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Department for
**Employment
and Learning**
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Underpinning Success

The Department for Employment and Learning's Research Agenda 2012 – 2015



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Prepared by: Analytical Services, Department for Employment and Learning

UNDERPINNING SUCCESS

THE DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING'S

RESEARCH AGENDA 2012 - 2015

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This Research Agenda identifies the key areas of strategically important research that the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) will seek to develop over the three year period to 2015. The research areas set out in this document have been selected specifically to support policy development and delivery in areas of particular strategic importance to the Department including the areas of skills, innovation, employment and the promotion of good working practices.
- 1.2 The document begins by setting out the strategic purpose for the Department's work. Section 2 examines the importance of evidence based policy development and establishes the key objectives of the Department's Research Agenda. Section 3 looks back at the research work that the Department has already undertaken while Section 4 identifies the priority research areas for the period 2012 – 2015. Section 4 also sets out how the research effort will complement DEL's wider evidence base and will be outward looking, capturing key messages from relevant analysis conducted elsewhere. Section 5 provides details about the Research Agenda Implementation Plan which will be published separately.
- 1.3 DEL will continue to work and engage with other government Departments and bodies in taking forward this Research Agenda to maximise impact.

Strategic Context

- 1.4 Within the Programme for Government (PfG) 2011-15¹ the Northern Ireland Executive has confirmed that it will work, as a matter of priority, to grow the economy and tackle disadvantage. The PfG recognises that there must be a continued focus on rebuilding the local economy in the aftermath of the

¹ Northern Ireland Executive, Programme for Government 2011-15
<http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/pfg-2011-2015-final-report.pdf>

global downturn and that the economy must be rebalanced towards higher value export led growth over the longer term. The actions identified in PfG have been designed to support the realisation of the Executive's economic vision as articulated in the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy². The vision is to:

'develop an economy characterised by a sustainable and growing private sector, where a greater number of firms compete in global markets and there is growing employment and prosperity for all.'

1.5 The work of the Department will play a critical role in realising both the Executive's Economic Vision and its desire to tackle disadvantage. The Department's formal aim is set out in the DEL Business Plan 2012/13³ and is:

'to promote learning and skills, to prepare people for work and to support the economy'.

1.6 It is accepted that it will be the skills, employability and creativeness of people and employers that will drive the economy and society forward. In pursuing its formal aim the Department's key objectives are:

- to promote economic, social and personal development through high quality learning, research and skills training; and
- to help people into employment and promote good working practices.

1.7 The delivery of the Department's aim and objectives is underpinned by a range of strategies which have been designed to advance the skills

² http://www.detini.gov.uk/economic_strategy_web_.pdf

³ <http://www.delni.gov.uk/del-business-plan-2012-2013.pdf>

employment and innovation agendas in Northern Ireland. These include the Northern Ireland Skills Strategy '*Success through Skills – Transforming Futures*⁴'; *Further Education Means Business*; '*Leading to Success*' – the Northern Ireland Management and Leadership Strategy; '*Working for Success*' – the Strategy which is being prepared to shape the work for the Northern Ireland Employment Service; '*Preparing for Success*' – the Strategy for Careers Education; Information, Advice and Guidance; '*Success through STEM*' – the strategy for Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths skills; '*Success through Excellence*' – the Quality Improvement Strategy; '*Pathways to Success*' – the strategy published by the Executive to address the issue of those young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs); and '*Graduating to Success*' - the Higher Education (HE) Strategy for Northern Ireland.

1.8 The achievement of the Department's aim and objectives will be dependent upon the successful implementation of these strategies. To drive this achievement it is critical that the Department has access to robust research evidence in order to underpin all stages of the policy cycle. The Department's commitment to evidence and research has and continues to be central to driving successful policy design and delivery. For example research helps the Department identify what barriers people face as they make decisions about upskilling or entering the labour market. Research helps generate an understanding of future skills needs and how best to respond to those. Importantly, effective research helps policy makers learn the lessons from examples of best practice elsewhere and to benchmark its own performance.

1.9 The Department recognises that evidence is central to effective policy and it has a long record in taking forward strategically focused research. Nevertheless, research requirements continue to evolve as the context

⁴ <http://www.delni.gov.uk/success-through-skills-transforming-futures.pdf>

within which the Department operates changes. This document seeks to move the evidence base forward by identifying the strategically important research areas that the Department will seek to develop over the period to 2015. Figure 1 and Figure 2 below illustrate how the research areas identified in this Agenda will underpin the delivery of DEL's strategic objectives and priorities. The number assigned to each research area in the figures below corresponds with the numbering in Section 4 where further details can be found.

Figure 1: Research identified to underpin the achievement of DEL's first strategic objective

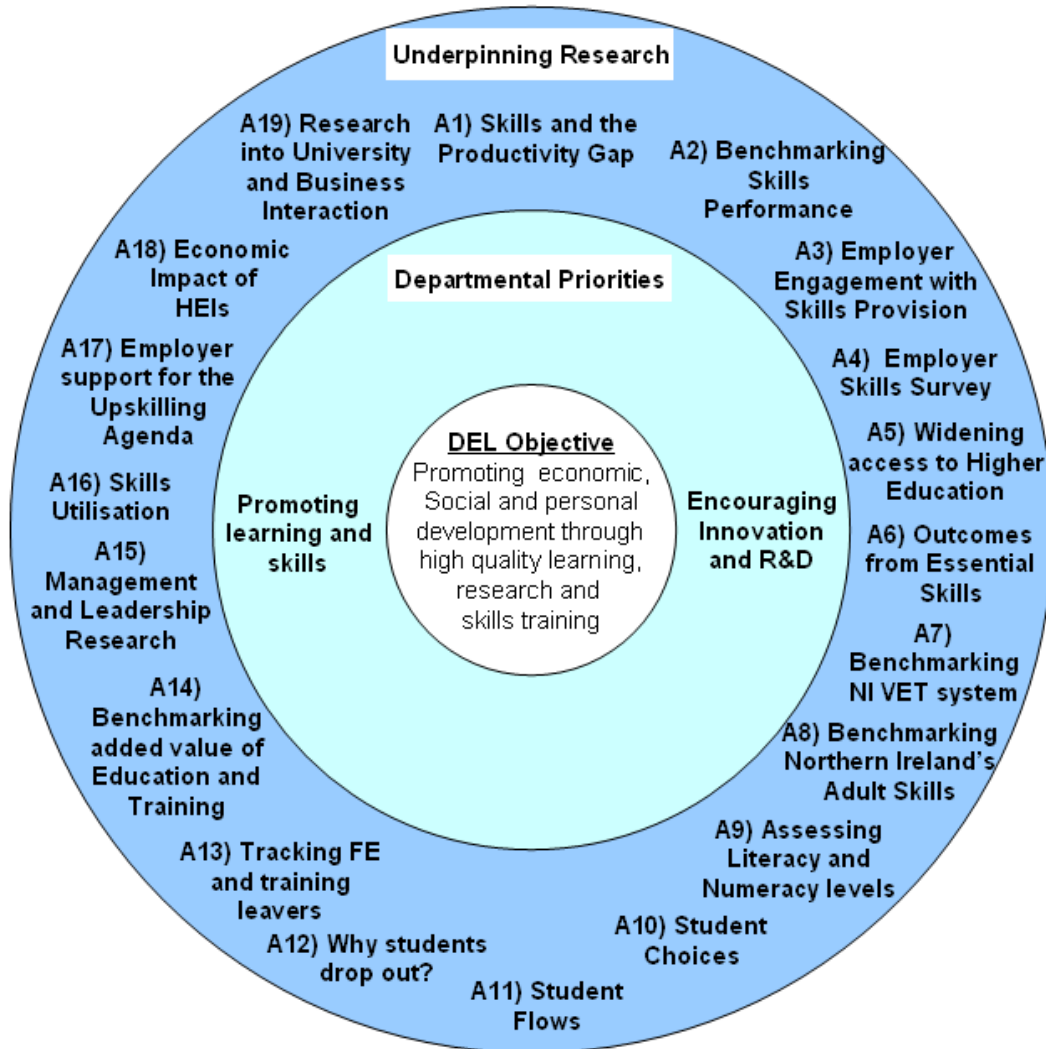
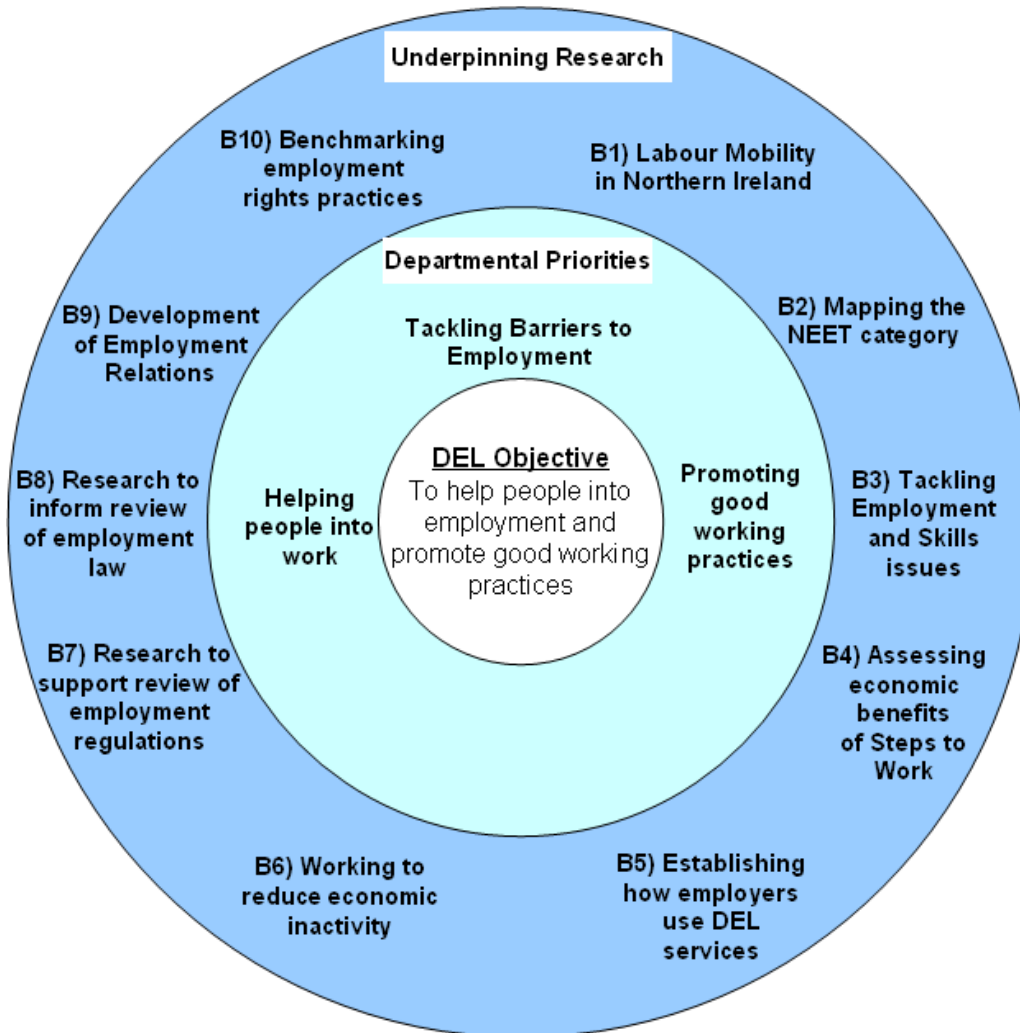


Figure 2: Research identified to underpin the achievement of DEL's second strategic objective



1.10 The Research Agenda will be underpinned by a detailed Implementation Plan which will be published in the autumn of 2012. Further details of what that Implementation Plan will contain are set out in Section 5.

2 Underpinning Success - The DEL Research Agenda 2012 – 2015: Objectives

2.1 The Northern Ireland Practical Guide to Policy Making⁵ recognises that the availability of good quality research and evidence is central to all stages of the policy development cycle.

2.2 It has been this desire, to have evidence at the centre of the policy making process, that prompted the Department to develop its first Research Agenda in 2004. Since then the Department has accumulated a wealth of new knowledge and information through its wide ranging research activities. From its inception the prime objective of the Research Agenda has been to *“to strengthen further the link that exists between research and policy development”*. That continues to be the core objective of this Research Agenda.

2.3 The 2004 Agenda was refreshed in 2007 and, more recently, the Department published a Research Stock Take paper⁶. It set out the research the Department planned to initiate in the period up to March 2012, rolling forward from the 2007 Research Agenda.

2.4 This latest Research Agenda which covers the period to 2015 will build upon the work that has flowed from the previous agendas. It will assist the Department as it seeks to develop policies and programmes which are rooted firmly in evidence and which are responsive to the needs of the people and economy of Northern Ireland. The objectives underpinning this Research Agenda are:

- to strengthen further the link that exists between research, policy development and service delivery within DEL;

⁵ A Practical Guide to Policy Making in Northern Ireland' OFMDFM (2003).

⁶ <http://www.delni.gov.uk/del-research-agenda-stock-take-paper.pdf>

- to provide improved co-ordination between the Department's planned research, the strategic development and the business planning process; and
- to enhance interest within the research community in the areas of research relevant to DEL

3 The Expanding Evidence Base – A Review

3.1 The research evidence base developed by the Department continues to expand. Much of the output from that work is summarised in the Department's Labour Market Bulletin⁷. The following provides an update of progress in relation to the research the Department commissioned and undertook since the publication of the DEL Research Stock Take paper April 2011⁸. Where the research has been completed and published, links to the underpinning reports are provided. The research has been set out against the Department's two strategic objectives.

DEL STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1. Promoting economic, social and personal development through high quality learning, research and skills training

3.2 This strategic objective relates specifically to the Department's activities in relation to skills and innovation and the research projects have been further categorised against these two headings (and within skills, by the relevant strategic themes underpinning the '*Success through Skills – Transforming Futures*' strategy).

Skills

Understanding the Demand for Skills

Employer Skills Survey 2011. The Department engaged with the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) to run a UK-wide Employer Skills Survey in 2011. The survey incorporated the themes and questions previously asked in the English National Employer Skills Survey

⁷ The Department's Labour Market Bulletins can be accessed at <http://www.delni.gov.uk/sr-labour-market-bulletins>

⁸ All research reports published by the Department are available on the DEL website <http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/statsandresearch.htm>

(NESS), the Scottish Employer Skills Survey (SESS), Future Skills Wales, and the Northern Ireland Skills Monitoring Survey. The UK survey provides key intelligence to government on skills shortages and skills gaps. It provides an information base to aid DEL customers, particularly job changers and job seekers, to make informed labour market decisions. It also provides important information on skills policy levers. The survey includes new questions on the application of high performance work practices and employers' skills utilisation. It will provide DEL with a comprehensive snapshot of the current skill needs of NI employers and will build on baseline information collected in the three previous Northern Ireland Skills Monitoring Surveys (2002, 2005 and 2008), thereby permitting analysis of time-series information. Also, the harmonisation of survey questions provides an opportunity for more detailed and consistent UK wide comparisons. A UK report was published in December 2011 and a Northern Ireland report is due to be published later in 2012.

<http://www.ukces.org.uk/assets/ukces/docs/publications/uk-ess-first-findings-2011-amended-22-dec.pdf>

Research to determine the skills required to support potential economic growth in the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy sector.

This report provides an assessment of the skills required to support the growth of companies operating in the sustainable energy sector in Northern Ireland over the next ten years. It examines four specific areas – integrated building technology, offshore energy, bio energy and energy storage. The report, which was published in September 2011, identifies a number of actions to sustain and improve the supply of skills in these areas.

http://www.delni.gov.uk/ni_se_final_report_-_pdf_version_-_final.pdf

Impact of reduction in Corporation Tax on skills, employability and R&D in NI. On foot of the Executive's goal of achieving a reduced rate of

corporation tax in Northern Ireland, Oxford Economics was commissioned by the Department to assess the impact a lower tax regime would have on the demand for skills, employability and Research and Development capacity. A final report from this research was published in June 2012.

<http://www.delni.gov.uk/lower-corporation-tax-environment.pdf>

Improving the Quality and Relevance of Education

Longitudinal Destination of Leavers from Higher Education. The latest survey took place in winter 2010/11 and provides details of the destinations of students that graduated from HE courses three and a half years previously (in 2006/07). Analysts within the Department produced a Northern Ireland report based on the results from the survey in March 2012. This included information on qualifiers from NI Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and on NI domiciled qualifiers from UK HEIs.

<http://www.delni.gov.uk/destination-of-leavers-from-he-0607-report.pdf>

Futuretrack. In 2005 the UK's Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU), launched a major programme of research, named Futuretrack, designed to explore the process of entry into and through HE. Futuretrack follows the progress of students, who applied through UCAS for full time courses at UK colleges and universities in 2006, over a 5 year period. HECSU published a series of working papers at the UK level on Stage 3 of Futuretrack, the first of these was made available in August 2010. This most recent stage of the work is aimed particularly at students who applied to UCAS in 2005/06 and were expecting to graduate in the summers of 2010 or 2011. It focuses on student experiences up to that point. The Department commissioned a separate NI report on Stage 3 of the study in 2011. This report is due to complete before summer 2012 and will be

published on the Department's web-site.

Econometric analysis of outcomes in Further Education (FE). The Department recognises the wide variance in retention and achievement rates amongst different types of student within the FE sector and has developed an in-depth statistical analysis to understand these differences in more detail. A pilot assessment of these effects in the FE sector has been completed. The results of the pilot, which was completed based on 07/08 and 08/09 data, has been shared with the FE colleges and the analysis will be updated with 2010/11 data shortly. The 2010/11 work will be completed over summer 2012 with the aim of publication in Autumn 2012.

Research Project into the Learning Styles of Entrepreneurs. This research, which is being taken forward by DEL and Invest NI, has sought to explore the learning patterns of local entrepreneurs across a variety of sectors. The researchers presented the findings of Phase 1 of the project, which identified the 'right-brained' learning preferences of entrepreneurs in November 2010. The Department has since commissioned Phase 2 of the research. It will seek to establish how entrepreneurial learning preferences (as determined in Phase 1) are currently met within formal education and what policy interventions might be introduced to improve the current situation. A final report is expected in Spring 2012 and it will be available on the DEL web-site in due course.

Understanding adult perceptions of FE. It has long been argued that lower level, non-accredited courses help foster and reignite the desire to learn amongst adults. The thrust of this research project was to explore: attitudes to FE; barriers to entry; why people drop out; why they complete their course; the impact of the so called 'softer outcomes'; and whether 'hobby and leisure' provision acts as an effective first step on the learning

ladder. This work was published in February 2012.

www.delni.gov.uk/removing-the-barriers-to-learning-part-one-research-report-final-for-publication-feb-2012.pdf

Improving productivity by increasing the skill levels of the workforce

Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey – Essential Skills Module. Since April 2004 DEL has commissioned a module within the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey, which is run by the Central Survey Unit of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)⁹. The Omnibus Survey is carried out on a regular basis and is designed to provide a snapshot of the lifestyle and views of the people of Northern Ireland. The survey is administered every quarter and on a bi-annual basis an Essential Skills module is included. The rationale behind developing the module was to provide a cost effective method of monitoring individuals' perceptions of their literacy and numeracy abilities in every day life. The latest results are available for April 2011 at: <http://www.delni.gov.uk/del-report-april-2011.pdf>

Innovation and R&D

The Impact of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) on Regional Economies. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), in partnership with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), DEL, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) initiated a 3-year research

⁹ <http://www.csu.nisra.gov.uk/survey.asp10.htm>

programme in 2006 to assess the impact of HEIs on regional economies. In particular, the programme sought to assess these impacts of research, knowledge transfer, expertise and skills on the economy, society and on cultural development. A number of research projects were commissioned through this major programme including an examination of the factors that affect the incidence, form, effectiveness and regional impact of knowledge exchange activities in the UK.¹⁰

Analysis of the Higher Education Business and Community Interaction Survey (HEBCI). The Department has produced an annual Northern Ireland summary of the UK wide HEBCI Survey which is produced by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and HEFCE. This work, which is published in the Department's Labour Market Bulletin,¹¹ seeks to provide reliable and relevant information to support policy development and to inform funding decisions related to the third stream activities (i.e. the exploitation of university research and knowledge for the benefit of the economy and society) of NI HEIs.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2: To help people into employment and promote good working practices.

3.3 This strategic objective relates specifically to the Department's activities in relation to addressing barriers to employment, helping people into work and promoting good working practices. The research projects that the Department has undertaken or that are currently underway in these areas are summarised below.

¹⁰ The various papers associated with the IMPACT initiative can be found at <http://ewds.strath.ac.uk/impact/Home.aspx>

¹¹ <http://www.delni.gov.uk/lmb-23-web-version.pdf>

Tackling Barriers to employment

Research to examine the possibility of developing a tracking system for individual young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). This research is investigating options that will allow the systematic collection and use of data to track young people as they move from school to further education, training or employment. The research is examining data tracking systems elsewhere and, by matching these with the requirements of departments in Northern Ireland and the availability of information here, it will establish what best fits local requirements. The research is also identifying what actions and agreements are needed to establish and support such a system in Northern Ireland. The study is due to be completed over Summer 2012.

Consultation with parents on Pathways to Success. The purpose of this research project was to seek, via a series of focus groups, the views of parents of young people who are NEET or likely to become NEET on the "Pathways to Success" strategy. This research was completed in March 2012 and findings were incorporated into the Strategy.

Helping people into work

Research into the destinations, attitudes and experiences of a sample of leavers from the Steps to Work programme. The purpose of this survey was to conduct research into the destinations, attitudes and experiences of a sample of 1,000 customers who had participated in the Steps to Work (StW) programme since September 2008. In particular, the

objectives of the research were to:

- provide information on the current status of participants (i.e. employed, on Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), Incapacity Benefit (IB)/ Employment Support Allowance (ESA), Income Support (IS), in education, not available for or seeking work due to other issues, for example caring responsibilities, etc);
- detail their post-StW history, particularly moves to employment and the duration (sustainability) of that employment;
- detail their experiences of, and attitudes to, StW as a whole, to the various strands of StW and to Employment Service Advisers, taking account of the various characteristics of participants;
- examine the extent to which StW has met the expectation of participants and to ascertain satisfaction levels; and
- provide information on participants' perceptions of the quality and appropriateness of the provision undertaken by them.

The final report was published on the Department's website in April 2012.

<http://www.delni.gov.uk/steps-to-work-leavers-survey.pdf>

Promoting Good Working Practices

Research into Employment Rights Information and Support for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs). This research project aims to identify and quantify the impact of deficiencies in information, skills and support available to SMEs in Northern Ireland in respect of employment rights/relations responsibilities. The study is utilising a sample survey of SMEs to assess the obstacles they face in understanding and complying with employment law. It is investigating the impact of dealing with compliance issues; knowledge, uptake and the impact/effectiveness of government and non-government support; and gaps in provision, which if addressed, would make it easier to overcome identified obstacles. A final

report from this research is due to be completed over Summer 2012.

4 Departmental Plans for Research 2012 - 2015 – Looking Forward

- 4.1 The Department has undertaken a thorough review of its research needs and questions for the period up to 2015. This has identified a wide range of research areas which will be required to underpin policy development and delivery. The research needs are set out below against the Department's two strategic objectives. In line with the guiding aims of the Research Agenda, this approach seeks to ensure that the research undertaken by the Department, over the medium to long term, will strengthen further the link that exists between research, policy development and service delivery within DEL.
- 4.2 The Research Agenda has been developed with a cross cutting emphasis on the desire to have increasingly robust national and international benchmarking across all DEL programmes. Consequently, where possible the benchmarking of performance with comparators both within and outside the region will be sought as part of relevant research projects.

DEL STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1. Promoting economic, social and personal development through high quality learning, research and skills training

- 4.3 As stated in Section 3, this strategic objective covers Departmental priorities in the areas of skills and innovation. The research undertaken to support attainment of this objective will inform delivery of a number of relevant policies and strategies including '*Success through Skills – Transforming Futures*', Further Education Means Business and 'Graduating to Success' – the HE strategy. While the following represents a comprehensive list of the Department's research needs in these areas, it is recognised that further research needs may emerge over the period to 2015 that will need to be addressed in order to meet the objectives of this Research Agenda fully.

Skills

Understanding the Demand for Skills

- A1) **Skills and the Productivity Gap.** In order to aid the Department's contribution to the delivery of the Economic Strategy, this work would seek to investigate the role of skills in narrowing the productivity gap with the UK as a whole and with other leading countries and regions. This work would examine the extent to which the productivity gap is accounted for by differences in skill levels and consider what steps can be taken to best address that gap.
- A2) **Benchmarking Skills Performance on an Ongoing Basis.** The Department will undertake a scoping study to examine the potential for benchmarking Northern Ireland's skills performance against other regions and to assess the impact of the Success through Skills strategy on productivity and employment. Subject to the outcomes of this scoping study, the project would seek to progress towards establishing, maintaining and publishing regularly a set of skills data which will make comparisons between Northern Ireland's performance and a number of other small, open and developed economies.
- A3) **Employer Engagement with Skills Provision.** The Department plans to participate in the Employer Perspectives Survey 2012 – a UK wide survey. This is one of two major UK wide employer surveys conducted on a biennial basis by the UKCES. The aim of this survey is to provide robust evidence for policy makers regarding employers' engagement and satisfaction with government support for recruitment and workforce development. The survey is unique in

that it allows for comparisons to be made across the four nations of the UK, where different initiatives are in operation, and it compares employers' perspectives of services and initiatives across three areas of government policy: general business support; employment; and skills. The survey fieldwork is expected to get underway later in 2012.

- A4) **Secondary analysis of the Employer Skills Survey.** The Department may seek to commission secondary analysis of the Employer Skills Survey in order to identify gaps in skill levels across NI. Amongst other things the evidence from this research could help inform the work of the Department's Future Skill Action Groups.

Improving the Quality and Relevance of Education

- A5) **Widening Access to Higher Education – what works.** The Department plans to undertake a series of projects to enhance data availability and tracking of students. These will be initiated as part of the implementation of the Strategy for Widening Participation in HE. For instance the Department would seek to engage with the Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study (NILS) to gather long term data on educational attainment outcomes. Using the baseline profile of qualification levels attained by 2001, the analysis would track subsequent educational experiences to identify which population groups are under-represented in HE and to examine the behaviour/outcomes for these groups over time. A comprehensive review of wider data sources in relation to HE participation is also envisaged. This work would be designed to understand more fully widening access issues so that resources can be targeted most

effectively.

- A6) **Factors that impact on the successful completion of Essential Skills courses.** The Department plans to conduct a detailed statistical analysis of outcomes in Essential Skills to consider why there appears to be significant variance in retention and completion rates across different types of students and providers.
- A7) **Comparing Northern Ireland's Vocational Education and Training system internationally.** In support of the *Success through Skills* and *FE Means Business* Strategies the Department will seek to participate in an expansive review by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) of postsecondary vocational education and training (VET) known as *Skills beyond School*. This research, which is likely to be conducted in conjunction with the UKCES, would include a 'commentary' on Northern Ireland's VET system by the OECD comparing and benchmarking it with other countries and identifying strengths, challenges and examples of best practice.

Improving productivity by increasing the skill levels of the workforce

- A8) **Assessing Northern Ireland's Adult Skills in an International Context.** The Department is already participating in a major international study of adult skills - the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). This highly regarded international research project, which is led by the OECD will assess the level and distribution of adult skills in a coherent and consistent way across countries. It will focus on the

key cognitive and workplace skills that are required for successful participation in the economy and society of the 21st century. It was officially established in March 2008. Field test data collection was completed in 2010 with the main study administered in 2011. Results will be available in late 2013. Following publication of the main report the Department will consider commissioning secondary analysis of PIAAC data. This is likely to include an examination of how Northern Ireland's skills profile has progressed since a similar survey, the International Adult Skills Survey (IALs), was conducted in 1996. This would provide insights into which policy approaches have delivered the best outcomes in terms of skills improvements.

A9) **Assessing Literacy and Numeracy levels at a Sub Regional Level.** The Department has recently initiated a piece of research to examine the possibility of providing estimates of self reported 'Literacy' ability at small geographical areas, such as Super Output Areas (SOAs). This work will benefit policy makers by building up a clearer picture of Essential Skills needs at a local level in Northern Ireland. The first phase of this research will scope the possibility of using Omnibus Survey data in conjunction with Census information to develop a spatial micro simulation model. If the scoping study indicates that the project is viable, given data availability, then phase two would develop the model and provide estimates of self reported 'Literacy' ability within small geographical areas. The study is due to be completed during summer 2012.

A10) **Student Fees, Student Support and their impact on Participation.** In order to help inform the delivery and implementation of the Higher Education Strategy the Department will consider commissioning research into what impact the availability of finance and the level of student fees have had on

students' choices about participating in HE.

- A11) **Student Flows.** Linked to the above project, the Department may also seek to consider how HE student flows across the UK are changing particularly in the advent of different HE fee charges across UK countries. The study would include an investigation of the flows from and to the Republic of Ireland particularly in light of possible changes to the funding system there.
- A12) **Identifying what factors cause students to drop out of their courses.** Building on the extensive existing evidence base at a UK and international level, this research would seek to examine the determinants and reasons for dropping out at all levels of HE, FE and Training. This would include research into the effects and/or impacts of guidance and careers advice provided prior to enrolling on the course.
- A13) **What happens to students once they leave their further education and training courses?** This study would consider the possibilities of conducting a survey similar to that conducted in HE via the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) Survey to track leavers from the FE and training sectors. The successful implementation of such a survey would mean that the Department would have labour market information on leavers from all of its key areas of sponsored provision. That in turn would help frame careers advice, student choices, policy development and service delivery.
- A14) **What Value Does Education and Training Add to individuals and to Society?** Building on the existing international evidence base and subject to robust data availability, this research would

consider the value added by education, training and apprenticeships in Northern Ireland, looking specifically at the value of the investment and returns for the individual and society.

A15) **Management and Leadership Research.** This work would help inform the evaluation of the Leading to Success Strategy and would focus particularly on how management and leadership skills in Northern Ireland have been improving and what remains to be achieved.

A16) **The Skills Utilisation and Up-skilling agenda.** This research would investigate how skills of people in work are currently being utilised and what barriers exist to those people re-skilling and up-skilling. It is envisaged that this research will also examine the role of careers guidance and the enablers for skills progression and greater skills utilisation.

A17) **Employer support for the Upskilling agenda.** Building on the above research this work would seek to establish employer's attitudes to and support for part time study and foundation degrees.

Supporting the promotion of Innovation and R&D

A18) **The Impact Northern Ireland Higher Education and Further Education Institutions have on the Innovation agenda.** This research would seek to build on the work of the ESRC led IMPACT initiative¹², which is described in Section 3. This supplemental research would be carried out at the Northern Ireland level and

¹² <http://ewds.strath.ac.uk/impact/Projects/UniversityIndustryKnowledgeExchange.aspx>

would enable the Department to augment the evidence base from the UK study by identifying the economic impacts of Universities and Colleges.

A19) Assessing the Performance of University Business Interaction Activities. The Department will develop a Northern Ireland level report which would sit alongside the published UK wide Higher Education Business and Community Interaction Survey which is produced by HESA and HEFCE. This work, coupled with the research above, will develop our understanding of the level of business engagement undertaken by Northern Ireland HE Institutions.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2: To help people into employment and promote good working practices

4.4 Key Departmental strategies supporting the delivery of this objective include the Employment Service Strategy '*Working for Success*' which is being developed currently. It will aim to further establish an individualised approach to addressing barriers to employment taking account of the increasingly diverse client base that is accessing the Employment Service. The Northern Ireland Economic Strategy includes commitments to develop and implement strategies to address youth unemployment and economic inactivity. In addition, the Executive has published a strategy, '*Pathways to Success*', which will focus on those young people that are not in education, employment or training (NEET). The research needs outlined below have been identified to inform the development and delivery of these strategies which will be critical to tackling disadvantage and building labour market capacity for sustainable economic growth.

4.5 In addition to the projects identified in the following list, the Department recognises that further research needs may emerge in this area over the period to 2015 which will need to be addressed in order to meet the objectives of this Research Agenda fully.

Tackling Barriers to employment

B1) Labour Mobility in Northern Ireland. Building on the current evidence base the Department plans to undertake research into the area of labour mobility within Northern Ireland. Labour mobility is important for individuals as it can help people gain the best return on their investment in skills. It is important for companies as it ensures they can access a wider pool of potential workers to address skills needs. By implication, labour mobility is vitally important for economic development. Previous research confirmed that while barriers to labour mobility exist in a British and Irish context, Northern Ireland faces a number of particular issues including transport and chill factors. Attempts have been made by the Department to help people move away from a purely local focus on employment through its presentation of labour market information and through the advice and help offered through the Careers Service and the Jobcentre/Jobs and Benefits Office network. Nevertheless, as the Department seeks to support delivery of the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy it will work with others to consider the extent of contemporary barriers to labour mobility and identify what remains to be done to address those barriers that continue to exist.

B2) Mapping provision for those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in the Voluntary and Community Sector. In

collaboration with the sector, the Department will seek to undertake a mapping exercise to determine the scope and range of provision offered by voluntary and community organisations for those young people who fall into the NEET category. This exercise will seek to establish a comprehensive picture of provision for young people in the NEET category to assist effective service planning and signposting. This exercise is a commitment in the NEET Strategy.

- B3) An examination and assessment of the contribution that skill and labour market policies make to employment and productivity levels.** This research will provide the Department with a new and fresh perspective on the solutions available to tackle Northern Ireland's employment and skill issues by providing an international perspective and expert policy advice. The project will be led by the Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) unit of the OECD and will involve a series of country reviews which will examine the capacity of our employment and skill services to contribute to economic growth. As this work is taken forward the Department will ensure it complements related research identified in the skill section above.

Helping people into work

- B4) Assessing the economic benefits of the Steps to Work programme.** This research would seek to assess and quantify the economic benefits of the Steps to Work programme and consider any deadweight associated with the programme. This research is also likely to include an examination of the impact of the downturn and the Universal Credit.

- B5) **Engaging with Employers to help people into work.** The Employment Service is interested to understand more comprehensively where employers place vacancies and if they use the Employment Service how they rate this service. This research would indicate the proportion of all vacancies in NI which are notified to the Department including a split across sectors. This is with a view to linking the unemployed to the full range of vacancies in NI.
- B6) **Working to reduce economic inactivity.** This work would seek to underpin and shape DEL's contribution to the development of a Northern Ireland strategy to address inactivity. It is envisaged that this research would focus particularly on those classified as sick and disabled and, where appropriate, how best they can be facilitated to re-engage with the labour market.

Promoting Good Working Practices

- B7) **To consider research around Better Regulation to tie in with the Review to rationalise the administrative burden.** The Department is about to take forward a review of all employment regulations. As a first step, officials intend to conduct a pilot exercise that will involve detailed scrutiny of three sets of employment regulations, in consultation with key stakeholders. The pilot exercise will have two objectives: to determine the need for and adequacy of those provisions, and to establish a methodology for a review of all employment regulations. The overall aim of this review will be to reduce the burden of regulations either through the removal of specific regulations or through the rationalisation of supporting

administrative processes. The findings from the pilot exercise are likely to generate further research requirements.

B8) Research to support the Review of Employment Law. In the Executive's Economic Strategy, the Department is committed to a review of employment law which will "seek to stimulate business confidence whilst maintaining the rights of individual employees". As a first step, the Department has issued a discussion document to the employment relations stakeholder community seeking views on the scope and sequencing of the policy areas to be covered in the review of employment law. The purpose of this stakeholder engagement is to establish an understanding about what policy and practice issues need to be reviewed as a matter of priority. Following the initial stakeholder engagement the Department will identify the policy proposals that merit further exploration, which will inform the qualitative and quantitative research that needs to be commissioned

B9) Development of Employment Relations. This project would look specifically at sources of information and support for employees and how they can be encouraged to consider alternative low cost non-legal options which either prevent or address workplace conflict.

B10) Review of practice within Employment Rights to include a review of international models. The Department was responsible for the transposition of the Temporary Agency Workers Directive into domestic law in 2011. In the course of preparing the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) it was evident that there was limited local evidence available to support policy proposals. The Employment & Learning Committee pointed to the need to enhance the local evidence base on agency workers in Northern Ireland during the

policy development stage. The Department is planning to review the implementation of the Directive to inform the European Commission's wider review in 2013 and there is a need to assess the impacts of the Agency Workers Regulations (NI) 2011 in Northern Ireland. Anecdotal evidence thus far indicates that the legislation has greatly impacted on NI agency workers, agencies and hirers but there is little statistical evidence to support this. Also, some of the new provisions have proven particularly controversial. The Department requires a firm evidence base to properly review the impact of the Directive and considers that this may be achieved by the commission of bespoke research to carry out a post implementation review.

An Outward Looking Research Approach

- 4.6 The Department is committed to ensuring that the research it commissions represents value for money and delivers the maximum positive impact on policy development and delivery. As it meets this commitment DEL will seek to build on the relevant evidence base that has been developed both locally and internationally. This approach will help ensure that any research commissioned by the Department complements rather than duplicates existing or emerging work.
- 4.7 Having a clear understanding of research work undertaken elsewhere also maximises the opportunities for Departmental policies and programmes to be framed by relevant lessons from elsewhere. Such an outward looking approach is in keeping with best practice advocated in the OFMDFM practical guide to policy making¹³. Through this approach the Department

¹³ <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/practical-guide-policy-making.pdf>

can gain an insight into which actions work and which actions have been less successful. It helps identify best practice and performance benchmarks against which Northern Ireland can be compared. In order to promote this outward looking approach, the Department will continue to monitor recently published research that has relevance to its work and, each quarter, produce a Quarterly Research Review¹⁴ (QRR).

4.8 Building further on its outward looking research approach, the Department will seek to build strong engagement with other public, academic and research institutions where it is relevant and cost effective to do so. This is in keeping with the aim of the Research Agenda *‘to enhance interest within the research community in the areas of research relevant to DEL.’* The Department already benefits significantly from such engagements and, in recent years, has developed strong relationships with a number of organisations which have helped it learn from national and international best practice. Research organisations with which DEL has forged links include:

- the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD);
- the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES);
- the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC);
- the Learning in Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies (LLAKES) Centre;
- the Centre on Skills Knowledge and Organisational Performance (SKOPE);
- the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP); and

¹⁴ The Department’s Quarterly Research Review can be accessed at <http://www.delni.gov.uk/quarterly-research-review>

- Ireland's Expert Group on Future Skills Needs – the expert panel which advises the Irish Government on skill needs and on other labour market issues.

Complementing DEL's Wider Evidence Base

4.9 DEL recognises that it is essential that the quality, performance and purpose of the Department's wide ranging provision is clearly understood and is of a high standard. Consequently, the Department undertakes research to evaluate and maximise the impact of the programmes it delivers or sponsors. This work is designed to build on and complement the evidence produced through this research agenda. It includes the DEL Rolling Programme of Evaluation, which is the principal mechanism through which the Department monitors and reviews existing policy. The Department also produces and publishes an annual Quality and Performance report¹⁵ which provides a detailed analysis of performance against key Departmental objectives and commitments. Underpinning this work, the Department produces and publishes a significant number of statistical releases and bulletins¹⁶ across a wide range of policy areas.

4.10 Taken together, this body of evidence supports the Department as it seeks to maintain and enhance the quality of the policies and programmes it delivers.

¹⁵ <http://www.delni.gov.uk/qualityperformanceanalysis>

¹⁶ <http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/statsandresearch.htm>

5 The Delivery of Underpinning Success – The DEL Research Agenda 2012 - 2015

Procurement

5.1 This Research Agenda will be complemented by a separate Implementation Plan which will be published in the autumn of 2012. That plan will:

- set out the procurement arrangements that will be adopted for the overall Research Agenda and for the individual projects within it;
- include identification of the research projects that will be conducted by the Department's own Analytical Services team and those for which external support will be sought;
- provide further details about contract management arrangements;
- identify how the research will be prioritised; and
- set out how projects flowing from the Research Agenda will be funded.

5.2 In order to ensure duplication of research conducted elsewhere in Northern Ireland is avoided and to maximise complementarity, DEL will continue to engage with other Northern Ireland government departments and bodies as it undertakes the research identified in this document.

Management of the Research Agenda

5.3 The management of this Research Agenda, including the prioritisation of projects, will reside with the Department's Senior Management Team (SMT)

5.4 The professional economists and statisticians within the Department's Analytical Services team will have a key role in supporting SMT to take forward the work identified in this Research Agenda. They will work

alongside policy professionals to assist with the specification of the research issues, the selection of external researchers where required, taking forward internal research studies, steering research and quality controlling research outputs.

Dissemination

5.5 The Department is committed to ensuring that the work emanating from this Research Agenda will feed into policy development. Consequently, the relevant research findings will be presented to the Department's SMT as appropriate. The Department is also committed to publishing and widely disseminating the research work it commissions. Currently summaries of research findings are published in the Department's Labour Market Bulletin, which is available to an audience far beyond the public sector. Full reports are usually made available electronically on the Analytical Service Group's web site¹⁷ or in hard copy upon request. Dissemination, where appropriate, also takes place through research seminars and conferences.

Other considerations

5.6 Where relevant, the research projects taken forward will be required to have due regard for the Equality Legislation as set out in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act; Lifetime Opportunities – The Government's Anti-Poverty and Social Exclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland; and the Government's Shared Future vision - 'Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland'. Further details will be outlined in this Agenda's Implementation Plan.

¹⁷ <http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/statsandresearch.htm>

Monitoring and evaluation of Research Agenda 2012 - 2015

5.7 Each research project will be monitored by a Steering Group to ensure that it delivers according to the Terms of Reference and timescales agreed at the outset. Progress of the overall Research Agenda will be monitored by the Department on an annual basis and an evaluation will be commissioned once the policy impacts from the individual pieces of research have had sufficient time to bed in.

Comments and Feedback

5.8 The Department for Employment and Learning would welcome views on this, its Research Agenda for the period 2012-15. If you would like to make any comments on the research areas identified within this document or on any other aspect of the Department's Research Agenda, please e-mail: analyticalservices@delni.gov.uk or write to:

Analytical Services
Department for Employment and Learning
Adelaide House
39-49 Adelaide Street
Belfast
BT2 8FD

people:skills:jobs:



Department for
**Employment
and Learning**
www.delni.gov.uk



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Our aim is to promote learning and skills,
to prepare people for work and to support
the economy.

This document is available in other
formats upon request.

Further information:

Department for Employment and Learning
Adelaide House
39-49 Adelaide Street
Belfast BT2 8FD
Tel: 028 9025 7775
Fax: 028 9025 7696
email: analyticalservices@delni.gov.uk
web: www.delni.gov.uk