

JobBridge – the National Internship Scheme
Speech at Athlone Road Show
Wednesday 14th September 2011

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset I want to thank you all for attending this morning's breakfast briefing on JobBridge - the National Internship Scheme.

Looking around the people gathered here this morning I see many key people from all sectors of our society. There is strong representation from businesses operating in the midlands region but there are also representatives from the public and community and voluntary sectors. All of whom are here this morning to learn more about the National Internship Scheme.

I want to thank Mr. Martin Murphy, the Managing Director of HP Ireland for agreeing to chair the Steering Group of the National Internship Scheme. This Steering Group is playing a vital role in advising me on various aspects of the scheme such as its design, structure and promotion.

Earlier this year the Government announced its Jobs Initiative which was our first major step in getting Ireland back on the road to recovery, The Government's aim was to begin the process of restoring confidence in Ireland's economy, but also restoring hope and confidence in the huge numbers of people who currently find themselves out of employment.

The Jobs Initiative contains additional labour market activation measures that aim to provide these individuals with enhanced opportunities to maintain and develop their skills and competencies, whilst also offering

the possibility of securing valuable work experience. These measures will assist those seeking employment to maintain their links with the labour market, while also improving their prospects of securing employment. JobBridge – the National Internship Scheme is a key element of the Jobs Initiative.

JobBridge is the first initiative operated under the new National Employment and Entitlements Services, which was a commitment contained in the Programme for Government. The aim of JobBridge is to assist individuals bridge the gap between unemployment and the world of work. JobBridge provides those seeking employment with the opportunity to undertake a 6 or 9 month internship in a host organisation. Participants will benefit from learning new skills to compliment their existing skills. Upon completing their internship participants will have improved their prospects of securing employment.

In the current labour market environment JobBridge provides individuals with a unique opportunity to secure work experience in a new field. The Scheme enables people to break the cycle whereby unemployed people are unable to get a job without experience, either as new entrants to the labour market after education or training or as unemployed workers whose existing skills will not be appropriate to the types of jobs that will emerge in post- recession Ireland.

Aside from helping people take their first step in a new career, I firmly believe that one of the other key benefits of the National Internship Scheme is that it enables individuals to get their foot in the door with a potential prospective employer. The Scheme therefore provides participants with a chance to prove that they have the necessary skills and commitment to make a valuable contribution to the work of the organisation.

JobBridge – the National Internship Scheme offers hope and support to thousands of individuals who are currently on the Live Register. It is important to note that individuals do not have to be in receipt of an actual social welfare payment to participate in the scheme. Instead they could sign onto the Live Register for credits for at least three months. This will enable many of our unemployed graduates participate in JobBridge.

Since JobBridge was launched in July it has already achieved significant milestones. At present there are in excess of 2,600 internship opportunities currently being advertised on the JobBridge website www.jobbridge.ie. In addition, as of last Friday a total of 1,124 interns had actually commenced their internship. These figures show the strong level of interest in JobBridge both from a host organisation perspective but also importantly from prospective interns.

Today is the first of four Road Shows that my Department has organised to promote the JobBridge Scheme. The purpose of these Road Shows is to inform more organisations of this scheme, which will in turn increase the number of internship opportunities that are available throughout Ireland. In addition, we have invited here this morning career guidance officers to assist us in spreading information about JobBridge to prospective interns.

JobBridge aims to offer individuals of all skill levels, ranging from those who left school early to highly qualified graduates, a unique opportunity to develop new skills and earn valuable experience. JobBridge can offer a diverse range of jobseekers a chance that will at the very least improve their prospects of securing employment in the future.

I am therefore calling on local businesses and other organisations to champion this initiative in the midlands region, by offering broad and meaningful work experiences to people who are currently without work. This is a win-win situation for all parties involved; interns will gain

valuable work experience which will enhance their skills and competencies while the organisations involved will benefit from fresh talent and fresh ideas from people who will add real value to their organisation. As my Department is paying the weekly €50 allowance to interns, there will be no direct cost to participating organisations.

I want to take this opportunity to ensure that all organisations are fully aware that JobBridge is not a tool to reduce their labour costs or to displace employees. Organisations that attempt to use this scheme for these purposes will not be able to get their internships approved and will be banned from participating in this and other similar schemes.

JobBridge requires commitment on the part of host organisations as they must offer quality internships that will allow the individuals to see firsthand how the organisation works. Internships must provide interns with substantial learning outcomes that will aid their career development.

I am confident that the vast majority of organisations will offer quality internships to the unemployed that will significantly improve their employment prospects.

To protect the intern many safeguards have also been introduced such as limiting the number of hours they can work in a week and making provisions for annual leave. These are all stipulated in the Standard Internship Agreement, which must be signed between an intern and a host organisation before an internship can commence.

In order to protect the integrity of the scheme these control mechanisms are vital. To ensure compliance my Department and the Employment Services Division of FÁS are monitoring internships to ensure that they are of sufficient quality and that both host organisations and interns are abiding by the spirit and the rules of the scheme.

We have also introduced a whistle blowing feature, where any individual who suspects that an internship may be in breach of the scheme's criteria may contact the National Call Centre. All such claims will be investigated.

I appreciate that, in the current climate, recruitment is a big decision for employers, particularly for small and medium enterprises. I would hope that some employers who, through JobBridge find talented and motivated interns, can make the decision to offer employment to their intern. In other words, the period of internship would be a job interview for a longer period of employment.

JobBridge over the course of the next two years will therefore offer thousands of people hope and improved prospects. The success of JobBridge will be dependent on organisations offering quality internships and in prospective interns availing of them. I would encourage everyone here this morning to logon to the dedicated website www.JobBridge.ie for further information and to begin the process of participating in the JobBridge scheme.

Thank you for your attention and I will now ask Mr. Martin Murphy, Chairman of the National Internship Scheme's Steering Group to say a few words.

ENDS