

# Travellers in Prison Initiative

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Seirbhís Phríosúin  
na hÉireann  
Irish Prison Service



An tSeirbhís Phromhaidh  
The Probation Service

METHOD

# EVALUATION SPOTLIGHT ENHANCING ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR TRAVELLERS IN PRISON

OCTOBER 2021



This evaluation Spotlight considers the work of the Travellers in Prison Initiative (TPI) undertaken in collaboration with the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb) undertaken as part of the TPI's action area 'Increasing and improving access to prison based services for Travellers'.

# 1.0 – INTRODUCTION

Education is an important prison-based service, and participation in education is a key to improving outcomes for prisoners, and reducing recidivism. Education services and Travellers alike acknowledge the barriers and poor outcomes for Travellers accessing prison-based education services. The TPI's strategic plan identifies the following themes as important in addressing the barriers to participation:

- Encouraging Traveller participation through identifying barriers, and articulating and presenting benefits of participation – these are expected to enhance Travellers' confidence and motivation to participate<sup>1</sup>
- Creating an atmosphere in which participation is both normal and positive – achieved through visibility of Traveller culture, role models, materials throughout

prisons and commitment of services to provide culturally appropriate services, and the development of cultural competence among service providers

- Supporting the development of (culturally) appropriate services

The above actions are anticipated to lead to positive impacts in terms of demand (from Travellers in prison) and to the provision of appropriate services. In this evaluation spotlight, we explore the development and outcomes relating to the CDET / TPI education programme, that was delivered across prisons in Dublin. The evaluation has been developed based on review of reports, surveys and research (and other desk materials); and interviews with staff from TPI, CDET, National Traveller Women's Forum (NTWF) and the Irish Prison Service (IPS).

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<sup>1</sup> In all services, including prison based education services.

## 2.0 – BACKGROUND TO THIS INITIATIVE AND ITS ACTIVITIES

In November 2016, the TPI undertook a baseline survey of 130 CDTEB teachers (in Irish prisons) on matters relating to Traveller participation in prison education and training services, with a response rate of 24% (31 responses). The key findings of this survey were:

- The majority of respondents (69%) acknowledged barriers to Travellers taking part in education in prisons: these included literacy, cultural barriers, negative experience of educational system, fear of discrimination, and shame associated with educational disadvantage.
- 68% did not believe that education and training in prison led to realistic opportunities for Travellers to access further education and employment post-release. There was a view that courses should focus on practical skills suited to self-employment (in areas of work traditionally undertaken by Travellers).
- 68% reported that they did not have strategies that suited Travellers specific educational / training needs.
- The survey reported a need for engagement with Travellers and Traveller organisations to establish and meet prisoners' needs (including outreach on the landings, open days, etc).
- It was also recommended that Travellers should be employed as liaison workers in the prison to facilitate Traveller engagement and in the delivery of courses.

- 83% of respondents had not received training on Traveller inclusion, and 58% had not received anti-racism, equality and diversity training. 100% of respondents agreed that it would be beneficial for them and other staff to receive training on Traveller inclusion and equality.
- There was almost unanimous agreement (92%) that it would be useful for CDTEB staff to have access to Traveller-specific resources, and 92% also welcomed any opportunity for involvement in the development of Traveller-specific resources.

Research undertaken subsequently by the TPI<sup>2</sup>, identified logistical and practical barriers to education and training services, for example security issues arising from prison segregation ('protection')<sup>3</sup>; a lack of adequate classrooms/ meeting rooms and security cover (meaning that services may have to be cancelled at short notice); and low staffing levels among both prison officers and education.<sup>4</sup> Subsequent discussions following this research with CDTEB identified a particular issue around the provision of literacy in the prisons.

The factors influencing access to prison-based education services therefore can be a combination of personal and educational barriers (literacy, prior experience); institutional barriers arising from the design of prison-based services (lack of relevance for Travellers, lack of training for staff delivering services) and also practical and logistical barriers (security related, as well as a lack of awareness).

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<sup>2</sup> *Travellers in Prison Initiative (2017) 'Access to prison-based services for Travellers in the Irish prison system: A consultation exercise with service providers'. Unpublished research undertaken by the TPI.*

<sup>3</sup> *Whereby prisoners are isolated in closed cells for 23-24 hours a day, either for disciplinary or protective reasons*

<sup>4</sup> *In addition, the ETB services in prison close during the summer months*

## 3.0 – DETAILS OF THE INITIATIVE - INPUTS

As improving access to prison services (including education) is a key action of the TPI, discussions between the CDETB organiser of education for education services in prison and TPI coordinator took place in 2015 and resulted in the appointment of an CDETB teacher to coordinate education for Travellers in the Dublin prisons – the teacher was released from other duties for 2.5 days per week to undertake the function.<sup>5</sup>

This role had the task of promoting Travellers' access to CDETB services across all the city's prisons, but was based in Wheatfield prison. The Traveller Education Coordinator's role involved a strong outreach function, visiting Travellers on the landings of the Dublin prisons (including those on 23-hour lock-up) and those who do not attend the CDETB prison education unit, and referring them onwards to services based on their needs (including mental health, addiction support and counselling services, as well as to the 'school'). The role also links in with prison-based services, and TPI peer support services where they operate in the prisons.

In addition, each of the Dublin prisons (Cloverhill, Mountjoy, Dóchas and Wheatfield) identified a teacher to take on a Traveller liaison teacher role to support Travellers' access to education (as part of their overall duties, rather than a seconded function). These Traveller liaison teachers have a remit to champion Travellers' access to the school among their peers, and 'to put the spotlight on Travellers, within the school'.

The TPI engaged with these roles and delivered training and awareness-raising supports to them (as well as to the wider CDETB teachers in the Dublin prisons). For example, Traveller liaison teachers were invited to events and conferences, to raise awareness of the situation, experience and identity of Travellers, including the Traveller Counselling Service conference in 2017. According to one Traveller liaison teacher here they learned about internalised oppression, high suicide rates, and wide-ranging discrimination, which affect the Traveller community:

*Reflecting on the 1963 Commission on Itinerancy shocked us in the ETB into raising questions about how we engage with Travellers, or indeed if we engage with the educational needs of Travellers in our prisons. When asked 'how many Travellers attend your school?', we could not answer because we did not know, and we were afraid to ask our students if they were members of the Traveller community.<sup>6</sup>*

Subsequent to this conference, a one-day training session was provided to the Traveller liaison teachers (delivered by Meath Traveller Workshops, TPI and Pavee Point) in November 2016 which considered how they might support Travellers in prison to access education. This enabled those involved in the initiative to raise awareness among teaching colleagues and to highlight the issues faced by Travellers. The CDETB led by the Coordinator

<sup>5</sup> At present, 1.5 days are allocated to the role, which includes work in a session in Mountjoy, Dóchas and the Progression Unit. An additional half day could be allocated for collection of materials, referrals, administration and follow-up.

<sup>6</sup> June Edwards presentation at TPI Traveller organisations networking event, November 2019

and the liaison teachers subsequently initiated a number of actions to increase Traveller participation. These included Traveller Pride events; a renewed focus on literacy; commitments to make the CDETБ curriculum more appropriate to Travellers; and a series of pre-release activities (included a Traveller-specific pre- and post-release course).

The TPI organised a one-day in-service training course on Equality & Diversity for 16 CDETБ teachers (delivered by Maynooth University) in November 2019. This training sought to develop an understanding of the context and principles relating to equality, anti-racism and anti-discrimination, rather than focusing specifically on Travellers. Feedback on this training was very positive, and participants recommended that it should be rolled out to all ETБ staff throughout the prison estate.

## 4.0 – THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INITIATIVE AND OUTCOMES

According to the CDETb, the first phase of the initiative was to look at attitudes within the school, and support change around this through the liaison teachers and coordinator (as well as training):

*We needed to start with our own attitudes towards Traveller education. Quite a bit of debate about whether we should be doing things separately for Travellers or whether they should be doing things for Travellers same as the rest of the prison population... we asked ourselves about the prejudice that we bring to our work.*

*One of the big learning is that we need to be more culturally aware as a whole – lots of diverse prison population.*

*We wanted to highlight the issues for Travellers as well as to challenge negative attitudes of our own staff.*

*This [first phase of the work, focusing on attitudes and training] has resulted in important learning for us – this needed to happen before we could do anything else.*

There has been some positive attitudinal change reported, reflected, for example, in teachers' understanding about Travellers. The extent to which there has been attitudinal change is anecdotal – as there has been no follow-up to the baseline study.

The Traveller liaison teachers act as champions and have undertaken the role as part of their work because they are committed to equality and anti-discrimination. Their commitment is highly regarded, but their role is informal.

There may be scope for the Traveller liaison teachers to maximise their influence (along with the Coordinator) if they have a formal role. This role might involve proposing to the school how to continue to advance Traveller participation. This group could be chaired by the Coordinator, and supported by the TPI. Proposals could be made by the group to each school in the Dublin prisons by this group – may need the staff to be formally released from duties to have an impact.

This may best be undertaken (or supported) through collective meetings and agreed recommendations and suggestions which can enhance Traveller participation in education.

The CDETb recognised the importance of providing education that is culturally appropriate and that reflects Traveller culture in the service.

*We set about organising cultural days, where aspects of Traveller culture were highlighted – tinsmiths gave demonstrations, musicians from the Traveller community – concerts, and what we found was that the impact was two-fold – increased Traveller pride and raised awareness amongst the teachers of the richness of Traveller culture.*

Also for Travellers, it demonstrated the value that the school has on their culture. The ETB notes that, anecdotally, Travellers have said that they feel a lot more comfortable attending the school, and that this is attributed to the visibility of Traveller culture and art work throughout school settings.

The atmosphere in the school arising from the approach of the staff is important in determining participation: the importance of creating a safe and welcoming atmosphere, where Travellers feel valued was noted, in particular in Mountjoy prison where 'everyone felt comfortable to participate in Adult Basic Ed classes and QQI<sup>7</sup> classes.<sup>8</sup> The importance of the personal relationship between Travellers and the teachers was highlighted throughout the evaluation. For example, several people made the point that the relationship with teachers, rather than course subject matter, was a primary factor in determining sign-up for courses for some Traveller prisoners. This was because of the negative experience of education in the past for many Travellers. It was reinforced that in engaging with the prisoners,

**It is important that prison education services are not school as they remember it.**

According to the 2019 end of year report for the initiative, the Mountjoy prison staff noted a gradual increase in take-up of education, and that Travellers were generally becoming more involved in prison life and self-motivated. It was also reported that the Progression Unit experienced positive participation rates.

However, there is limited data on the increase in take up in absence of a functioning ethnic identifier. This is reflected in the following ways:

- While the total number of Traveller men that the programme engaged with in Main Mountjoy was 43 in 2019, it is not known what proportion of the total prison population this accounts for (the snapshot census undertaken in 2018 identified 58 Travellers in Mountjoy).
- There is no systematic approach to referring all Traveller prisoners to the programme – and while the outreach approach on the landings is very effective, and should be maintained, there is no way to monitor its impacts. It was noted that prisons vary in the extent to which they facilitate access to the landings by the Traveller liaison teachers, and prisoners to access the school. A structured approach to ensuring all Traveller Liaison Teachers can gain access to the landings (to encourage prisoners to attend the school) is needed. In addition, Travellers interested in attending school should be facilitated in doing so in a timely manner (within a set period of committal).
- The increased uptake in education is anecdotal – this will not be rectified until there is reliable data available on the participation and outcomes for Travellers in the school (this is discussed below).
- However, qualitative data is also important – even if a prisoner registers with the school, information on continuation and completion rates, as well as the relevance of the training provided to meet their needs, is required. This would require qualitative research to be undertaken, and ongoing monitoring and reporting on outputs by the ETB.

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<sup>7</sup> Quality and Qualifications Ireland.

<sup>8</sup> The ETB Traveller Liaison Coordinator's 2019 annual report

- In addition, in order to address the personal barriers including previous negative experiences of school, there is a need for one-to-one support, delivered by the Coordinator but also involving peer support<sup>9</sup>. In this evaluation and other research, the importance of role models and peer supports is well documented.
- Finally, take-up of education in prison is dependent on other needs and issues being addressed – and all of the indications are that prisoners have complex needs and the services in the prison to address these (such as addiction and mental health supports) can be limited. At the same time, other resources (such as peer support project and external Traveller-specific supports<sup>10</sup>) are not fully utilised in all prisons.

## 4.1 Data on outcomes

The IPS has worked with TPI in introducing an ethnic identifier across the PIMS (prison information management system). There is a separate but linked education data collection system (PEMS) which has been in place for almost three years, and this has the capacity to collect data on whether a prisoner has been interviewed, whether they have been scheduled to attend classes, their record of attendance and their academic record. This means that data on the participation of Travellers in education services and outcomes of participation should be available in time.

At the end of 2020, the PEMS data analytics was tested and preparations were undertaken for the system to go live. It was expected that when the system was live, there could be some constraints relating to some incomplete data, and incompatibility of data sets.<sup>11</sup> However, it would provide an opportunity to troubleshoot system issues, and to modify the system to ensure that it can provide aggregate data in future.

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<sup>9</sup> For example, through peer support meetings as well as through the support from peer support group facilitators who are present in four prisons.

<sup>10</sup> For example, addiction and mental health counselling

<sup>11</sup> Based on historic data collection which used different ethnic categories.

# 5.0 – HOW THE ACTIONS REFLECT THE TPI PRINCIPLES

## 5.1 Relationship building

Relationship building is a key component to the work of the TPI.

This programme relies on multiple relationships between 1) the TPI and CDETB; 2) the TPI and prisons and 3) the CDETB and prisons, and 4) Traveller prisoners and the individual teachers/ schools.

It also relies on internal relationships within the CDETB, as the Traveller liaison teachers and Traveller education coordinator act as internal champions to support Traveller access to services.

In this section, an outline of the nature and dynamics of these relationships are assessed.

For some CDETB staff, they need to negotiate with their own staff (teachers, head of school) and with the IPS, so there is an inter-relationship of internal and external multiple relationships at play.

For the TPI, there is a need to negotiate several relationships, within and across a number of prison sites, each with their own dynamic. This means that the success of initiatives can be dependent on individual goodwill, and the indications are that prisons do not respond in the same way to this initiative.

The success of outreach measures and follow up seems to be dependent on IPS staff (and senior prison staff) commitment, which varies from prison site to site.

While relationship-building is important for the TPI, and has supported this initiative, it is also important that the initiative's future development is not wholly dependent on relationships and goodwill. It is suggested that a more formalised and structured approach to the programme, in the form of terms of reference, monitoring and reporting on activities within the schools and highlighting issues of access and need might be pursued. This is explored later in the recommendations for future action.

## 5.2 Participation

The need for Travellers to see Traveller culture reflected in the school arose throughout the consultations, and actions undertaken such as Traveller Pride events have contributed to an anecdotal increase in participation.

Consultations indicated that literacy difficulties remain a significant barrier for Traveller participation in education services (as well as negative prior experiences of education). There was a view that a one-to-one approach might work best for Travellers (literacy supports), and that there remains a one-size-fits-all approach in the schools.

While the CDETB has committed to reviewing education courses and materials to ensure that they meet the needs of Travellers in prison, there needs to be formal participation from Travellers, peer-support groups and by the TPI in these reviews.

The need for positive role models and peer-supports were identified. In prisons outside Dublin, the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) has provided literacy awareness training to a group of prisoners, probation officers and staff in Portlaoise Prison's education unit. NALA also developed a peer literacy tutor programme<sup>12</sup> and action research project to help prisoners qualify as literacy tutors in order to provide peer-to-peer literacy support for other prisoners who are not accessing education support.<sup>13</sup>

It was noted that in a prison environment, including the school, getting information on courses remains difficult, and that there is a sense of needing to be 'in the know' to access them. There needs to be greater transparency around courses available and timetables.

Word of mouth is a very powerful way of promoting activities among Travellers. This promotion points to an important role for peers (in this instance, Travellers prisoners who are students) to support access (in addition to information posted throughout the prison). Travellers in prison attending the school should be supported to raise awareness of training and education opportunities among their peers. The peer led 'meet and greet' programme pilot in Castlerea prison could be used as a model.<sup>14</sup> This could be supported by the peer support group and facilitators (in prisoners where peer groups operate). The importance of the peer dimension was noted in the ETB Traveller Liaison Coordinator's annual report (2019).

*I can only reinforce the importance of Peer Work being continued into the future, if the programme is to progress*

### 5.3 Gender dimension

*The peer support worker's Creative Craft class on Tues morn in the Options room<sup>15</sup>, has been 'a lifeline' for many Traveller women. It is estimated that 10-12 women attend these sessions. Apart from the Craft class, the women feel comfortable and safe 'in opening up' emotionally to the peer support worker.*

The gender dimension is hugely relevant to this work, and the example of Dóchas prison acts as a case study in how wider issues can impact on prisoners. The need for this initiative is more acute for Traveller women, but they probably benefit least from it, given increased restrictions introduced in late 2019 that were noted by a number of people consulted. These restrictions have coincided with the new lock-down and security regimes in Dóchas prison, introduced at that time. According to the CDET B Traveller Liaison Coordinator's report for 2019, 'we found a big reduction in Monday afternoon class this year, due to access restrictions. The new Lock-down system in the Yard introduced by the IPS Management Sept/Oct 2019, prevented many women availing of the 'Traveller Culture Pre and Post Release' class this academic year.

<sup>12</sup> 11 prisoners in Portlaoise Prison took part in a Level 6 training programme accredited by Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT).

<sup>13</sup> NALA (2020) *Our year and our work: Summary Annual Report 2019*

<sup>14</sup> *The Meet and Greet programme was a peer-led model where new prisoners shortly after committal were given an induction to prison life by another prisoner. It has been discontinued as a result of Covid 19 restrictions.*

<sup>15</sup> *The initiative's Annual report 2019*

It fluctuated between five to three Traveller women attending the session. In the previous year, we had eight or ten women attending this session.'

This is compounded by a reported lack of other supports for women, and under-utilising of existing supports (including the peer support programme) in planning progression for women, and in supporting advocacy etc.

All of these will impact upon women's access to education. It is noted here and in previous research undertaken by the TPI that the impact of prison on Traveller women is more significant than for men.

Within this context, opportunities to engage with prison governors should be pursued by the ETB Traveller Liaison Coordinator and TPI in order to address any issues of access for prisoners to ensure a consistent approach across the prison estate. These could be facilitated through IPS staff or timetabled to take place on a regular basis (e.g., quarterly or bi-annually).

## 5.4 Next steps and recommendations

The plan is to roll out the initiative across all the prison estate. Each prison has recently identified an ETB staff member who would undertake the function of a Traveller liaison teachers to roll out the initiative. To maximise the impact of this initiative, a set of recommendations based on the evaluation findings are outlined below. In addition, a three-year work plan for the initiative is recommended. A proposed outline work plan based on the good practices and learning of the Dublin initiative, and drawn from the recommendations, is outlined under 5.5 below.

**TABLE 1 EVALUATION INDICATORS SUMMARY OF PROGRESS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Outcome interim indicator	Progress summary	Recommendations
Enhanced competence of school staff to deliver culturally appropriate services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality and diversity training delivered to 16 teachers, and other training inputs since the initiative began</li> <li>• Anecdotal evidence of changed attitudes among school staff</li> <li>• ETB plans for poster campaign throughout the school (on the use of language)<sup>16</sup></li> <li>• Plans to repeat training in equality and diversity for teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repeat baseline exercise amongst all school staff to measure changes in attitudes</li> <li>• Establish a structure or forum for the Traveller liaison teachers (with Coordinator) to develop recommendations and present these to the school in the prisons</li> <li>• Continue training on equality and diversity with add-ons for anti-racism and discrimination training – and consider online delivery (contingent on Covid)</li> <li>• Undertake baseline survey with newly appointed Traveller liaison teachers.</li> </ul>
Travellers' enhanced confidence to access services Enhanced motivation reported by Travellers to access services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anecdotal evidence of increased numbers of Travellers accessing the school</li> <li>• Plans to undertake research on barriers to participation in next phase</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertake research on the barriers and enablers to participation (personal, educational, institutional, and practical barriers) and perspectives of the school across the Dublin prisons and develop responses to these by ETB with TPI and IPS.</li> <li>• Engage with the PEMS data analytics testing phase currently taking place to gather any data and to identify any obstacles and modify the system so that aggregate data may be available in the future. data sets, etc.</li> <li>• Establish Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for each school with reports published on outcomes</li> </ul>
Enhanced visibility and presence of Traveller culture, role models and related materials in prisons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traveller Pride events organised in the school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to engage with Traveller prisoners and peer groups in the development of Traveller pride events.</li> <li>• Engage with Traveller prisoners and peer groups on curriculum review and course development.</li> <li>• Identify the scope for prisoner peer support as a source of information and support around participation (courses, timetables).</li> </ul>

<sup>16</sup> As recommended in the Equality and Diversity Training programme.

Outcome interim indicator	Progress summary	Recommendations
Barriers to participation and suitability of services identified, and potential new approaches identified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The initiative is fully integrated into the education system across the prison estate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formalise the role of the Traveller liaison teachers and the coordinator role, which should be signed off by the ETB, IPS and TPI.</li> <li>Dedicated work by Traveller liaison teachers with Travellers (including outreach) should be designated and timetabled into their work schedule (for the coordinator, this should be approx. 2 days per week).</li> <li>TPI and peer support groups should seek regular meetings with senior staff in prisons (e.g., head teachers, governors) to troubleshoot issues, for example, on a quarterly or bi-annual basis.<sup>17</sup></li> <li>A protocol should be developed giving clear direction for how the initiative will support Travellers to access education, and should cover how the school will support 'access to information and transparency around courses', registration supports, and promotional materials. This protocol will be developed by the ETB Traveller Education Coordinator, Traveller liaison teachers, with the TPI, peer support groups.</li> </ul>
Appropriate services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Curriculum Development Unit of the ETB has agreed to explore the possibility of developing resources for use with Travellers, and to adapt the curriculum as appropriate (with guidance from the TPI).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a timeline for this action.</li> </ul>

<sup>17</sup> In addition, IPS staff meet with the head teachers on a weekly basis and this could also be a useful means of communicating any barriers or obstacles encountered.

## 5.5 Task plan outline

The table below provides an outline workplan for the initiative once all of the Traveller liaison teachers are in place across the prison estate. It is envisaged that this workplan would be implemented by the TPI and the ETB, with the support of the IPS and individual prison management staff.

TABLE 2 PROPOSED WORKPLAN FOR THE ETB TRAINING INITIATIVE (QUARTERLY OVER THREE YEARS)												
Task	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Orientation/ training sessions for Traveller liaison teachers (repeated for new Traveller liaison teachers roles)	●				●							
Protocols developed for role, structures, monitoring, etc (see note below)	●	●										
Equality and diversity training for other school staff		●										
Baseline exercise (survey) across school staff (with follow-up after 2 years)		●								●		
3-month meetings of Traveller liaison teachers with TPI (sharing experiences, support)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Research on needs/barriers (qualitative) in one area (possibly Dublin)			●									
Action plan for the programme agreed which can be adapted for each prison site			●									
Annual report using forms and templates agreed					●				●			

**Note:** the protocol (identified in the table above) would include:

- Role description for each of the Traveller liaison teachers (and hours per week formally designated for programme work)
- Description of what the work will involve and how it should be undertaken (e.g. principles)
- Terms of reference for the programme (and the responsibility of ETB/ IPS around engaging with it)
- Role of Traveller liaison teachers (and others) in attending multi-disciplinary team meetings re prisoner needs
- Role of Traveller liaison teachers in working with peer support projects (where they exist)/ identifying Traveller prisoners as peer support (e.g. using model of meet & greet)
- Details of how to record the work (e.g., number of Travellers engaged with, and their outcomes re training and education)
- Sign off by ETB, IPS and TPI