in as much as possible, the strengths and weaknesses of current Traveller education provision. The Survey of Traveller Education Provision (STEP) involved interviews with teachers, parents, principals, support personnel and services both at primary and post-primary level. While an outline of the result have been given to the JWG a final report from this survey is not yet available.

2.10 The Traveller organisations suggested to the DES that a national consultation with Traveller parents and learners would enhance the process. DES was supportive of this and made resources available to organise six consultation seminars (five regional and one national). The short time frame for the strategy process posed a challenge to Traveller organisations in organising this consultation and inevitably meant that there were limitations as to the depth and scope of the process. Many Travellers needed much more information in order to develop informed opinions about the very complex, multi-layered matters at hand. The seminars in this respect began a process of informing and consulting with Travellers that needs to be built on and continued to a point where many more Travellers are able to participate in the development of the education policy and service as it is delivered to their community. However despite these constraints the seminars were very well attended and successful and garnered much valuable material for the strategy development process.

2.11 Consultations and discussions completed, it is then the job of the consultants to write the strategy document. It will be submitted to the EDC, which is responsible for addressing broader issues of educational disadvantage, many of which are relevant to Travellers. Subject to approval, it will then be submitted to the Minister and government for a final decision on its sanction and implementation.

2.12 This report is a record of the Traveller consultation seminars. It is an attempt to document, collate and present the views of the participants who took part in the five regional seminars, which took place in the midlands (Tullamore), East (Dublin), North-West (Sligo), South (Mallow) and South-East (Kilkenny) and the national seminar, which took place in Dublin. The seminars took place in May and June 2004.

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## & THEMES

### RECURRENT THEMES

5.2 Firstly a number of concerns were articulated repeatedly in the workshops. They caused intense levels of discussion and therefore deserve particular attention. These are summarised as follows:

1. **Access** including difficulties enrolling their children in schools and preschools.
2. **Negative attitudes towards Travellers** on the part of teachers, principals, other students and the way these impact on the whole educational experience including discipline, discrimination, low expectations and stereotyping.
3. **Segregation** in provision leading to poorer outcomes for Travellers and less contact with settled peers, thereby feeding into inter-community tensions.
4. **Additional Resources and Supports** being often part of the problem rather than part of the solution as they create a separate, parallel system, dependency and targets of resentment and bullying.
5. **Invalidation of Traveller Culture** in a curriculum that reflects only the settled culture.
6. **Ethos** in schools that is ignorant about cultural diversity fails to understand the effects of internalised oppression and places little importance on the concerns of minorities such as discrimination and prejudice.
7. **Parental involvement** is crucial but currently minimal for a range of reasons including lack of understanding of the system or parents own negative experiences of school. In some cases this can lead to the absolute alienation of some parents from the system.
8. **Outcomes** for Travellers from the significant budget appeared to be very poor highlighting the need for a comprehensive and on-going evaluation of the cost-benefit of such spending and with Travellers being the central participants in that evaluation.

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# INTO THE SEMINARS

## Preparations Before The Day

3.1 Over the years Traveller organisations have engaged with Travellers on educational issues. However, mainly due to a lack of resources, this has been relatively limited. These seminars, supported by DES, were a very positive development and a real opportunity to broaden the process of hearing the Traveller voice in education.

3.2 Traveller organisations, in a very short timeframe managed to organise the logistics and process smoothly and efficiently. In an attempt to maximise the success of the seminars the organisers asked those who were to participate to do some preparation. Detailed documents were sent to each group to indicate the issues that would be discussed, to stimulate reflection and discussion and to explain terminology. Participating groups thereby had a chance to familiarise themselves with the concepts and begin reflecting on the issues. This was particularly important given the short time available on the seminar days.

## Attendance

3.3 A wide range of Traveller groups were invited to attend and approximately 450 people did so. Although the seminars were explicitly organised and supported by DES to ascertain the views of the Traveller community there was a lot of interest expressed by settled people who work with Travellers in attending. This caused some difficulties for the organisers, as the objective was specifically to hear the opinions of the Travellers. It was decided to include a settled workers' workshop to cater for the settled people attending.

## Structure of the Day

3.4 The seminars each ran over a half-day. They involved:

1. An input on the background to the strategy to set the context;
2. Facilitated thematic workshops on pre-schools, primary, post-primary, Traveller-specific training, adult educations and third level education and;
3. A plenary session involving feedback of three priorities from each workshop.

3.5 Traveller parents who participated were primarily focussed on the day-to-day issues, which affect their children in education. Therefore their priorities were those levels of which they have experience and not third level where they had little or no experience. For this reason, in some of the regions, the third level workshop did not take place.

## Setting the Context

*"Education needs to be about liberating Travellers, not about domesticating them. True education will give Travellers the tools to challenge their oppression rather than teaching them how to become acceptable" in a settled world."* - Martin Collins, Pavee Point, addressing the opening session of the national seminar.

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## INTO THE SEMINARS

3.6 The opening part of the seminars provided a context for the discussions:

1. An explanation of the background to the strategy.
2. An outline of educational provision to Travellers.
3. An explanation of the values underpinning the strategy.
4. A call for fresh thinking.

3.7 The opening input explained that a Traveller education strategy was developed in response to the evident issues. It emphasised the importance of Traveller input into that process. It gave a brief outline of the educational status of Travellers and the substantial investment by DES in Traveller education.

3.8 The estimates for enrolment at primary level indicate that in the 2002/2003 school year 5,500 Traveller children were enrolled in primary schools. Of these 673 were in the 12 – 15 age group (This group is a cause of concern as it may be an indication of children not being in age appropriate placement).

3.9 Figures in the table below show that only 1608 Travellers were in post-primary school in 2002/2003. There is a significant drop off rate in the later years of post-primary. Approximately 100 Traveller children between 12 – 15 years attend three Junior Traveller Training Centres and 955 in the 15+ age group attend Senior Traveller Training Centres.

3.10 Given the poor levels of participation and completion of post-primary it is no surprise that only 16 Travellers were reported as being in any third level course in 2002.

3.11 These poor outcomes are despite significant expenditure in Traveller-specific measures, bolstering the case for an analysis of the reasons for the poor outcomes and a review of Traveller education policy.

3.12 The history of Traveller education provision was outlined and some of the key challenges identified. It was explained that differences of opinion in relation to what the priorities should be were gradually being bridged through dialogue and communication between the DES, Traveller groups and other players. The DES traditional focus on attendance, transfer and retention differed from the focus of Traveller groups on anti-discrimination, interculturalism and equality. It is a welcome development that all stakeholders were now addressing all of these issues in partnership.

### **Travellers in Post-Primary 2002/2003**

(Source DES)

<b>Distribution</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Mainstream post-primary	729	879	1608
Year 1	316	334	650
Year 2	213	269	482
Year 3	127	145	272
Year 4	7	19	26
Year 5	42	60	102
Year 6	22	40	62
PLC	2	12	14

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## INTO THE SEMINARS

### Expenditure on Specific Additional Supports for Traveller Education in 2002 (Source DES)

Item	Amount
Pre-schools for Travellers	€1m
Resource Teachers for Travellers 519 @ €40K (notional)	€18.4m
Teaching hours second level (123.32 whole time equivalent posts @ €45K	€4.9m
Extra capitation primary 5,500 @ €266	€1.46
Visiting Teachers for Travellers 40 @ €45 & 1 Education Officer	€1.845m
3 Junior Training Centres 100 X €245	€0.254m
Senior Traveller Training Centres	€12.849m
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>€41.16m</b>

3.13 The values and principles underpinning the strategy were explained, in particular the key values of:

- Inclusion and integration
- Mainstreaming
- Equality of outcomes

This should mean that more than getting Travellers into the education system the target of Traveller education policy will be that Travellers leave the education system with the same benefits as settled people, including results and qualifications, but also cultural esteem. This should involve changes in the way mainstream education is provided in order to cater better for the needs of Travellers. It is intended that the strategy should be a sophisticated response to a complex issue and should impinge on and involve new approaches on the part of all the players, DES, policy makers, providers, schools, teachers, principals, Boards of Management, institutions, inspectors, support services as well as Traveller parents and learners, the wider Traveller community and Traveller representatives and organisations.

3.14 It was stressed to participants that in the workshops they should think broadly about the education system and what needs to change in order to improve it for Travellers and that they should raise their expectations and think about what practical steps need to be taken to turn the current reality into a better future. The focus of the day was not to be on difficulties in the past, although it was important to acknowledge them, but rather it was to be on the key question: What needs to happen to bring about educational equality for Travellers?

### **A Space to Talk**

4.1 Both the national and regional seminars involved thematic workshops. They created a space for people to express their views, discuss issues and relate their personal experiences and that of family members.

4.2 These were very valuable, and it transpires, rare opportunity for many of the participants. It was apparent that opportunities to give expression to their experiences and discuss their ideas could help engage Travellers on the issue. It pointed to the need for continuing opportunities to do so.

### **Good and Bad Experiences**

*"My child has no problems in school. He's treated very well. It's great to see them happy in school and learning and doing all sorts of activities, camps, outings etc."*

*"My child was called names by the teacher. Once that happened the settled kids started asking him if he was a 'knacker'. He was made so embarrassed he didn't want to go back any more. I complained to the principal but nothing happened"*

4.3 While there were examples given of children who had positive experiences with teachers, schools etc., the majority of the opinions expressed or experiences referred to were negative ones. It is clear that individual teachers or other role models within the school system are impacting positively on some Traveller children's lives, but this appears to be dependent on an a committed or innovative individual's rather than being a whole school approach to the integration of Travellers in education. Traveller children are constantly aware that their identity may pose a problem from them in school whether in their relationships with teachers or amongst their settled peers.

4.4 Settled parents can take it for granted that their child will be accepted and welcomed into a school and don't have to think twice about whether or not their cultural identity will be a problem or barrier to their children's education or fair treatment. Traveller parents do not make any such assumptions.

4.5 This fact points to the low expectations many Traveller parents have of the education system, where doing well is measured, at least in part, in terms of success in getting in and not being bullied or hurt while there rather than high levels of academic achievement. For many Traveller parents their lived reality is that their identity is a trigger for discrimination and a school full of potentially hostile settled people is not an attractive place to send their little children. Schools are obviously not immune to such discriminating. The second highest number of complaints to the Equality Tribunal about discrimination by Travellers is in relation to schools.

### **Travellers Want Change**

4.6 It was clear from these workshops that Travellers want change, both within their own community and in the education system. They spoke frankly and openly about the need for some Travellers to take more of an interest in their own and their children's education and to support other Travellers who break the mould by staying in education beyond the usual years. They called for supports to be there to enable the average Traveller parent, who is keen to act

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## **OVERVIEW OF THEMATIC WORKSHOPS (continued)**

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responsibly but who knows very little about the system, to be informed and educated about it so that they can support their child to a better level of education than they have had themselves.

4.7 While it is not the case for every Traveller child, there was a palpable level of hurt expressed by parents when talking about the experiences of their children. It is hard for people to focus on supporting children in their educational attainment when they see their children being hurt by prejudice, whether it manifests itself in the individual attitudes of a teacher or the institutional attitudes of the system.

4.8 In nearly every workshop in every region the issue of teacher attitudes was raised. There is clearly a need to do something comprehensive and effective about this issue.

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# ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THEMATIC WORKSHOPS

## 5

5.1 The following is a detailed account of the issues raised in the thematic workshops and the recommendations for action (numbered R01 etc.) to address those concerns. They are presented in seven sections covering the themes: Preschool, Primary, Post-Primary, Traveller-Specific Training, Adult Education, Third Level and a final section covering Overarching Themes relevant to more than one sector.

### PRESCHOOLS

#### *Participation*

5.3 Preschools were recognised by participants as an important first educational step with lasting consequences. Early intervention and investment is cost-effective in the long run. Travellers need more access to preschools.

- **R01 Both publicly and privately owned preschools should have enrolment policies that guard against discrimination against Travellers.**
- **R02 Availability of pre-schools and pre school places should be increased generally, with a focus on “community support”, supporting parents who are in education and training.**

#### *Inclusive Service*

*“Traveller pre-schools cause labelling and are used as a baby-sitting service.”*

5.4 Many participants thought there should be no Traveller-only pre-schools; that they should all be integrated. They spoke of their experience that Traveller-only services were often poorer services, with fewer resources in sub-standard premises. There were some participants who thought that the key for parents was to have a real choice between Traveller-specific and integrated.

- **R03 Integrated provision of this pre-school service based on intercultural approaches should be the goal in the long term.**
- **R04 If Traveller only pre-schools are to continue they need to be on an equal par with other services in terms of resources e.g. the Early Start Programmes with training for all staff in terms of interculturalism and anti racism.**
- **R05 Pre-school provision should not be on-site because if it is provided away from the site there is a better chance of mixing with settled people and breaking down the barriers.**

#### *Premises*

*“The building they are in is terrible. They are constantly being shut down.”*

5.5 The standard of premises for the Traveller-only pre-schools was thought to be poor.

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## ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THEMATIC WORKSHOPS 5

- **R06 There should be purpose-built centres available in each community for use by all the community, Traveller and settled. Funding for such centres should be based on the inclusion of groups such as Travellers and all staff should be trained in the anti bias approach. Enrolment policies should be inclusive and anti racist codes of practice implemented for all centres so there is no room for the exclusion of Traveller children.**

### PRIMARY

#### ***Participation***

*"Travellers are still being refused places in schools. They come up with plenty of excuses but it's as clear as day that they don't want us. What sort of a message is that to give to a child?"*

5.6 Participants related that Travellers still experience many difficulties enrolling their children in schools. Some Travellers' attitude to education is negative, leading to poor attendance. It is vital therefore that education is promoted positively amongst the Traveller community. The context in which some Travellers do not see the value in education should be understood in terms of the day to day experience of discrimination and the reality of not accessing employment even with educational qualifications.

5.7 A number of participants raised the issue of the cost of education and how it puts a burden on parents who are already heavily burdened, particularly where there are larger families.

#### ***In-school experience***

5.8 The treatment of their children in schools was a serious cause of complaint for many. Incidents of racist bullying and discrimination by teachers and settled peers were related from the schoolyard to the classroom. It also seems that some schools are not dealing with this issue in a very even-handed manner and tend to be predisposed to blaming the Traveller for getting into fights without exploring if racist bullying was a factor in such incidents. Schools, it was said, don't like to admit that it is happening.

5.9 Participants reported that Traveller children tend to be treated differently in relation to disciplinary matters; that there can be an assumption that Traveller children are the cause of problems. There is very little understanding of the impact of inter-community tensions and their minority status within the school population and in the schoolyard. Likewise there is very little understanding of how internalised oppression manifests itself and how to deal with it.

5.10 Some felt that teachers are afraid to challenge or discipline Traveller children, which in itself can lead to poor behaviour.

5.11 For various reasons teachers often do not want or know how to deal with the complex issues of Traveller identity and therefore tend not to address the topic at all. Lack of validation of identity, often reinforces some Traveller children's inclination to hide their identity in order to fit in.

#### ***Outcomes***

5.12 There is little hard data available on how Travellers are getting on in school.

- **R07 Mechanisms for measuring and assessing the outcomes for Travellers need to be identified. Data collection and analysis systems are required at all levels of the education system.**

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# ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THEMATIC WORKSHOPS 5

## **Management**

- 5.13 It was felt that where there is a positive, approachable, principal who is welcoming then there are very few other problems that are insurmountable. The principal dictates the culture and ethos of the school.
- **R08 Programmes should be initiated to promote positive inclusive leadership by principals. Boards of Management need to do similar training as well.**
  - **R09 Equality and anti-racism should be properly built into the fabric of the school and all its various aspects.**

## **Homework**

- 5.14 Teachers need to have a greater understanding of the barriers for Traveller children and the impact that poor literacy of Traveller parents has on homework.
- **R10 The practice of giving homework should be equality-proofed. There should be a review of the educational value and necessity of homework and in particular its impact on inequality and disadvantage. If it is to continue, inclusive after-school homework supports should be available in the school premises. Parents could get involved in such homework clubs. Children should not receive extra homework from the RTT.**

## **Supports**

- 5.15 A whole range of extra resources are being put into Traveller education. This needs to be reviewed. Participants felt that Traveller children should be involved in all aspects of school life and sometimes the extra resources were not having the desired effect.
- 5.16 The allocation of **extra capitation** to schools for each Traveller enrolled where there is an RTT is a cause of concern to Travellers. Apart from the concern that there is little transparency in how the resources are used the whole concept is considered questionable in that it appears to be an incentive to schools to accept Travellers.

*"It is ridiculous to be taking Traveller children out of class to learn Traveller culture."*

- 5.17 They felt that there is a lot of poor practice in the use of these resources and pending the complete review of the system the following practice should be observed:
- **R11 There needs to be full consultation with parents before a child is given support by the Resource Teacher for Travellers; the support should be delivered in class, the teachers should be trained in anti-racism and interculturalism.**
  - **R12 All children with learning support needs should get in-class supports and links should be made between after school supports services and the resource/learning support teacher in the school to ensure that the child's needs are fully developed. Learning Support should be underpinned by the following principles:**

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## ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THEMATIC WORKSHOPS

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- **It should be needs based**
- **Inclusive of all children**
- **RTT should be called the Learning Support Teacher and should be available to all children**
- **After schools support is about the provision of homework supports particularly for children whose parents may be unable to support them in doing their homework and where perhaps the environment is not conducive to studying. It should be resourced through community based initiatives and expanded where they are not in existence.**
- **Learning supports within schools on the other hand are supports for in class work and act as a support to the main teacher in carrying out the delivery of the required lessons.**

5.18 Removal of children to go to a **Resource Teacher for Travellers** without consultation with parents should not happen but it does. Many parents are unaware of what this service entails. It should be based on educational assessment. All children should be appropriately assessed when they start school, not just Travellers. There should be no removal during class time.

5.19 It was also reported that withdrawal sometimes leads to children getting two sets of homework, which indicates poor communication between classroom teacher and RTT. Children are also missing necessary classes and it sets the Traveller child apart. After school support is a good idea. This could be where the RTT is most useful, but it should be mixed and they could help with homework. Many Traveller parents consulted felt that if the RTT was to remain a new job description could be developed for the role. This could include working with nomadic families and linking in with the providers of **after-school supports**. The RTT should always be working as part of a team.

- **R13 The Resource Teacher for Traveller (RTT) service should be reviewed.**

5.20 There was a range of views on the **Visiting Teacher Service**. Some participants thought there was no need for such a service at all; others thought they should visit parents more often. It was suggested that they should have a role in organising homework clubs. These different opinions and views resulted in some participants commenting that it is crucial that the Visiting Teacher Service would be reviewed.

5.21 The role of the **Home/School/Community Liaison** Service may also need to be revised. There were mixed feelings about it but most people know very little or nothing about it.

*"There are positive and negative aspects to Visiting Teacher Service and there is also good and bad practice. They have a particular role to play in relation to transient families. It should not be assumed that all Travellers need the service. It should be provided on a needs basis."*

- **R14 In light of developments in the area of Education Welfare, and the need to build an inclusive education service for Travellers, there is a need to review and evaluate as a matter of priority the Visiting Teacher Service.**
- **R15 The role of the Education Welfare Officer also needs to be clarified and communicated to parents.**
- **R16 All children should be assessed re educational welfare on a yearly basis. The assessment methods should be reviewed to make sure they are not culturally biased. Resources should then be allocated on the basis of need rather than identity.**

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# ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THEMATIC WORKSHOPS

5

## POST-PRIMARY

***"XX (NAME OF STUDENT) CAME IN LATE AND TEACHER STARTED TO GIVE OUT TO HIM AND THEN SAID TO HIM " I DON'T WANT YOU TO TURN OUT LIKE A KNACKER I WANT YOU TO HAVE A GOOD EDUCATION". I WAS VERY UPSET BY THE COMMENT SO I WAITED UNTIL AFTER CLASS TO SPEAK TO HER. WHEN I ASKED HER WHAT SHE MEANT BY THE COMMENT HER ANSWER WASN'T SATISFACTORY" (1<sup>ST</sup> YEAR STUDENT)***

### ***Participation***

5.22 The factors affecting post-primary participation are complex. Poor accommodation has a clear impact on a person's capacity to stay in education in terms of being able to study and learn in the home environment etc. Participants acknowledged that Travellers at 14 years are expected to take on more of an adult role than a child's. Uniforms and school rules can seem "babyish" leading to pressure to leave school and become an adult. The general pressures teenagers feel, in relation to identity and fitting in, are magnified in the case of teenagers from minority communities, such as Travellers.

5.23 The reality is that Traveller pupils and the families experience racism and discrimination by both institutions and individuals. Traveller teenagers are particularly vulnerable to this as they have to deal with a variety of teachers and class composition varies during the day. Teenage years are a difficult emotional time in one's life and this is compounded for Travellers by the racism and discrimination they experience.

5.24 In post primary school if Travellers require additional supports, these seem to be harder to access and avail of than at primary school level. The allocation of 1.5hours per student needs to be looked at in order to examine the use of these hours and to question their use.

5.25 As with primary school, some parents have different opinions on the role of the Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers. Confusion can arise between Home School Liaison Officers, Education and Welfare Officers and the role of the VTS. This needs to be clarified for parents and a full review of the VTS completed in consultation with Traveller organisations.

5.26 Enrolment continues to be an issue in post-primary school particularly for nomadic families and local families living on the roadside who are moved by the local authorities.

5.27 Some participants expressed their anger that Travellers in secondary schools can be the subject of rolling suspensions which are not viewed as necessary which means missing exorbitant amounts of school with little that can be done about the situation. Many Travellers feel that rolling suspensions can be used as a way of avoiding having Travellers in the classroom or schools

5.28 Parental involvement in post primary schools is even less than in primary education. Because a pupil does not have one set teacher a parent has no regular face with which to interact. This is particularly difficult for a parent of a Traveller as it means negotiating the 'identity' issue with several teachers.

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## ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THEMATIC WORKSHOPS

## 5

5.29 One mother related how she gives her daughter her child benefit allowance to keep her in school. It was felt that the idea of a financial incentive to keep children in school should be explored. Perhaps child benefit payments should be increased for people on low income levels in line with the recommendations from other community and voluntary organisations.

5.30 Training Centres have a huge role in children not finishing school. Many aspects of the training centres are attractive to young Travellers, including the allowance and comfort of being with Traveller peers.

5.31 It appeared, to some participants that children could be out of school without any real follow-up from the services. It is also felt that the levels of resources and supports at post primary are not at the same level as primary schools, yet it is post primary school where the level of early school leaving amongst Travellers is most apparent.

5.32 In general the suggestions to improve participation at second level are to get parents more involved in supporting their children, to train teachers to deal with diversity in a positive way, to address transport needs properly, to work towards a more inclusive school system that would mean that training centres would not be needed for teenage Travellers and to work on the attitudes of Travellers to education.

- **R17 The Education Welfare Act is good but the trigger for action should be 20 days absence and no more.**
- **R18 There should be an investment in education and capacity building work with Traveller parents so that they understand the long-term benefits staying in school may offer their children.**
- **R19 Schools should put equality and anti-racism clearly and centrally on their agenda at all levels and in an integrated way into their plans and policies.**
- **R20 There needs to be more flexibility in the way courses are delivered in post-primary, including, for example, modular programmes. Schools should be able to support people to do apprenticeships. Extra resources and supports needed to ensure the retention of Travellers in post primary education e.g. school completion programmes**

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# ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THEMATIC WORKSHOPS

5

## TRAVELLER-SPECIFIC TRAINING

### **Participation**

5.33 Participants felt that some of the Traveller specific training was allowing course to be tailored to meet the specific needs of Travellers and at the same time affording people the opportunity to get out of the home and involved in society.

5.34 There was an articulated need for more flexibility in terms of how and when courses are provided.

### **Inclusive Service**

5.35 Participants felt that Travellers need education and training opportunities of a high standard that is respectful of their identity. They were not generally against the idea of Traveller-specific training per se, as in certain circumstances it had the potential to address specific issues relevant to them.

5.36 People expressed varying opinions on STTCS such as the fact that some good practice and educational opportunities are available in these centres. It was acknowledged that the level of opportunities available to Travellers in the mainstream labour market was limited due to discrimination on the part of employers. There were concerns and an acknowledgement of the need for changes to the model of STTC e.g. young people should be catered for in school while others felt that young people who are out of school need some alternative to go to. For older people it was felt that it is good for them to have some training available to them but felt that many older people were on a "merry-go-round", repeating the same courses in STTC's. In this regard some people expressed the view that STTC's should be phased out.

### **Outcomes**

*"It needs to be "proper" accreditation beyond foundation level and there needs to be links with real jobs."*

5.37 Accreditation is important to give value to the training but participants complained of getting accreditation in the Senior Traveller Training Centres that had little real value. However this frustration is in part due to discrimination in the workplace.

*"If a STTC is an alternative to school then it should be a better education than schools, but it generally isn't. When people leave the STTC there is nothing for them. It doesn't go anywhere."*

5.38 Some participants felt that once a qualification is seen as coming from a STTC it is seen as inferior and becomes a block. They thought that FETAC should promote an equal recognition of Traveller qualifications from STTC's with employers.

5.39 The attitudes of employers need to be changed. It was suggested that employers should be offered incentives to employ Travellers. Career guidance was also seen to be necessary. Greater links need to be created with LES and through work experience with employers.

- **R21 The long-term strategy should be to work towards more inclusive integrated training opportunities for Travellers. As an initial immediate step training centres should not pay allowances to trainees under 18 years of age. This would deter Travellers from leaving school for a financial incentive.**

**The Quality framework must be implemented in all adult education spheres and there needs to be an overhaul and reform of adult education provision for Travellers in the short term.**

**The medium to long term strategy should be to work towards the provision of inclusive adult education which would mean a phased integration of Traveller learners to mainstream adult education provision and work towards the development of an inclusive adult education model for Travellers and settled people. This would mean that all adult education provision would be inclusive, anti racist and would target Travellers and it would have some of the following:**

- **Accredited training of a high standard of quality**
- **Be provided in an intercultural and anti racist setting**
- **Provide real outcomes in terms of educational and employment opportunities**

**Steps should be taken over the long term to have a phased integration of adult Traveller Learners to mainstream adult education provision, in the context of a real change in the current development and provision of adult education and access to the labour market. This would mean the phasing out of the model of Senior Traveller Training centres in the long term.**

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# ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THEMATIC WORKSHOPS

## 5

### *Supports*

5.40 Lack of adequate childcare means that there is a risk that some younger people are being taken out of school to mind children while their parents are doing training courses.

5.41 Training provides an allowance that helps with the family income. However the impact of participation on training course on social welfare entitlements is a big consideration for people going on courses and it can be an obstacle to progression if progression means losing a medical card and other secondary benefits.

5.42 On the other hand training allowances should not be allowed to be an enticement to leave school.

- **R22 The age limit for training allowances should be increased to 18 years of age. This would eliminate one of the pull-factors from the school system.**
- **R23 That there would be a phased approach to the loss of secondary benefits for those accessing further education, training and employment to alleviate the financial burden attached to their loss. The medical card should be retained for five years after becoming employed**

### **ADULT EDUCATION**

#### *Participation*

5.43 Childcare provision and transport are important and are not generally adequately available to Travellers who wish to engage in adult education programmes.

5.44 It is also important that resources be put into getting information to Travellers about the opportunities and potential benefits of engaging in adult education.

- **R24 There needs to be more outreach work with Travellers regarding the issue of education. It is important that Travellers be supported to see the long-term value of education and the impact it has on a person's future rather than making choices solely based on the short-term allowances they get.**
- **R25 Work needs to be carried out on reviewing existing adult education provision, to ensure that any barriers to participation are alleviated and the appropriate measures are taken to make existing training more accessible.**

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# ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THEMATIC WORKSHOPS

## 5

### ***INCLUSIVE SERVICE***

5.45 Greater links should be built between Travellers and other adult education agencies so that Travellers access, to a greater degree, mainstream or integrated adult and further education opportunities. Greater links would also mean that providers of integrated adult education services would be encouraged to respond more to the needs of Travellers and build interculturalism into their approaches.

### **THIRD LEVEL *Participation***

5.46 Participants thought that Travellers are not going to third level in any significant numbers because they are not succeeding at second level. They said that second level would have to improve first in order to bring about a situation where more Travellers were accessing third level.

5.47 One way to improve the numbers going would be to target adults (mature students) and put in a range of supports, including childcare. The Traveller community would also need to be made aware of the benefits of going to college. There would need to be a strategy to counter negative peer pressure that stops people breaking the mould and doing something that is outside the norm for the community. Travellers would need to feel supported by their families and community. Community development work could play a role in building confidence and support.

5.48 The financial implications of staying in education are a serious deterrent to third level as is the experience of discrimination or fear of it.

5.49 In the long-term an attitudinal changes will be required at individual and institutional levels so that participation in third level by Travellers and other non-traditional participants will become normalised and routine.

5.50 The question of role models was seen to be important. There is a need for young Travellers to see other Travellers going through the system and on to third level and benefiting from it in order to confirm to them that it makes sense to stay in school and to do well there.

- **R26 Efforts should be made to highlight the successes and to give publicity at local and national level to educationally successful Travellers. Perhaps those Travellers who have completed second level and third level would be included in a role model campaign.<sup>1</sup> The Irish Traveller Movement's video should be used as a tool to highlight 3<sup>rd</sup> level.**
- **R27 In the medium term, pending more substantial developments in the field, Traveller organisations should liaise with third level institutions and target Travellers who show an interest and potential and support them to enter third level through Access programmes, as mature students and indeed through conventional routes. Bursaries and scholarships and other financial supports will need to be identified, as will other supports. \***

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\* See, Irish Traveller Movement, education video entitled, 'Moving-on, Travellers & Third level Education', launch date October 20th @ UCC.

## Overarching Themes

### *Role of Parents*

5.51 There needs to be action taken to get Traveller parents more involved in the process of their children's education and in the structures of the schools and to address the barriers to such involvement. There is a perception that some parents don't care about their children's education or are irresponsible with regard to it. Many parents are despondent about education and feel that their children are not going to get anything out of staying in school because of the general attitudes of the majority settled community. Many also lack the confidence to go into the schools and as a result confidence measures are required to overcome this. Measures need to also be taken to address the negative attitudes that Travellers experience.

5.52 Parents need to take an interest in their child's education and try to build a good relationship with the teacher and school. Lack of communication between parents and teachers is a problem. Some parents feel that the existence of the Visiting Teacher can risk breaking the link between the parents and the teacher.

5.53 Informal as well as formal involvement should be encouraged e.g. if parents were invited to help out for a morning in the school, this would be an ideal opportunity to communicate informally and get to know about the school and for the school to build a relationship with the parents.

- **R28 The Traveller Education Strategy should include a strategy in relation to Traveller parents. This strategy should have as its focus the improvement of the level of engagement by parents with the education of their children and the school and other structures**
- **R29 That a training and information programme would be set-up to empower Traveller parents with information on the education system and how it is operated.**
- **R30 A space needs to be created for real dialogue between Traveller parents and teachers. Like wise their informed involvement in Parents' Councils and Boards of Management is something that needs to be actively supported.**
- **R31 Good experiences of co-operation between Traveller parents, schools and Traveller organisations at a local level should be built upon.**
- **R32 Initiatives should be taken to build Traveller parents knowledge and confidence to get involved in an informed a positive way in preschools. One way might be to establish Traveller Parent Support Groups.**
- **R33 There should be a meeting with parents before the child starts in pre-school. On-going one to one meetings to get an in-depth picture of how the child is progressing would be ideal.**

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## ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THEMATIC WORKSHOPS

## 5

### ***Transport***

5.54 The thrust of discussion on this topic was that the school transport needs of Traveller children should be dealt with in an inclusive way that gives due consideration to the specific situations of Travellers, such as the oft marginal location of their accommodation. The service should not continue where it is not necessary or where it is creating or feeding a culture of dependency, is facilitating the exclusion of Travellers from certain schools, or is generating resentment from members of the settled community who are in similar circumstances.

5.55 The way transport is currently being provided can mean that Travellers in some cases miss the first hour of school. Or in other cases pre-school children go on the same bus as primary children and end up being on the bus a long time each day (8am to 10am). They should go on the same buses as the settled children. They end up missing the very important socialising that goes on before school etc. and end up stigmatised from a very early stage, arriving on separate busses at different times (often late).

5.56 Traveller accommodation is often located away from services, including transport. This is an example of disjointed planning on the part of various service providers.

5.57 Changes to the service should be developed in consultation with Travellers and Traveller organisations. It was suggested that on integrated transport systems an adult along with the driver should be present to alleviate any problems with bullying or similar types of behaviour.

- **R34 School transport for Travellers should be provided in an inclusive, integrated way ensuring that Travellers arrive in school on time, it should be needs based.**

### ***Multi-Agency Approach***

*"The government must acknowledge the marginalisation of Travellers and apologise for the way they have been treated."*

5.58 The wider Traveller situation has a severe impact on Traveller education and needs to be addressed - only then can progress be made and barriers broken down. A lack of co-ordination between the various government departments and agencies as well as contradictory policies, is hampering the effective provision of services, and Travellers are paying the price. One suggestion, in the area of childcare, was that there should be a junior minister responsible for childcare to take responsibility for all aspects of the service.

- **R35 The Social Inclusion Unit should have responsibility to drive the strategy and ensure its implementation across the department's structures. The implementation of the strategy should be monitored by the ACTE with regular reports and updates being conveyed by the high level official for social inclusion as to progress being made.**

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# ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THEMATIC WORKSHOPS

5

## ***Nomadism***

5.59 Nomadic children should have access to preschool and school. They have the same right to an education that respects their culture. When changing schools it often happens that classes are not at the same level or stage of the curriculum. Some standardisation would help in this regard.

- **R36 A preschool assistant should have the role of targeting Traveller children in the area who are nomadic to ensure they know about the service and are included.**
- **R37 The practice of one enrolment per year militates against nomads and should be reviewed to see if there is a better way. The idea of reserved spaces for children who are nomadic should be considered, particularly where there is a predictable level of nomadism.**

## ***Professional Development***

*"Some teachers don't know how to deal with Travellers. I think they're afraid of them".*

5.60 Teachers need to be skilled in dealing with difference in a positive way. Many teachers do not know how to deal with it and think that the right thing to do is to hide or minimise difference.

- **R38 Teachers should have adequate training on issues related to discrimination. This training should be a core part of their training and not an elective part. The professional development of teachers should be reinforced through follow-up after training. This follow-up should incorporate policies and procedures in relation to professional practice and independent monitoring and evaluation. The level and quality of contact between teachers and parents should be explicitly dealt with as part of this process of professional development.**

5.61 The importance of role modelling was highlighted and is probably more important in education than in most other fields.

- **R39 Positive action steps should be implemented to bring Travellers into the professional role of teachers, educators and educational assistants. These should include "on the job" training and development of other access routes into the profession.**

## ***Attitudes***

5.62 The attitudes of teachers and assistants are crucial. If they are discriminating or are hostile to Travellers they should not be working with Traveller children as they could be doing a lot of damage.

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## ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THEMATIC WORKSHOPS

5

5.63 Expectations of both teachers and parents were generally felt to be low and a contributory factor to low outcomes. This was reflected in assumptions, for example, that Travellers could not and should not learn Irish. A broad education with full access to a wide range of subjects is needed.

5.64 The attitude of Traveller parents to education is generally changing to being more positive. However many expressed feelings of ambivalence because they feel that their children won't get a job out of it anyhow because of the discrimination they face.

- **R40 The pre-school leader or principal should assess and monitor how the Travellers are being treated as well and their standard of learning.**

5.65 Participants raised questions about the regime ethos in many of the Senior Traveller Training Centres. They argued that there is a need for more respect and understanding of the needs, culture and circumstances of Travellers.

5.66 The attitudes of the tutors need attention, not just because they may be sometimes negative but because they have a big impact on the outcomes. Many teachers or tutors may work with Travellers using a charitable approach that is not focussed on empowering Travellers. This approach can lead to the further disempowerment of an already marginalised community

- **R41 Tutors need access to attitudinal and intercultural training to support them to work in a way in a way that is culturally appropriate, inclusive and empowering for Travellers to develop to their full potential.**

### ***Interculturalism***

5.67 A strong message came from the workshops that curricula in the various educational settings should be interpreted in an intercultural way and appropriate resources developed - books, images, posters, etc.

5.68 This would mean that Traveller children would become more confident about their identity when they enter primary school. This needs to be reflected in teacher and assistant training.

5.69 It was suggested that a subject could be introduced in schools specifically on cultures and difference.

5.70 The teenage years for Travellers, as it is for all teenagers, are a critical point in relation to their identity and how other people perceive them. Fear of rejection or discrimination can undermine a child's sense of their Traveller identity. This can be compounded if the messages they receive from others, peers, teachers, school, etc are negative about that identity.

5.71 Informed and skilled work is necessary for the adults in these situations to be able to work with Traveller and other minority children in a way that makes them feel good, proud and positive about who they are and develops their sense of being able to contribute to their school

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# ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THEMATIC WORKSHOPS

5

and society. There are many instances where people related how they felt the opposite: devalued, not listened to, bullied, rejected, because of their Traveller identity, by adults, including teachers, administrators, bus drivers and settled peers.

- **R42 Intercultural teaching methods, approaches and materials should become the standard in schools. It should be fully integrated into the whole system. An environment should be fostered where Traveller children feel validated and comfortable and where the effects of internalised oppression are recognised and dealt with. Cultural difference should be built into schoolwork in an inclusive and respectful way.**
- **R43 Resources, toys etc. should be accessed or developed that validate Traveller culture and diversity.**
- **R44 The anti-bias approach<sup>2</sup> should be adopted and mainstreamed.**

## ***Recruitment of Travellers as Service Providers***

5.72 There is a need for positive action (i.e. positive drives to recruit Travellers and to make Travellers employable). Travellers should be actively targeted so that they can move into roles of responsibility in schools as teachers or assistants etc. to generate good role models and to raise self-esteem and expectations of Traveller children.

- **R45 Travellers should be trained as literacy teachers and as adult education workers.**
- **R46 Community development initiatives targeting Travellers as education workers need to be developed. We recommend that the Dept. of Education would work with the Traveller NGO's to develop an appropriate model.**
- **R47 Traveller organisations need to be resourced to participate in the Traveller Education Strategy.**
- **R48 Travellers must be employed in all levels of the education system. It is essential that there are initiatives to encourage this necessary development in order to ensure that Traveller children not only have role models within the system, but also that Traveller adults have the opportunity to access such employment opportunities.**

## ***Traveller Men***

5.73 The perception that rearing children and their education is the role of women is compounded in the Traveller community by their marginalisation. There is a need for an initiative to target Traveller men and boys.

- **R49 That Traveller projects are resourced to engage Traveller women and men in community development initiatives relating to education. These would involve not just raising their awareness but also building the capacity of families to engage better with the system. Particular initiatives need to be taken to target Travellers men for training. Courses need to be made relevant to their particular training needs.**

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<sup>2</sup> An Anti-bias approach to education is described as "An active/activist approach challenging prejudice, stereotyping, bias and 'isms'. It actively intervenes, to challenge and counter the personal and institutional behaviours that perpetuate oppression". Eist- respecting diversity in early childhood care, education and training, Pavee Point p.39

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## **ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THEMATIC WORKSHOPS**

**5**

### ***Community Issues***

5.74 Apart from the cultural dimension of nomadism, Travellers organise their lives in other ways that are generally different from the majority community. These sometimes militate against their children's education and draw the children out of school. For example sometimes priority is given to family events, and children are absent from school, sometimes for extended periods of time with consequences for the child's education. While it is important for children to be involved in family events they must be balanced against their impact on the long-term education of the child. This dilemma needs to be addressed in a sensitive way.

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## STRATEGIES EMANATING FROM THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

## 6

There was a high degree of unanimity across all regions as to the broad changes that need to take place to improve the situation. The overall thrust was that, unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the experience of Travellers as learners or trainees was consistent with their experience in general in Irish society. It is also noteworthy that there was also a strong level of consistency between the thrust of what the Travellers identified as the issues and the changes necessary and the thrust of what was identified in the majority of the submissions to the strategy.

6.2 In particular the consultation with Travellers emphasised the need for the following core strategies:

### **Strategy I. Teacher Attitudes**

***Changing the attitudes and expectations of teachers and providers and improving their capacity to deal positively with Travellers in particular and with diversity in general.***

6.3 The focus of this change should come through a strategy at the level of their pre and in-service training and education and through on-going evaluation and development.

### **Strategy II. Involving Traveller Parents**

***Improving the capacity of Traveller parents to support their children's (and their own) education.***

6.4 To achieve this will require resources from the DES for community development initiatives to engage parents in building a greater understanding and appreciation of the education system, and also resources to train and employ Travellers in a new role of community education workers.

### **Strategy III. Quality of In-School Experience**

***Shifting the focus in Traveller education from attendance and participation to a focus on the quality of the in-school experience and the outcomes/achievement/employment for Traveller learners, graduates of education and training.***

6.5 This will require shifts in the way Travellers are dealt with in schools and how resources are used.

6.6 There was a very strong sense that, as a minimum first step to turning around the poor outcomes, discrimination and racism will have to end, in whatever form or shape they present themselves, be it low expectations, double standards, or ethnic stereotyping. It will also require appropriate data to be collected and collated and the development of inclusive policies and practices at all levels of educational establishments.

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# STRATEGIES EMANATING FROM THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

6

## Strategy IV. Full Interculturalism

***Making interculturalism a cornerstone of all educational settings so that all children learn to deal positively with difference, develop confidence in their own identity, whether majority or minority and develop the skills to think critically about racism and other forms of oppression.***

6.7 This will require leadership, commitment and investment to bring about the necessary changes in the ethos, approaches, programmes and capacities of educational institutions.

## Strategy V. Multi-Agency Approaches

***Building multi-agency approaches to the issues in recognition of the complexity and plural nature of the factors that impact on Travellers' education.***

6.8 Ways need to be found to build a common and co-ordinated approach both within and between different agencies with responsibilities for Travellers ranging from accommodation, health, social welfare, education etc. in order to address in a holistic way the full range of factors affecting them.

## Strategy VI. Education Provision for Nomads

***Making the education service more accessible to Travellers who are nomadic.***

6.9 This will require a determined and concerted approach to develop "nomad-friendly" services and initiatives and to remove the biases that exist in enrolment and other policies, which militate against nomadism.

## Strategy VII. Inclusion

***Providing services to Travellers in an inclusive, integrated setting.***

6.10 This will require the phasing out of services currently provided in a segregated manner and the adaptation of the mainstream services to a more inclusive and intercultural orientation.

## Strategy VIII On-Going Consultation and Participation

***Placing Travellers at the centre of monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the strategy***

6.11 This will involve developing an on-going process of consultation with the Traveller community to a point where they are participating fully in monitoring the implementation and evaluating the effectiveness of each dimension.

## Strategy IX Ring fencing Resources

6.12 The resources allocated to Traveller education should be maintained. If there are areas where expenditure can be reallocated, this should be prioritised on actions concerning Traveller parents and the development of the employment of Traveller Community Education Workers.

# CONCLUSION

# 7

*"It is clear from this consultation process that Travellers do not want minor reforms to the current package of measures addressing their educational needs. They want radical change. They want it brought back to the drawing board."* - Anastasia Crickley, MA Applied Social Studies, NUI Maynooth in the closing session of the national seminar.

7.1 The consultation process provided an excellent opportunity to consider the wide range of issues both at the regional and national seminars relating to Traveller education. The commitment by DES to develop and implement a Traveller Education Strategy was warmly welcomed and participants throughout the country clearly wished it great success. The growing focus on the importance of education to the Traveller community means that there is an opportunity now to make significant progress towards redressing the inequalities of the past.

7.2 In the final part of the national seminar the following broad themes were identified to encapsulate the overall views of the Traveller participants in the consultation process.

## **Acknowledge Past Hurt**

7.3 The strategy should acknowledge the hurt and damage caused to generations of Travellers from the old system. The effective exclusion of Travellers, or their inclusion on inferior terms, has done psychological and emotional damage to many. The need for this acknowledgement is an essential starting point for change. By acknowledging the failings of the past it is more likely that those involved will be able to move forward together.

## **Radical/Real Change Rather Than Reform**

7.4 The system is not satisfactory and requires radical change. Reform of the existing measures and approaches is not enough, what is required is a major overhaul. This change will benefit all students not just Travellers.

7.5 The Traveller Education Strategy should be a catalyst for the changes that are necessary to end educational disadvantage. In particular it should highlight the dimensions of disadvantage that are particular to those who are from disadvantaged ethnic minority communities, such as discrimination and racism.

## **Inclusion into a Changed System**

7.6 The way forward has been clearly and repeatedly identified in the consultation process as integration and inclusion, in other words, to bring to an end the history of separate and parallel provision for Travellers. This parallel system is most visible in the continued provision of over fifty Traveller preschools, a small number of Traveller primary schools, the small number of Traveller Junior Training Centres and the thirty Senior Traveller Training Centres.

7.7 However the existence of these separate services is often explained on the basis that the mainstream services are neither positively disposed to Travellers nor capable of meeting their distinct needs. Integration and inclusion of Travellers must involve more than the ending of separate provision; it must involve inclusion into a changed system – one which is skilled in dealing with cultural difference positively and is validating of Traveller identity, i.e. one which has interculturalism at its core.

# CONCLUSION

# 7

## **Beyond Access**

7.8 There needs to be a significant shift in thinking which includes, but goes beyond, the question of access and deals seriously and in an in-depth manner with the whole nature of the participation and the treatment of Travellers in education and training. It further needs to be focused on generating positive and equal outcomes for Travellers from that participation.

## **Rethinking Allocation of Supports and Resources**

7.9 While it is acknowledged that significant resources have been allocated to Traveller education over recent decades there is an urgent necessity for a rethink on how they are allocated and what outcomes they generate. Much of what is allocated has been in the nature of setting up parallel services rather than making the mainstream services more in tune with meeting the needs and aspirations of Travellers within a framework that is positively disposed to diversity.

## **Community Development and Educational Change**

7.10 The role of Traveller community development organisations was acknowledged as an empowering and positive force in bringing about awareness and positive change. Travellers at these seminars displayed an intense concern for the education of their children and an awareness of the potential role education can play in their emancipation.

7.11 It was identified that there has been little investment in the community development approach to Traveller educational issues and very few of the national or local Traveller NGOs had resources for dedicated or specific educational workers or projects. It was clear that the potential of such NGOs to contribute to Traveller involvement in the education system, to policy thinking and to service provision is much greater than that which is currently being harnessed and that there needs to be a substantial investment in this area if the strategy is to be well-informed, inclusive and effective. In particular the need for Travellers to be trained and employed as community education workers, as teachers and educational service providers was something that was raised again and again.

## **Different Travellers, Different Needs**

7.12 The notion that Travellers are a homogenous group is a false one. Within the Traveller community there are many differences which require sophistication if their needs are to be met equally. Young and old, men and women, disabled and abled, rural and urban, nomadic and sedentary are some examples of the range of difference within the community. Life long learning is a concept and ideal particularly pertinent to Travellers in this context and in light of the general low levels of formal education most Travellers have had.

## **A Challenge to All**

7.13 The change envisaged will require the involvement and commitment of all players. It is not simply a matter of working with teachers and pupils. It also includes the management role of principals, the evaluation roles of inspectors, the policy roles of civil servants and elected representatives as well as the all-important role of the parents in supporting the child at home. Finally it must also involve bringing an equality/anti-racism focus to the fore at all levels of the system, from the formal to the non-formal education sectors. This will require leadership as new challenges are met and new ways of working, thinking and behaving evolve.

# APPENDIX – PRIORITIES FROM THEMATIC WORKSHOPS BOTH THE REGIONAL AND NATIONAL SEMINAR

## 8

Sector	• Midlands	• East	• North-west	• South-east	• South
Pre-school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integration</li> <li>• Training of workers in interculturalism</li> <li>• Service accessible to nomads</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should be an integrated service only</li> <li>• Traveller children should have their identity validated through intercultural approach (in teacher training)</li> <li>• Transport should be available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus at government level through Junior Minister for Childcare</li> <li>• Resources and quality – need more spaces in pre-schools and supports for parents to access them</li> <li>• Integration is the goal and anti-bias approach should be implemented in all pre-schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrated and intercultural</li> <li>• Travellers should be trained and employed as teachers</li> <li>• Travellers should be on management committees</li> <li>• Condition of Traveller preschools very poor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integration of pre-schools, close Traveller- only ones</li> <li>• Teacher training in anti-bias and interculturalism</li> <li>• Resource materials to support diversity and validation of Traveller culture</li> <li>• Supports to parents, transport, supports to get involved in BOMs</li> </ul>
Primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Courses for parents on how all levels of education system work</li> <li>• Training of teachers in interculturalism and dealing positively with diversity</li> <li>• Effective and early follow-up to absenteeism, including the training and employment of Travellers as Community Education Workers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning support should be based on assessed need, not identity</li> <li>• Interculturalism should be built into school policy and teacher training</li> <li>• Review needed of VTS and RTT and mechanism established for on-going review of outcomes for Travellers</li> <li>• Travellers should be recruited into named positions (positive action)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning support should be integrated</li> <li>• Transport should be integrated</li> <li>• Outreach initiative to promote parental involvement/interest</li> <li>• Deal with difference positively in school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to education but with outcomes</li> <li>• Teacher training in dealing positively with diversity</li> <li>• Curriculum should also meet Travellers needs</li> <li>• Equality in the classroom in terms of homework, sanctions and discipline and all children should be provided with lunch</li> <li>• Discrimination is a big issue in schools and has a huge impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After-schools support</li> <li>• Transparency and accountability to Traveller community re Traveller education budget</li> <li>• All children should be assessed and get rid of “slow learner” stigma</li> <li>• Teachers should be assessed for professional effectiveness</li> <li>• Schooling should be done in lunch school, supports should be after school</li> </ul>
Post-primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traveller Community Education workers to work with VTS.</li> <li>• Supports for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interculturalism</li> <li>• Full review of STTC’s</li> <li>• Traveller education budget should be</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failures at post-primary stem from pre-school and primary</li> <li>• Teacher training in dealing with</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low expectation of teachers need to be addressed</li> <li>• Pressures to leave need to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrated, multi-agency, inter-issue strategy needed</li> <li>• Transparency and</li> </ul>

Sector	• Midlands	• East	• North-west	• South-east	• South
	transition including psychological support, counselling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports for parent to get involved in BOMs</li> </ul>	increased	difference, interculturalism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Codes to deal with unfair treatment of Travellers in school</li> </ul>	be addressed, uniforms (baby-ish), name-calling, children put into "Traveller classes" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents need to be empowered through community development to deal with difficulties in school</li> <li>• Older students subvention needed or funding for progression routes</li> </ul>	accountability re Traveller budget in post-primary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of good policy needs to happen</li> </ul>
Traveller-specific training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance of STTC awards</li> <li>• Link workers between Training Centres and employment</li> <li>• New integrated approach needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Junior Traveller Education Centre should be phased out</li> <li>• Traveller tutors should be trained and recruited</li> <li>• Settled tutors expectation and attitudes need to be improved</li> <li>• Standards need to be increased</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Settled workers need anti-racism training</li> <li>• Should be equal partnership between trainees and settled staff</li> <li>• More flexibility in provision and links to employers (link person)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher expectation need to be raised through training in how to deal positively with difference</li> <li>• Career guidance in STTCs and outreach to homes re guidance counselling</li> <li>• Integration should happen with Traveller identity respected and difference acknowledged</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FETAC modules are too difficult</li> <li>• Childcare is not available</li> </ul>
Adult education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travellers need to see the value of education</li> <li>• Travellers need opportunities to develop more confidence in the Traveller community</li> <li>• Outreach, information programmes targeting Travellers for participation in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traveller parents need to be trained to work as support workers</li> <li>• Traveller parents need to be educated and supported to understand education system</li> </ul>

Sector	• Midlands	• East	• North-west	• South-east	• South
		mainstream and relevant adult education programmes			
Third Level	•	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training of teachers</li> <li>• Financial supports required</li> <li>• Parents attitudes to value continuing in education</li> </ul>	•	•	•

<b>NATIONAL CONSULTATION SEMINAR JUNE 2004</b>	National Day event was an opportunity to explore further the themes from the Regional consultations
<b>Special supports for Travellers in the education system</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special Schools for Travellers should be phased out immediately</li> <li>• Transport provision has created a culture of dependency and needs to be urgently reviewed</li> <li>• Practice in relation to Resource Teachers for Travellers (RTT) needs to be reviewed and best practice implemented. It should be an integrated support in an in-class setting. Is it still an appropriate provision?</li> <li>• Visiting Teacher Service (VTS) should concentrate primarily on nomadic families and needs based</li> <li>• Traveller parents need to be given full information in relation to the use of capitation</li> <li>• Early School Leaving age should be raised higher than 16 years. Payments should be discontinued if young people do not stay in school. There is a difficulty with Education &amp; Welfare Officers (EWOs) following up non-attendance</li> <li>• Nomadic families and children need to be supported and accommodated in the education system. The use of IT needs to be developed. Need to look at and develop a model here as in the UK and Australia. Travellers should be trained as liaison officers with nomadic families.</li> </ul>
<b>Traveller Parents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents and educators need to have forums where they can meet and discuss issues</li> <li>• Traveller parents need to be involved in school at all levels</li> <li>• Induction programmes need to be implemented</li> <li>• A Strategy to target parents needs to be implemented including: local Traveller groups resourced to support Traveller parents, target all men and women; acknowledge and build in literacy supports similar to those at primary level that support children; employment of Traveller Education Workers</li> <li>• Strategies also need to be holistic and address poverty, accommodation, racism and discrimination</li> </ul>
<b>Interculturalism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needs to target four main areas: (1)</li> </ul>

	<p>the development of cultural awareness modules (2) support the importance of family in Traveller culture (3) target teachers and (4) target boards of management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocacy programmes to be developed with parents</li> <li>• Training for teachers has to be compulsory with regular in-service. This pre-and in-service should be evaluated and monitored</li> <li>• Development of appropriate intercultural materials</li> <li>• Development of access routes for Travellers to train as teachers and education workers</li> </ul>
<b>Pre-schools/after-schools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At present a lot of Traveller-only services exist and these are acknowledged in the role they have played in developing safe, accessible, onsite services. However, the ideal is an inclusive service developed with settled and Traveller children and young people together. It will only be a true inclusive system if equality and identity validated.</li> </ul>
<b>Traveller specific provision</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Junior Secondary Education Centres to be phased out immediately in line with Task Force Report recommendations</li> <li>• Ideally Senior Traveller Training Centres (STTCs) to be phased out, over the long terms</li> <li>• In the short-term (STTCs) should have guidelines and implement the quality framework. There needs to be improved links to employment and access for mature students to third level. The age limit should be raised to 18 years and an adult education model implemented</li> </ul>
<b>Third level and adult education</b>	<p><b>SHORT-TERM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More Travellers need to complete the Leaving Certificate and be role models for their community</li> <li>• Should promote Travellers who achieve in education</li> <li>• Career Guidance needs to be developed at an earlier stage in school</li> <li>• Develop an awareness raising campaign/register of Travellers who have completed secondary and third level education</li> </ul> <p><b>MEDIUM-TERM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Target course providers in relation to access courses for young and mature students</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop bursaries and scholarships</li></ul> <b>LONG-TERM</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There needs to be an initiative for a mindset to change in the Traveller community</li><li>• There needs to be institutional change to encourage and support Travellers to achieve in the education system</li></ul>
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## **APPENDIX 2 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**The following recommendations are drawn from the main body of the report and are based on what Traveller parents feel needs to happen to ensure the Traveller Education Strategy is to benefit and make a real impact on the lives of Travellers**

#### **PRE-SCHOOL (PAGE 15)**

**The majority of people consulted felt that in the longer-term there should be no need for Traveller-only preschools, but that significant work would have to be done on ensuring that there was affordable accessible integrated inclusive pre-schools options for Travellers to avail of.**

- **R01 Both publicly and privately owned preschools should have enrolment policies that guard against discrimination against Travellers.**
- **R02 Availability of pre-schools should be increased generally, with a focus on "community support", supporting parents who are in education and training.**
- **R03 Integrated provision of this preschool service based on intercultural approaches should be the goal.**
- **R04 If Traveller-only preschools they are to continue they need to be on an equal par with other services in terms of resources e.g. the Early Start Programmes with training for all staff in terms of interculturalism and anti racism.**

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# OVERVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS

# 1

- **R05 Pre-school provision should not be on-site because if it is provided away from the site there is a better chance of mixing with settled people and breaking down the barriers.**
- **R06 There should be purpose-built centres available in each community for use by all the community, Traveller and settled. Funding for such centres should be based on the inclusion of groups such as Travellers and all staff should be trained in the anti bias approach. Enrolment policies should be inclusive and anti racist codes of practice implemented for all centres so there is no room for the exclusion of Traveller children.**

## **PRIMARY SCHOOL (PAGE 16)**

- **R07 Mechanisms for measuring and assessing the outcomes for Travellers need to be identified. Data collection and analysis systems are required at all levels of the education system.**
- **R08 Programmes should be initiated to promote positive inclusive leadership by principals. Boards of Management need to do similar training as well.**
- **R09 Equality and anti-racism should be properly built into the fabric of the school and all its various aspects.**
- **R10 The practice of giving homework should be equality-proofed. There should be a review of the educational value and necessity of homework and in particular its impact on inequality and disadvantage. If it is to continue inclusive after-school homework supports should be available in the school premises. Parents could get involved in such homework clubs. Children should not receive extra homework from the RTT.**
- **R11 There needs to be full consultation with parents before a child is given support by the Resource Teacher for Travellers; the support should be delivered in class, the teachers should be trained in anti-racism and interculturalism.**
- **R12 All children with learning support needs should get in-class supports and links should be made between an after schools support service and the resource/learning support teacher to ensure that the child's needs are fully developed.**  
**Learning Support should be underpinned by the following principles:**
  - **It should be needs based**
  - **Inclusive of all children**
  - **RTT's should be called the Learning Support Teacher and should be available to all children**
  - **After-schools support is about the provision of home work supports particularly for children whose parents may be unable to support them in doing their homework and where perhaps the environment is not conducive to studying. It should be resourced through community based initiatives.**
  - **Learning supports within schools on the other hand are supports for in class work and act as a support to the main teacher in carrying out the delivery of the required lessons.**
- **R13 The Resource Teacher for Traveller (RTT) service should be reviewed.**

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## **OVERVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

**1**

- **R14** In light of developments in the area of Education Welfare, and the need to build an inclusive education service for Travellers, there is a need to review and evaluate as a matter of priority the Visiting Teacher Service.
- **R15** The role of the Education Welfare Officer also needs to be clarified and communicated to parents.
- **R16** All children should be assessed re educational welfare on a yearly basis. The assessment methods should be reviewed to make sure they are not culturally biased. Resources should then be allocated on the basis of need rather than identity.

### **POST PRIMARY(PAGE 19)**

- **R17** The Education Welfare Act is good but the trigger for action should be 20 days absence and no more.
- **R18** There should be an investment in education and capacity building work with Traveller parents so that they understand the long-term benefits staying in school may offer their children.
- **R19** Schools should put equality and anti-racism clearly and centrally on their agenda at all levels and in an integrated way into their plans and policies.
- **R20** There needs to be more flexibility in the way course are delivered in post-primary, including, for example, modular programmes. Schools should be able to support people to do apprenticeships. Extra resources and supports needed to ensure the retention of Travellers in post primary education e.g. school completion programmes.

### **TRAVELLER SPECIFIC TRAINING & ADULT EDUCATION (PAGE 21)**

- **R21** The long-term strategy should be to work towards more inclusive integrated training opportunities for Travellers. As an initial immediate step training centres should not pay allowances to trainees under 18 years of age. This would deter Travellers from leaving school for a financial incentive.

**The Quality framework must be implemented in all adult education spheres and there needs to be an overhaul and reform of adult education provision for Travellers in the short term.**

**The medium to long term strategy should be to work towards the provision of inclusive adult education which would mean a phased integration of Traveller learners to mainstream adult education provision and work towards the development of an inclusive adult education model for Travellers and settled people. This would mean that all adult education provision would be inclusive, anti racist and would target Travellers and it would have some of the following:**

- **Accredited training of a high standard of quality**
- **Be provided in an intercultural and anti racist setting**
- **Provide real outcomes in terms of educational and employment opportunities**

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# OVERVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS

# 1

Steps should be taken over the long term to have a phased integration of adult Traveller Learners to mainstream adult education provision, in the context of a real change in the current development and provision of adult education and access to the labour market. This would mean the phasing out of the model of Senior Traveller Training centres in the long term.

- **R22** The age limit for training allowances should be increased to 18 years of age. This would eliminate one of the pull-factors from the school system.
- **R23** That there would be a phased approach to the loss of secondary benefits for those accessing further education, training and employment to alleviate the financial burden attached to their loss. The medical card should be retained for the first five years of employment.
- **R24** There needs to be more outreach work with Travellers regarding the issue of education. It is important that Travellers be supported to see the long-term value of education and the impact it has on a person's future rather than making choices solely based on the short-term allowances they get.
- **R25** Work needs to be carried out on reviewing existing adult education provision, to ensure that any barriers to participation are eliminated and the appropriate measures are taken to make existing training more accessible.

## THIRD LEVEL (PAGE 23)

- **R26** Efforts should be made to highlight the successes and to give publicity at local and national level to educationally successful Travellers. Perhaps those Travellers who have completed second level and third level would be included in a role model campaign.<sup>3</sup> The Irish Traveller Movement's video should be used as a tool to highlight 3<sup>rd</sup> level.
- **R27** In the medium term, pending more substantial developments in the field, Traveller organisations should liaise with third level institutions and target Travellers who show an interest and potential and support them to enter third level through Access programmes, as mature students and indeed through conventional routes. Bursaries and scholarships and other financial supports will need to be identified, as will other supports.

## OVERARCHING THEMES (PAGE 24)

### ROLE OF PARENTS

- **R28** The Traveller Education Strategy should include a strategy in relation to Traveller parents. This strategy should have as its focus the improvement of the level of engagement by parents with the education of their children and the school and other structures
- **R29** That a training and information programme would be set-up to empower Traveller parents with information on the education system and how it is operated.

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<sup>3</sup> See, Irish Traveller Movement, education video entitled, 'Moving-on, Travellers & Third level Education', launch date October 20th @ UCC.

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## **OVERVIEW OF PREPARATIONS & INPUTS 3 INTO THE SEMINARS**

- **R30 A space needs to be created for real dialogue between Traveller parents and teachers. Likewise their informed involvement in Parents' Councils and Boards of Management is something that needs to be actively supported.**
- **R31 Good experiences of co-operation between Traveller parents, schools and Traveller organisations at a local level should be built upon.**
- **R32 Initiatives should be taken to build Traveller parents knowledge and confidence to get involved in an informed a positive way in preschools. One way might be to establish Traveller Parent Support Groups.**
- **R33 There should be a meeting with parents before the child starts in pre-school. On-going one to one meetings to get an in-depth picture of how the child is progressing would be ideal.**

### **TRANSPORT (PAGE 25)**

- **R34 School transport for Travellers should be provided in an inclusive, integrated way ensuring that Travellers arrive in school on time, it should be needs based.**

### **MULTI-AGENCY APPROACHES (PAGE 25)**

- **R35 The Social Inclusion Unit should have responsibility to drive the strategy and ensure its implementation across the department's structures. The implementation of the strategy should be monitored by the ACTE with regular reports and updates being conveyed by the high level official for social inclusion as to progress being made.**

### **NOMADISM(PAGE 26)**

- **R36 A preschool assistant should have the role of targeting Traveller children in the area who are nomadic to ensure they know about the service and are included.**
- **R37 The practice of one enrolment per year militates against nomads and should be reviewed to see if there is a better way. The idea of reserved spaces for children who are nomadic should be considered, particularly where there is a predictable level of nomadism.**

### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT(PAGE 26)**

- **R38 Teachers should have adequate training on issues related to discrimination. This training should be a core part of their training and not an elective part. The professional development of teachers should be reinforced through follow-up after training. This follow-up should incorporate policies and procedures in relation to professional practice and independent monitoring and evaluation. The level and quality of contact between teachers and parents should be explicitly dealt with as part of this process of professional development.**
- **R39 Positive action steps should be implemented to bring Travellers into the professional role of teachers, educators and educational assistants. These should include "on the job" training and development of other access routes into the profession.**

### **ATTITUDES (PAGE 26)**

## **OVERVIEW OF PREPARATIONS & INPUTS 3 INTO THE SEMINARS**

- **R40 The pre-school leader or principal should assess and monitor how the Travellers are being treated as well and their standard of learning.**
- **R41 Tutors need access to attitudinal and intercultural training to support them to work in a way in a way that is culturally appropriate, inclusive and empowering for Travellers to develop to their full potential**
- **R42 Intercultural teaching methods approaches and materials should become the standard in schools. It should be fully integrated into the whole system. An environment should be fostered where Traveller children feel validated and comfortable and where the effects of internalised oppression are recognised and dealt with. Cultural difference should be built into schoolwork in an inclusive and respectful way.**
- **R43 Resources, toys etc. should be accessed or developed that validate Traveller culture and diversity.**
- **R44 The anti-bias approach should be adopted and mainstreamed.**

### **RESOURCING TRAVELLERS AS PROVIDERS(PAGE 28)**

- **R45 Travellers should be trained as literacy teachers and as adult education workers.**

**R46 Community development initiatives targeting Travellers as education workers need to be developed. We recommend that the Dept. of Education would work with the Traveller NGO's to develop an appropriate model.**

**R47 Traveller organisations need to be resourced to participate in the Traveller Education Strategy.**

- **R48 Travellers must be employed in all levels of the education system. It is essential that there are initiatives to encourage this necessary development in order to ensure that Traveller children not only have role models within the system, but also that Traveller adults have the opportunity to access such employment opportunities.**

### **TRAVELLER MEN**

- **R49 That Traveller projects are resourced to engage Traveller women and men in community development initiatives relating to education. These would involve not just raising their awareness but also building the capacity of families to engage better with the system. Particular initiatives need to be taken to target Traveller men for training. Courses need to be made relevant to their particular training needs.**

