

DEL QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE – AN ACTION PLAN

A response to the Key Issues Raised in the 4th Annual DEL Performance Report

1. Annually, the Department for Employment and Learning (The Department) publishes a detailed quantitative assessment of performance across its key programmes and provision. The latest report, the fourth annual Performance Analysis report, was published in [November] 2013. The report is an important element of the Department's quality improvement strategy, '*Success through Excellence*', which sets out its commitment to evidence based policy development and high quality service delivery. The Department is committed to ensuring that the provision it funds is of a high quality, and that those who provide these services on its behalf deliver high performance standards.
2. The Department has put in place an extensive framework for monitoring and delivering quality and performance across its programmes. A number of key examples are set out below:
 - a) Quality and Performance Monitoring in Further Education

In the Further Education Sector, the main components of the Department's performance monitoring are: quarterly health checks; the annual production of learner retention and achievement data, down to individual course level; the annual College Development Planning process; and the Quality Managers' Forum. The quality of each college's provision is subject to a whole college inspection carried out by the Education and Training Inspectorate once every three years. Where poor provision is identified, progress towards improvement is monitored through a series of follow-up inspection activities. Each college is also required to submit to the Department an annual self-evaluation report and quality improvement plan, the accuracy of which is confirmed through a short inspection, also by the Education and Training Inspectorate.
 - b) Quality and Performance Monitoring in Higher Education

The Department charges the independent Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to undertake the quality assurance of Higher Education in Northern Ireland including that delivered through the six Further Education Colleges (HE in FE). The QAA's core business is to review the quality and standards of UK higher education. It does this by auditing the way in which each university and college manages the overall quality and standards of its provision. It reviews the academic standards and the quality of teaching and learning in each subject area. The focused work of the QAA is further complemented by regular accountability meetings between senior staff in the Department and the local

higher education institutions. These provide an opportunity to discuss issues on the performance, operation and accountability of each institution.

c) Quality and Performance Monitoring of Training and Employment Programmes

The Department monitors contracts on a regular basis to ensure training suppliers (and lead contractors for Steps to Work) are adhering to the terms of their contract and to the operational guidelines for the programme. It also works closely with the Education and Training Inspectorate to schedule inspection activities normally on a three year cycle. As with further education, poor provision is subject to a series of follow-up inspection activities. Each training supplier and Steps to Work lead contractor is requested to submit an annual self-evaluation report and quality improvement plan, the accuracy of which is confirmed by the Inspectorate. In addition, the Department holds an annual case conference to review the performance of each Steps to Work lead contractor to determine if their contract is to continue for the next financial year or alternatively what remedial action/sanctions are to be applied.

3. The Department places a high priority on the quality of provision across further education, training and employment programmes. Where poor provision is identified, each provider is afforded an opportunity to improve. They must submit a detailed improvement plan to the Department outlining how they intend to address the areas of weakness identified. The implementation of this plan is monitored by the Inspectorate who also carries out the above mentioned follow-up inspection activities. As a result of these processes, almost all colleges and providers address effectively weaknesses in provision and most demonstrate significant improvement. The Department monitors the sustainability of improvement through the annual self-evaluation process and through contract monitoring activities, where appropriate. Where a provider fails to make the necessary improvements within the agreed timescale, the Department terminates the contract.
4. The latest DEL Performance Analysis report provides an update on a range of important performance indicators right across the spectrum of DEL provision, reflecting its commitments around skills, employment and innovation. It illustrates the progress that the Department has made against its Quality Improvement Strategy but also highlights the challenges that remain. It is in response to these challenges that the Department has developed this action plan, to complement and strengthen its existing quality and performance framework. The action plan sets out the work the Department will take forward to address each key issue.
5. The Quality and Performance Action Plan will be monitored regularly and an update on progress will be published as part of the Department's annual performance reporting cycle.

A. Skills

A.1. Delivering over 200,000 qualifications at Level 2 and above by 2015

Key Issue	Current Position	Planned Action	Timescale	Responsible Division
At present the Department is on track to meet its Programme for Government qualifications commitment; in the 2011/12 academic year there were over 73,000 Level 2 and above full qualifications gained across mainstream Further Education, Essential Skills, funded Departmental Training programmes, and HE (including HE in FE) - against a target of 52,500. This represents 11% growth from the qualifications gained in 2010/11. However, enrolments in a number of key areas have fallen which could impact negatively on the	The 4 th annual Quality and Performance report points to an improving picture on retention and, particularly, achievement. However, it shows that enrolments - which underpin future achievements - have fallen in FE Mainstream (at Level 2 and above) and in HE in FE provision in recent years. These two areas contribute around 40% of qualifications to the overall Programme for Government target and should continue to be monitored closely.	Much of the decline relates to falling numbers in part-time HE in FE. Additional work is underway to encourage FE Colleges to increase part-time enrolments in proportion to full-time students.	Additional funding has been made available for part-time programmes and colleges are assessed on a full to part time efficiency ratio.	Higher Education Division & Further Education Division
		The Department will continue to monitor college performance on enrolments and retention and achievements through the College Development Planning (CDP) process. Introduce through the next (2013/14) CDP process a Quality	Annually.	Further Education

number of qualifications achieved during the course of the Programme for Government period.		Performance Adjustment process that penalises colleges financially for poor retention and achievement performance.		
---	--	--	--	--

A.2. STEM – Building the Supply of STEM skills

Key Issue	Current Position	Planned Action	Timescale	Responsible Division
The Northern Ireland Executive is committed, through its STEM Strategy - <i>Success through STEM</i> , to building the supply of STEM skills. This commitment is reflected also in the Executive's Programme for Government and forms a central aspect of its Economic Strategy.	The latest Quality and Performance report identifies that a number of significant challenges remain if the long term supply of STEM skills are to be increased significantly.	The Department is implementing a number of actions outlined within the STEM strategy. These actions are complemented by the actions contained within the Department's sectoral action plans in ICT, Advanced Manufacturing and Food and Drink Processing. Actions currently being taken forward as a result of this work include the	Ongoing	Skills and Industry Division (supported by FE and HE where appropriate)

		<p>continuation of the 'BringITOn' campaign and 'Tasty Careers', the provision of 1,350 additional undergraduate and 350 Phd places in areas of economic relevance, including STEM, by 2015/16, creation of industry backed STEM scholarships and further tranches of the software Testers Academy, Higher Level Apprentices in ICT and Engineering and the public / private sector ICT Apprenticeship.</p> <p>The Department will consider if, and how, further education colleges could be incentivised to increase the number of enrolments in STEM areas.</p>	<p>From the 2014/15 academic year.</p>	
		<p>Between December 2011 and November 2012, the Department</p>	<p>The additional places will be phased in up to 2015/16 academic year.</p>	<p>Higher Education</p>

		announced a total of 1,060 additional STEM places for the two universities.		
		Since December 2011, the Department has announced a total of an additional 140 MaSN places specifically for STEM subjects in HE in FE.	The additional places will be phased in up to 2015/16 academic year.	Higher Education / Further Education
		<p>The Department has commissioned a review of apprenticeships and youth training, to ensure that they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support the growth and rebalancing of the Northern Ireland economy; • meet the future needs of business by developing a highly skilled workforce; and • provide consistently high 	The review is scheduled to report in during 2013, thereafter will follow a period of policy development and consultation.	Skills and Industry

		quality training leading to qualifications which are valued by employers.		
--	--	---	--	--

A.3. Tackling variability in retention, achievement and course completion rates.

Key Issue	Current Position	Planned Action	Timescale	Responsible Division
Retention, achievement and course completion rates across the Department's skills and training provision are a key indicator of wider quality and performance.	The latest Quality and Performance report finds that whilst retention, achievement and course completion rates have improved steadily in recent years they vary markedly across education and training providers, across subject areas and by student / participant type.	The Department will continue to challenge colleges to improve their retention and achievement performance, through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quarterly health checks; • annual statistical data analysis down to individual course level; • annual CDP process; • annual quality performance adjustment (financial); • annual 	Annually.	Further Education Division / Higher Education Division

		<p>publication of colleges' retention and achievement performance;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • benchmarking between 6 FE colleges in Northern Ireland; and • consider how to benchmark with FE colleges in the rest of the UK. 		
		<p>Access to Success – the integrated regional strategy for widening participation in Higher Education – will require each of Northern Ireland's higher education providers, (including HE in FE), to produce a detailed annual Widening Access and Participation Plan (WAPP). The strategy seeks to put in place a student centred approach with tailored support mechanisms to ensure the successful retention and progression of</p>	<p>WAPPs Introduced 2013, updated annually.</p>	<p>Higher Education</p>

		students from widening participation backgrounds.		
--	--	---	--	--

B. The Employment Agenda

B.1. Supporting people into employment by providing skills and training

Key Issue	Current Position	Planned Action	Timescale	Responsible Division
The desire to increase employment is central to the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy which sets a longer term strategic goal of increasing the employment rate in Northern Ireland so that, by 2030, it exceeds the average for the UK regions.	Northern Ireland's employment rate is low in a UK context. Of particular concern is youth unemployment and long-term unemployment, both of which have risen sharply in the downturn. [See Q&P report section 3.11 – 3.14]	<p>The Department is finalising the design of Steps 2 Success, the successor programme to Steps to Work. Participation will be mandatory for 18 -24 year olds after 9 months of a claim to JSA and mandatory for 25+ after 12 months of a claim.</p> <p>The Department is currently developing the specification for a 'Support Contract' for use by Employment Service front line staff providing flexible external provision to that will help job ready clients find work before they</p>	<p>In place by April 2014.</p> <p>Currently targeted to be in place by June 2014.</p>	Employment Service

		<p>become mandated to enter Steps 2 Success.</p> <p>The Youth Employment Scheme was launched in July 2012. Backed by a 3 year investment of £31 million, the Scheme will provide work experience, skills development and employment opportunities for 18 to 24 year old unemployed young people.</p>	<p>By March 2015 – offer 3,000 work experience opportunities annually, 1,800 skills development opportunities and a total of 1,200 subsidised jobs.</p>	
--	--	--	---	--

B.2. Tackling economic inactivity through skills and training

Key Issue	Current Position	Planned Action	Timescale	Responsible Division
<p>The Executive has committed to develop and implement a strategy to reduce economic inactivity in Northern Ireland.</p>	<p>Inactivity for working age individuals in Northern Ireland has, for decades, been high, largely varying between 25% and 30%. [See Q&P report section 11.11]</p>	<p>The Economic Inactivity Strategy is being led by DEL and DETI and will develop interventions on the demand side and on the supply side. As a first step the Department has published a baseline study which provides a detailed analysis of factors contributing to the high rate of inactivity in Northern Ireland. The recommendations of the baseline study will underpin the draft strategy that will be presented to the Executive for agreement later this year</p>	<p>The strategy is due to be presented to the Executive during 2013 for approval.</p>	<p>Employment Service</p>

C. The Innovation Agenda

C.1. Support Knowledge Transfer from the NI Research Base

Key Issue	Current Position	Planned Action	Timescale	Responsible Division
The higher education and further education sectors have the potential to significantly affect the level of innovative capacity through their role as knowledge-generators.	The latest performance report shows that the continuing investment through the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) is yielding tangible benefits in terms of the commercialisation and exploitation of university research. While the number of spin-off companies originating from a NI HEI has fallen (marginally) in the latest year, the region still has produced proportionately more of these companies than the UK as a whole (see section 12.6 to 12.10 of the 4 th annual Q & P Report). Full cost recovery professional and technical provision in FE (which provides one indicator of FE's interaction with business and the community) increased in the latest year, albeit	The Department will develop and implement a new formula funding model for the Higher Education Innovation Fund to be administered as part of the universities' annual core funding allocation. This model will draw on best practice elsewhere to ensure that the Department is able to maximise the universities' performance against key knowledge transfer metrics while also ensuring that they are able to plan effectively, retain key staff and fully embed knowledge transfer within their overall Strategic Missions as their "Third Stream" of activity alongside, and closely integrated with, teaching and research.	Launched August 2013	Higher Education

	marginally (+1.8%). (see section 12.15 of the 4 th annual Q & P Report)			
--	--	--	--	--

C.2. Encourage increased HE / FE / business collaboration

Key Issue	Current Position	Planned Action	Timescale	Responsible Division
The university sector, in collaboration with the further education sector offers access to technology and knowledge capital to meet the development needs of business.	The 'Connected' programme has already exceeded the target set out in the NI Economic Strategy - to undertake 155 knowledge transfer projects on behalf of local businesses – having delivered some 120 projects in 2011/12 alone and a further 118 in 2012/13 (see section 12.15 of the 4 th annual Q & P Report).	To develop and implement a third round of the Connected programme in order to build upon and sustain the progress to date in terms of collaborative working and transfer of knowledge between the FE and HE sectors, and knowledge transfer between these sectors and businesses.	April 2014	Higher Education / Further Education