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Independent Verifier's Report

Social Audit New Zealand was engaged by the Department of Internal Affairs to review the 2001 Community Internship Programme by conducting a stakeholder evaluation using Social Audit Methodology. To achieve this task Social Audit New Zealand has:

- Reviewed the objectives of the programme and its underlying values to determine their relationship to the principal stakeholder groups.
- Assessed the way the programme has changed from its original intentions.
- Provided a mentoring/coaching role for the Department's staff.
- Assisted in the development of the interviewing process.
- Audited a random selection of interview notes to ensure the interviewees have felt accurately represented.
- Assisted in the preparation, collection, collation and analysis of questionnaires to unsuccessful interns, unsuccessful host organisations and some of those who expressed an interest in the programme but did not apply.
- Audited the process resulting in the final report "Evaluation of the Community Internship Programme Department of Internal Affairs" by David Mulholland and Helena Barwick August 2002.

Social Audit New Zealand's responsibility is to express an independent opinion on the evaluation process and the final report from the perspective of best practice as outlined by the six social audit principles.

The first key principle provides for a multi-perspective view of all stakeholders. The programme evaluators attempted to contact all stakeholders and were very successful in interviewing those involved in setting up, running and participating in the programme. Representatives from the home organisations who were unsuccessful in their bid were also interviewed. Questionnaires were sent out to the other stakeholders or potential stakeholders including unsuccessful interns, host organisations and those who had expressed an interest in the programme but did not apply. Although the response rate from the questionnaires sent out could have been better there was a comprehensive cover of all respondents except from the people who had inquired about the internship but had not followed up by applying. The inclusion of evaluation expectations from the host, home and interns into the programme should partly address this, but there will need to be more detail given to those who were unsuccessful or who only expressed interest to enable the programme to increase the pool of suitable applicants.

The second key principle aims to be comprehensive and report on all aspects of the programme's performance. The internship evaluation identified the original vision for the programme and addressed the programme objectives that had evolved. The stakeholder feedback suggested the internship was very valuable both personally to the interns and to their host organisations. The interns and host organisation's comments suggested the programme had strengthened the organisational capacity of the

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community organisations affected and had added to the experience, skills and knowledge of individuals but had only had a minimal impact on improving relationships between public, private and community sectors. One possible reason for this minimal impact in improving relationships is that the programme objectives were not clear to applicants. Many successful and unsuccessful participants presumed the programme to be a type of job creation scheme. We suggest the programme be targeted to interns in paid employment from the public, private and community sectors to prevent this perception continuing. The programme may also be strengthened by the inclusion of the original vision into material sent out to potential applicants.

The third key principle aims to produce social accounts or an ongoing evaluation of the vision and values plus the assessment and achievement of the objectives of the programme, on a regular basis so that the practice of evaluation and reflection becomes embedded in the programme. The Department of Internal Affairs is to be congratulated on incorporating evaluation into the programme. The ongoing development of vision, values and objectives may be addressed by ensuring those participating in the programme have a structured time to meet and reflect on their experience and its relevance to the stated vision, values and objectives. The Department may also wish to plan an independent audit on a yearly or two yearly basis.

The fourth key principle is that the audit should be comparative. This means that the audit provide a means whereby the organisation can compare its own performance over time and make provisions to compare its performance with other government agencies engaged in similar work. The Internship Programme by documenting the results of the ongoing evaluations, and ensuring the changes are recognised, will be able to have its performance compared over time and assist in the establishment of relevant benchmarks. These social auditors are not familiar with those government departments whose work would be comparable but suggest that this may be an avenue that the Department of Internal Affairs may wish to address.

The fifth key principle aims to ensure that the evaluations are audited by suitably qualified people with no vested interest in the programme. The Department has achieved this by employing an outside interviewer to conduct the interviews, by having the questionnaires collected, collated, analysed and vetted for bias by Social Audit New Zealand. The final report has also been written in collaboration with both the original and an independent researcher and checked for accuracy by Social Audit New Zealand, an independent agency.

The sixth key principle relates to disclosure, which is an important underlying principle in any auditing process. The discussion and analysis of the consultation information collected appears to be very fair and frank. There are some differences between the original vision and the Internship Programme under evaluation. These have been discussed openly. Many of the differences have been easily explained and should become less as the distinction between the objectives of the programme and a job creation programme become clearer and with the possible introduction of a structured reflection meeting or workshop involving all participants in the programme. The social auditors are not clear about the Department's expectations on dissemination of the final report but suggest that those who have participated in its compilation should be offered an opportunity to see the final document.

Social Audit New Zealand conducted its audit in accordance with the above six principles outlined by John Pearce and the New Economic Foundation in the U.K. Social Audit New Zealand has evolved with supervision and support from John Pearce. This audit included an assessment of the significant estimates and judgements made by the Department of Internal Affairs from external

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reports, completed questionnaires and stakeholder interviews. It also included assessment of whether the methodology was appropriate to programme evaluation, consistently applied and adequately disclosed.

In performing the audit, we considered the processes involved in identifying the stakeholder groups and assessed their completeness. We have obtained all the information and explanations which we considered necessary to give reasonable assurance that the report is free from material misstatement.

Consequently, subject to the points made in the body of this statement, Social Audit New Zealand is of the opinion that the report gives a true, fair and balanced view of the various stakeholders' experience of the 2001/2 Community Internship Programme.

The members of the evaluation and audit team were Lindsay Jeffs, Social Audit New Zealand and Lynda Jeffs, LJ Associates.



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