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July 2015

Consultation document on
**the development of a new
Further Education Strategy
for Northern Ireland**

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Consultation Document

July 2015

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Foreword

I am pleased to launch this consultation on the further education sector in Northern Ireland, and the central role which it has in our education and training landscape.

Our further education system has a proud tradition, going back over a hundred years, of providing a wide range of learning opportunities for an equally wide variety of learners, and of supporting employers and the economy of Northern Ireland. At no time in colleges' history is their role more important. The Northern Ireland Executive acknowledges the critical importance of skills to developing a vibrant knowledge based economy here. The Economic Strategy for Northern Ireland, the Skills Strategy, 'Success through Skills – Transforming Futures' and the Innovation Strategy all point to the growing need for higher level skills, with a particular focus on the subjects of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

There are drivers for change at a national and international level and the pace and complexity of this change is both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is for our colleges to use digital technologies to transform the way professional and technical education is delivered. The rapid pace of change means that business models and the skills that go with them will need to be renewed continually. The opportunity for colleges is to take centre stage as they prepare those entering work and those who need retraining not only to know and do, but also to learn how to learn. Those about to enter the workforce will have many jobs in their lifetime and a key requirement will be the ability to adapt and learn new skills.

It will be important for further education to have an identity which is distinct and sets it apart from the other education sectors, promoting professional and technical learning pathways and skills development which the sector is uniquely placed to provide. This can be achieved through further education's passion for learning and ambition for its learners. Internationally, there is a desire for professional and technical education and training to be valued equally to academic education by learners, employers and wider society. This has been achieved more in some countries than in others, and is something which I and my Department aspire to for Northern Ireland. The high quality professional and technical provision that colleges deliver, the proposed changes to apprenticeships and the youth training system, and the development of a new qualifications strategy, will all be key drivers in achieving this for the people of Northern Ireland. It is against this wider background that further education will be recognised as an equal and valuable pillar of the education system in Northern Ireland, alongside higher education and the statutory school system.

Building on their considerable achievements in recent years, colleges need to excel and provide Northern Ireland with a highly-skilled workforce which can compete at a global level. They must build on areas of competitive advantage to become the foremost experts. We need to

support local businesses to enable them to keep one step ahead, whilst at the same time having the foresight to seize the opportunity presented by emerging technologies to build and attract new business. That is why the skills agenda, and the critical role that colleges play in it, is so fundamental.

I look forward to receiving your views on the policy commitments in this consultation document; they will help to inform the development of the strategy for further education in Northern Ireland which will be published in the autumn.

Executive Summary

The vision is that further education colleges will be recognised locally, nationally and internationally for high quality and economically relevant education and training provision. Colleges will be focussed on achieving excellence in delivering the skills needed for the economy of today and tomorrow, and will be ambitious for their learners, and for the contribution they make to improving the competitiveness of the economy of Northern Ireland.

The need for a new further education strategy is a reflection of the unprecedented state of change that we face now and in the future. The impact of digital technologies, access to content online, challenges to government funding, global mobility and increased economic competition all require a strategy to give direction and ensure that further education adds value to individuals, society and the economy.

As the statutory providers of education and training, further education colleges, working in partnership with others, will be at the heart of delivering the vision of a strong knowledge based economy in Northern Ireland. International evidence confirms that the strategic direction of our further education sector in recent years is the right one; in particular, colleges' strong economic focus, their ability to help employers to embrace innovation,

their involvement with employers to design curriculum and qualifications to meet their needs, and their ability to use technology to deliver programmes and services in flexible and innovative ways. Colleges also have a strong role in supporting diversity and social inclusion by encouraging participation from the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland and ensuring access for those with barriers to learning. With their already strong relationship with employers in their areas, and with a deep understanding of the skills needs of individual learners, the economy and the local community, colleges are uniquely placed to drive a skills revolution in Northern Ireland. As part of this, colleges,

with key partners, will be major providers of the new apprenticeships and youth training systems in Northern Ireland.

This consultation document seeks views on a series of policy commitments that will establish a world class system of further education in Northern Ireland. These commitments are set out under the following themes.

The need for a new further education strategy is a reflection of the unprecedented state of change that we face now and in the future.

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themes

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

with colleges at the centre of skills delivery for professional and technical occupations

Policy Commitment 1 – Priority Skills

Colleges will have a crucial role working with employers and other key stakeholders to ensure that the professional and technical qualifications and curriculum they provide support the rebalancing and rebuilding of the Northern Ireland economy.

Policy Commitment 2 – Levels of College Provision

Further education colleges will have a particular focus on further developing provision at level 3 (A level equivalent) and above in areas that will support the rebalancing and rebuilding of the Northern Ireland economy. Progression for learners who wish to study at higher levels will be encouraged and facilitated through the qualifications system, and through innovative delivery and clear pathways.

Policy Commitment 3 – Up-skilling the Existing Workforce

Colleges will support indigenous companies and new companies which are being established in Northern Ireland, to ensure that employees have the required knowledge, skills and qualifications. In doing this, colleges will operate in flexible

ways in terms of where, when, and over what period of time up-skilling activities are provided, so that the needs of employers can be met effectively and in a manner which suits business needs.

Policy Commitment 4 – Support to Employers

Colleges will be at the forefront of providing support to employers to enable them to innovate, to grow, to operate more effectively and efficiently, to develop new products and to identify new markets for their products.

Policy Commitment 5 – College Specialism and Regional Capacity

Centres of specialism and expertise will be developed in each college to enable the further education sector as a whole to deliver high quality professional and technical provision to employers. Through a collaborative approach, individual colleges will have identified sectors where they will be recognised for their expertise and specialism. As well as identifying specialisms, all colleges will develop networks of experts who will share the latest developments in curriculum and skills training across Northern Ireland.

SOCIAL INCLUSION:

driven by improved job skills and capabilities

Policy Commitment 6 – Increasing Economic Participation through Engagement

Colleges' distinctive contribution to social inclusion will be to provide learners with the knowledge, skills and qualifications required to find, or progress within employment, in order to avail of the benefits of economic participation. Working in partnership with others, colleges will support diversity and social inclusion through widening access to provision for those with barriers to learning. They will work with other organisations in the voluntary, community and private sector to strengthen pathways for learners that can open up their ambition and develop their talents.

Policy Commitment 7 – Improving Literacy, Numeracy and ICT

Colleges will raise the level of literacy, numeracy and ICT competence in Northern Ireland by adopting the new qualifications that are being developed through the refreshed Essential Skills strategy and the reviews of GCSEs in English and mathematics.

CURRICULUM DELIVERY:

the engine of high quality further education delivery

Policy Commitment 8 – Using Technology to Enhance Learning

Colleges will adopt international best practice in the use of technology enhanced learning to support and improve their teaching and learning, and will adopt flexible approaches to learning to meet the needs of learners and employers.

Policy Commitment 9 – Developing Employability and Enterprise Skills

A distinctive element of provision delivered by colleges will be the development of employability skills, through high quality and relevant work placements and the use of virtual reality technology to simulate work placements in innovative and effective ways. Through their teaching strategies and approaches, colleges will also seek to develop enterprising learners, who are innovative and creative, and are able to adapt to change.

EXCELLENCE:

to achieve the highest possible quality standards

Policy Commitment 10 – Embedding High Quality Teaching

Through a new teacher education framework there will be a renewed focus on high quality initial teacher education and continual professional development for all lecturing staff, with minimum standards for pedagogy and subject qualifications put in place. College staff will also have the opportunity to undertake relevant and good quality industrial placements to ensure that they understand the needs of employers and workforce development. The quality improvement process, including the inspection regime, will be reviewed to ensure that it is appropriate for all aspects of delivery in colleges. The Department will support the development of research in pedagogy to inform best practice in professional and technical education and training to establish Northern Ireland as an internationally renowned centre for excellence in teacher education in professional and technical subjects.

Policy Commitment 11 – Improving Performance

Standardised approaches to receiving and analysing feedback from learners and from employers will be developed and introduced. Additional performance measures will be adopted to enable colleges and the Department to monitor colleges' performance more effectively as part of quality management, including learner progression and learners' destinations after leaving further education. Colleges will publish information on learner retention, achievement, progression and destinations on their web sites in such a way as to inform learners' choice of courses on which to enrol.

International evidence confirms that the strategic direction of our further education sector in recent years is the right one...

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INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION:

to learn from best practice outside Northern Ireland

Policy Commitment 12 – Operating Internationally

Colleges will enhance the learner experience, and the professional development and industrial knowledge of their staff, through placements and exchanges with similar institutions in other countries. They will also build on the excellent partnerships that have already been created across the world to share best practice with, and to learn from others. In addition, colleges will, with the Department, explore commercial opportunities to deliver more services in the international market.

GOVERNANCE:

to maximise the benefits of colleges' Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPB) status while also addressing any challenges posed

Policy Commitment 13 – Further Education Governance and Business Model

Colleges and the Department will work together to maximise the benefits to colleges and their customers of the NDPB status, while also addressing any challenges posed.

COLLEGE PARTNERSHIPS:

to maximise efficiency and effectiveness

Policy Commitment 14 – Sectoral Efficiency through Collaborative Working

In order to ensure that their services are delivered with maximum efficiency, colleges will operate more collectively in the delivery of their corporate services through a more rigorous and comprehensive approach to collaborative (shared services) working. Where appropriate, the colleges will take advantage of their NDPB status by adopting collaborative working opportunities that are available across the public sector in Northern Ireland.

Policy Commitment 15 – Sectoral Effectiveness by Sharing Best Practice

Colleges will share best practice, and learn from each other, in the innovative and imaginative delivery of services to learners and employers. In particular, colleges will work together to ensure that technology can be developed and used in the most cost efficient and effective way to support learning.

Policy Commitment 16 – Delivery Mechanism to Drive Efficiency and Effectiveness

A mechanism will be established to stimulate, manage and oversee collaboration and sharing of best practice between colleges to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of services, and to maximise the level of resource that is available to fund front line services.

FUNDING MODEL AND COLLEGE SUSTAINABILITY:

to underpin priorities

PROMOTING THE FURTHER EDUCATION SECTOR:

with colleges ambitious for learners, employers and the wider region

**Policy Commitment 17 –
Reviewing the Further
Education Funding Model**

In partnership with colleges, the funding model will be reviewed to ensure that it supports and incentivises colleges to deliver this strategy, that it supports a sustainable further education sector and that it aligns with the funding models that will be developed for other departmental programmes that further education colleges will deliver, in particular apprenticeships and youth training.

**Policy Commitment 18 –
Promoting Further
Education Provision**

Colleges Northern Ireland, individual colleges and the Department will work together to demonstrate and explain the distinctive role that the further education sector has, as part of the wider education system, and the role that the sector plays in strengthening the Northern Ireland economy. More generally, the benefits and status of professional and technical qualifications will also be promoted.

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Structure of the Document

Section 1 explains the statutory basis for the further education sector in Northern Ireland, outlines the rationale for the new further education strategy and describes the approach that has been taken to evidence gathering to inform the new strategy's policy commitments.

Section 2 examines the strategic, economic and labour market context within which colleges operate.

Section 3 summarises the achievements of the current further education system.

Section 4 sets out the vision for the further education sector in Northern Ireland.

Sections 5 to 13 set out policy commitments, based on the evidence that has been gathered to support the review, through which the vision for further education in Northern Ireland will be implemented.

Section 14 asks a series of related consultation questions on the new strategy.

Screening

A Section 75 Equality of Opportunity Screening exercise has been undertaken. This has concluded that the proposals set out in this document will not lead to discrimination against any of the Section 75 categories, and will not have a negative differential impact on these categories.

A Shared Future Proof screening exercise has also been conducted. It demonstrates the strong contribution that colleges already make to the provision of education in a shared and integrated environment, and indicates that the proposed new strategy for further education will strengthen this further. The outcome of the shared future screening exercise is included at Annex A.

1

Introduction

The current strategy for further education in Northern Ireland, 'Further Education Means Business', has had a range of highly successful outcomes, with colleges now focused strongly on meeting the economic and workforce development needs of Northern Ireland. However, the Northern Ireland economy has changed considerably in recent years, with current and future jobs requiring increasingly high levels of skills and a breadth of knowledge across many occupational areas. Over the next ten years the pace of change will accelerate, driven by globalisation, advances in technology, new business models and rapidly changing consumer needs. One of the major results of this will be substantial changes to the world of work.

Further education has a clear and unrivalled role to respond to the changes in work through the development of innovative, flexible and economically beneficial programmes that will both meet the requirements for new ways of learning and adaptable skills and lead the development of a 'learning to learn' culture in Northern Ireland.

One of the key features and strengths of the further education sector over the years is that it is accessible to a wide variety of learners, for example in terms of the

level and type of learning required (from those with no, or very few qualifications to those who are following higher education provision), and in terms of the different age groups of learners. Further education students come from a variety of backgrounds and have a range of learning, work, and life experiences. This diversity strengthens and enhances the learning experience.

Education has become one of the clearest indicators of life outcomes, with participation in further education delivering

many benefits, at an individual, economic and societal level. Along with access to employment, education is the best way to support social and economic participation and is vital in supporting the achievement of Northern Ireland's economic goals. Increasingly, countries are recognising that good initial vocational education and training has a major contribution to make to economic competitiveness.¹

Learners in Northern Ireland colleges currently study a variety of courses, in a variety of ways, including by:

- ▶ level, from courses in basic literacy and numeracy to degree level programmes;
- ▶ subject area, with courses from accountancy to animal care and management;
- ▶ levels of engagement, from modules lasting a few hours to courses lasting up to three years and delivered on a part-time or full-time basis; and
- ▶ finance, with some learners paying full costs and others paying no fees.

The college estate has seen a major programme of improvement in recent years. Most of the colleges are now operating out of state-of-the-art campuses containing the latest technology and industry-standard equipment. There is still significant work to be done in some areas and, subject to the availability of capital funding, the Department is committed to ensuring that all students, regardless of

where they live, can learn in vibrant and well equipped learning environments.

Under the Further Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, colleges are the statutory providers of further education and training in Northern Ireland, a position that has been consolidated further by the classification of colleges as NDPBs of the Department for Employment and Learning since October 2010. They are the providers of choice for skills delivery in Northern Ireland, and deliver education and training to a wide variety of learners and in many settings, including in college campuses, in the community and on employers' premises.

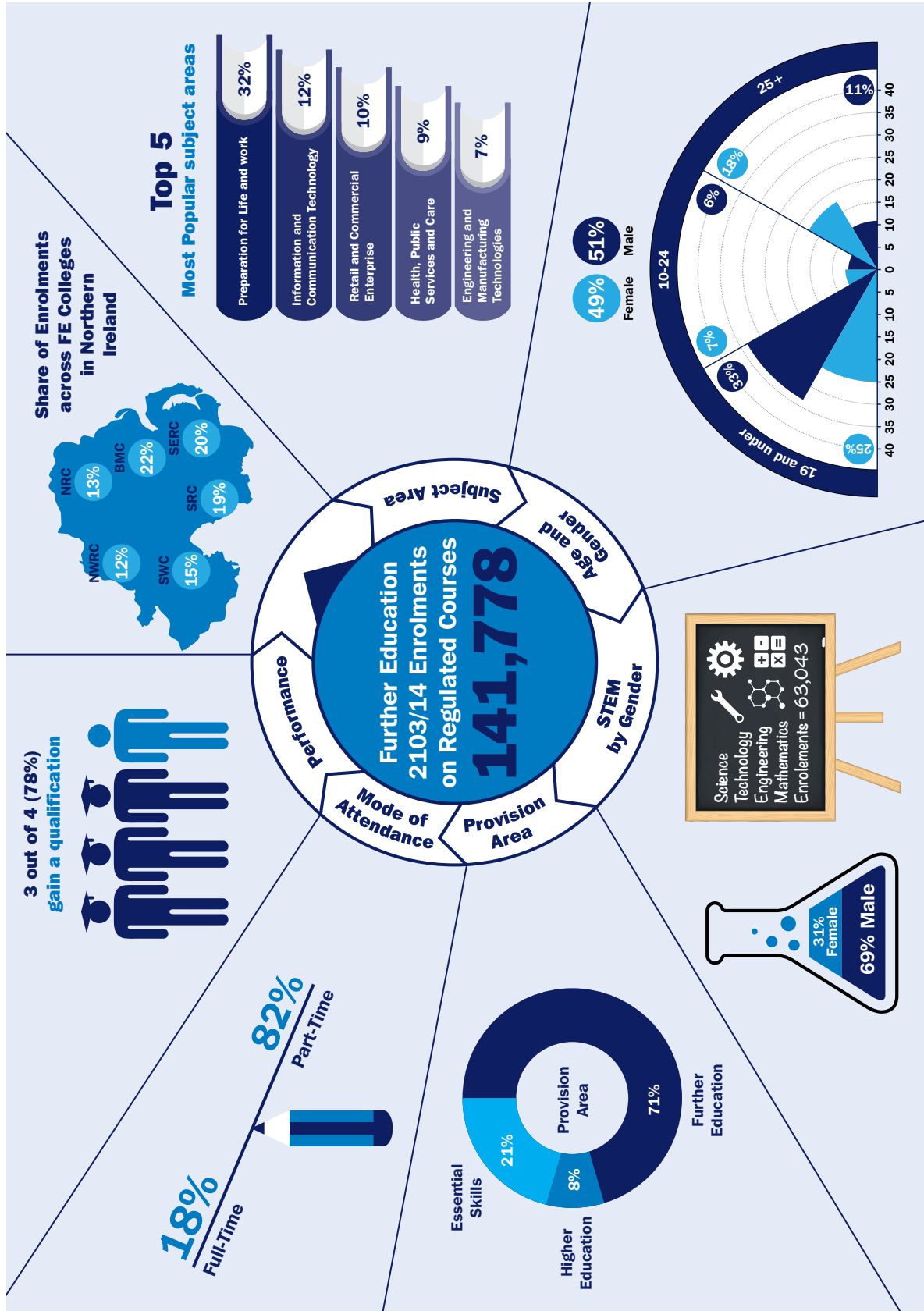
Going forward, colleges will continue to deliver provision of a broad nature to meet the needs of a wide variety of learners and will be open and available to all.

The figure overleaf illustrates the number and breadth of enrolments within the further education sector in the 2013/14 year.

A number of recent strategies within the department will be instrumental in determining the nature and content of a significant proportion of the provision to be delivered by colleges in the future, in particular, the new apprenticeships system and the youth training system at level 2. Further education colleges, along with universities, will be the primary deliverers of the new apprenticeships system in Northern Ireland which will commence in 2016, and which will see apprenticeships commence at level 3

1 OECD Learning For Jobs www.oecd.org/education/innovation-education/learningforjobs.htm

Figure 1: Key Statistics and College Enrolments 2013/14 (All Enrolments at All Levels)²



² Further Education Activity in FE Colleges in Northern Ireland 2013/14 <http://www.deini.gov.uk/fe-infographic.pdf>

with progression possible up to level 8.³ Colleges, with other training providers, will be key deliverers of the new Youth Training System at level 2.

Further education college staff will have a critical role to play in working with employers and other key stakeholders with regards to qualifications and programmes of learning. They will be representatives on the Strategic Advisory Forum, and will have a particularly prominent role in working with employers and other stakeholders on the Strategic Partnerships which are being set up as part of the new apprenticeship system to design and develop high quality and economically relevant qualifications and curriculum.

The development of qualifications for use in the new apprenticeships and youth training systems will be part of a new qualifications strategy that is currently being developed by the Department. The aim is that further education colleges and other training organisations deliver qualifications that are valued by employers and learners, and other users of qualifications, particularly in terms of their high economic relevance.

In taking forward the new further education strategy, a range of information has been considered and used to inform the policy commitments, including:

- ▶ the development of an underlying evidence base setting out the economic and social context that is most relevant to the further education sector;

- ▶ desk research of key literature and research papers, in particular recent OECD publications, as set out in the bibliography;
- ▶ an analysis of the best practice that is present in our own further education colleges, and in other parts of the world;
- ▶ a detailed statistical analysis of further education activity in terms of enrolments and learner retention and achievement;
- ▶ evidence compiled through the reviews of apprenticeships and youth training, which is relevant to the wider vocational education and training (VET) system within which further educational colleges operate;
- ▶ consultation with a range of key stakeholders; and
- ▶ use of specific forums and further engagement with the sector.

An accompanying Supporting Evidence document has been produced to provide more detailed information on areas such as the strategic context, related strategies, and recent reforms and developments which impact on the work of the colleges. Furthermore, the document presents a summary of the findings from research on international policies and practices, case studies of best practice in the Northern Ireland further education colleges, and statistical information on college enrolments, and performance in terms of learner retention, achievement, and success.

³ Securing our Success: the Northern Ireland Strategy on Apprenticeships: <http://www.delni.gov.uk/securing-our-success-the-ni-strategy-on-apprenticeships.pdf>

2

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Strategic Context for Further Education

This section summarises the wider strategic context for the new further education strategy.

The Northern Ireland Executive has taken the step of making the economy the top priority in its Programme for Government⁴ for 2011-2015. The key strategic priorities of the Programme for Government are:

- ▶ growing a sustainable economy and investing in the future;
- ▶ creating opportunities, tackling disadvantage and improving health and wellbeing;
- ▶ protecting our people, the environment and creating safer communities;
- ▶ building a strong and shared community; and
- ▶ delivering high quality and efficient public services.

The economic and innovation strategies set out a clear vision of a successful Northern Ireland economy and provide a pathway for achieving that vision based around investment in skills and innovation. The skills strategy and related strategies are similarly clear about the priority actions that are required to deliver the economic vision. The skills strategy points to the need for transformational change with people being encouraged and facilitated to move up the skills ladder.

In Northern Ireland there is a particular focus on STEM, management and

4 Northern Ireland Executive Programme for Government 2011-2015 www.northernireland.gov.uk/pfg

leadership, and on the development of higher level skills. Furthermore, the new apprenticeships and youth training systems, when implemented fully from 2016, will make a significant contribution to the skills base in Northern Ireland.

The further education sector is a key economic driver for Northern Ireland and plays a central role in the implementation of the Programme for Government and in delivering on all of the strategies referred to above.

Alongside economic growth, there is a need to support social inclusion by ensuring that those who have barriers to learning or who are unemployed or economically inactive are encouraged to participate in education and training provision that will help them to secure employment and to improve their life chances. The economic downturn has had a detrimental social impact in Northern Ireland in areas such as health, crime, social mobility, and youth unemployment. Furthermore rates of economic inactivity have been stubbornly higher than in the rest of the United Kingdom over a prolonged period of time. Further education colleges have a strong track record of engaging with those who are furthest from the labour market, and they will have an important part to play in ‘Enabling Success’, the strategy to tackle economic inactivity in Northern Ireland which was published in April 2015.

The main Departmental strategies that will have an impact on further education are as follows:

- ▶ **Securing our Success: The Northern Ireland Strategy on Apprenticeships**
<http://www.delni.gov.uk/securing-our-success-the-ni-strategy-on-apprenticeships.pdf>;
- ▶ **Generating our Success: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Youth Training**
<http://www.delni.gov.uk/youth-training-strategy-pdf>;
- ▶ **The Professional and Technical Qualifications Strategy**
 (currently under development);
- ▶ **Graduating to Success: A Higher Education Strategy for Northern Ireland**
<http://www.delni.gov.uk/graduating-to-success-he-strategy-for-ni.pdf>
- ▶ **Access to Success: An Integrated Regional Strategy for Widening Participation in Higher Education** <http://www.delni.gov.uk/access-to-success.pdf>;
- ▶ **Preparing for Success 2015-2020: Careers Strategy**
 (currently under development);
- ▶ **Enabling Success: A Strategy to Address Economic Inactivity**
<http://www.delni.gov.uk/economic-inactivity-strategy>;
- ▶ **Refresh of Essential Skills for Living Strategy** and, in conjunction with the Department of Education in Northern Ireland, **The Review of GCSEs in English and Mathematics** (currently under development).

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Current Further Education System: Achievements

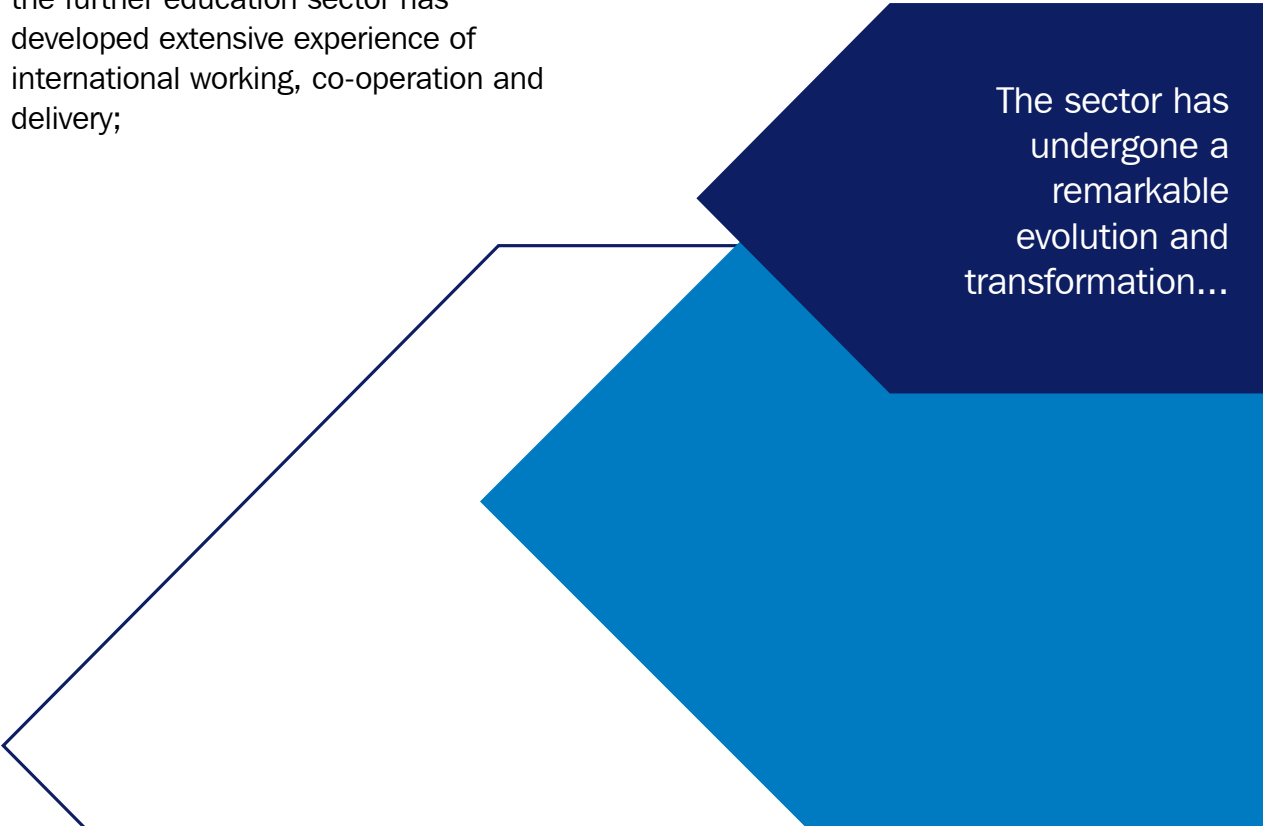
Under “Further Education Means Business”, the strategic aim for the further education sector is that colleges should “be at the heart of lifelong learning in order to strengthen economic development, enhance social cohesion, and advance the individual’s skills and learning”. Since the publication of “Further Education Means Business”, the sector has undergone a remarkable evolution and transformation, and colleges have much of which to be proud.

The main achievements in recent years are summarised below:

- ▶ the re-structuring of the further education sector from 16 colleges to the current six large regional colleges;
- ▶ economically focused curriculum - around 97% of the funding provided by the Department to further education is now directed at provision that leads to qualifications on the regulated qualifications frameworks;
- ▶ learner achievement and success⁵ - there has been a dramatic improvement in the rates of learner achievement and success over the four academic years from 2010/11 to 2013/14;
- ▶ further education colleges have worked in strong and effective partnerships with many post primary schools across Northern Ireland in the delivery of the Entitlement Framework, which requires school pupils from year 11 upwards to have access to a mixed curriculum of academic and professional and technical subjects;

⁵ For definitions of learner achievement and success see Annex E

- ▶ the further education sector has responded positively and very effectively to the need to strengthen economic development by supporting business and innovation, and colleges are now the Department's providers of choice to support inward investment and local employers;
- ▶ colleges have provided access to further education to those with barriers to learning, those with no or low qualifications, those who are furthest from the labour market, and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities;
- ▶ the further education sector has developed extensive experience of international working, co-operation and delivery;
- ▶ the drive by colleges to further improve the excellence and quality of provision they deliver has continued, and this is shown through the increased levels of learner achievement and success referred to above. A strong contributory factor in the drive to improve standards is the quality of teaching in our colleges in terms of pedagogy and up to date industrial knowledge; and
- ▶ the further education sector has been operating with increasing efficiency over recent years.



The sector has undergone a remarkable evolution and transformation...

4

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Vision for Further Education in Northern Ireland

Vision

The vision is that further education colleges will be recognised locally, nationally and internationally for high quality and economically relevant education and training provision. Colleges will be focussed on achieving excellence in delivering the skills needed for the economy of today and tomorrow, and will be ambitious for their learners and for the contribution they make to improving the competitiveness of the economy of Northern Ireland.

To achieve this vision the key objectives that set the future direction for further education are as follows:

- ▶ ensuring high quality provision for learner education and training;
- ▶ developing the talents of those already in work and those seeking to enter employment in order to provide a pipeline of suitably skilled and qualified individuals at all levels to meet employers' needs, including indigenous companies and inward investment projects;

- ▶ supporting employers to become more innovative and competitive, and to source new markets; and
- ▶ encouraging and supporting the economic participation of those who have barriers to learning and who are furthest from the labour market, to the benefit of individuals, the economy and wider society.

In essence, the further education system has two core purposes. These are:

1. taking a pivotal role in developing a strong and vibrant economy through the development of professional and technical skills, increasingly at higher levels, and by helping employers to innovate; and
2. supporting social inclusion by providing those who have low or no qualifications, or who have barriers to learning, with the skills and qualifications needed to find employment and to become economically active.

This dual role is reflected in the themes and policy commitments in this strategy.

Themes

This review of further education is based around a number of themes and policy commitments, incorporating evidence gathered, examples of best practice in Northern Ireland and best practice internationally. The themes, which aim to deliver the vision and the key objectives outlined above, are set out as follows:

- ▶ **economic development**, with colleges at the centre of skills delivery for professional and technical occupations;
- ▶ **social inclusion**, driven by improved job skills and capabilities;
- ▶ **curriculum delivery**, the engine of high quality further education delivery;
- ▶ **excellence**, to achieve the highest possible quality standards;
- ▶ **international dimension**, to learn from best practice outside Northern Ireland;
- ▶ **governance**, to maximise the benefits of colleges' NDPB status while also addressing any challenges posed;
- ▶ **college partnerships**, to maximise efficiency and effectiveness;
- ▶ **funding model and college sustainability**, to underpin priorities; and
- ▶ **promoting the further education sector**, with colleges ambitious for learners, employers and the wider region.

These themes are discussed in more detail in the sections that follow.

5

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Economic Development

This section outlines the first part of the dual role referred to in section 4, namely the key role colleges will play in identifying and meeting the skills and qualification needs of employers via a more economically focused curriculum, providing direct support to employers by upskilling employees and supporting employers to become more competitive and innovative.

The further education sector is a key economic driver for Northern Ireland and plays a central role in the implementation of the Programme for Government, and in particular delivering on the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy, Skills Strategy, the STEM Strategy and the Innovation Strategy. Colleges make a significant and high quality contribution to addressing the current and future skills needs of Northern Ireland and have an increasingly important role in attracting inward investment companies. The policy commitments under this theme will strengthen colleges' role in this important strategic area, and will see colleges gaining an even more in depth

understanding of the needs of employers, and how these needs can be met most effectively.

The further education curriculum must be shaped to support the needs of learners and to support employers and the wider economy by matching vocational education and training provision to the needs of industry. Evidence suggests this can be achieved through a collaborative process of employer engagement, a strong focus on employability skills, and an effective careers service embedded within the curriculum.

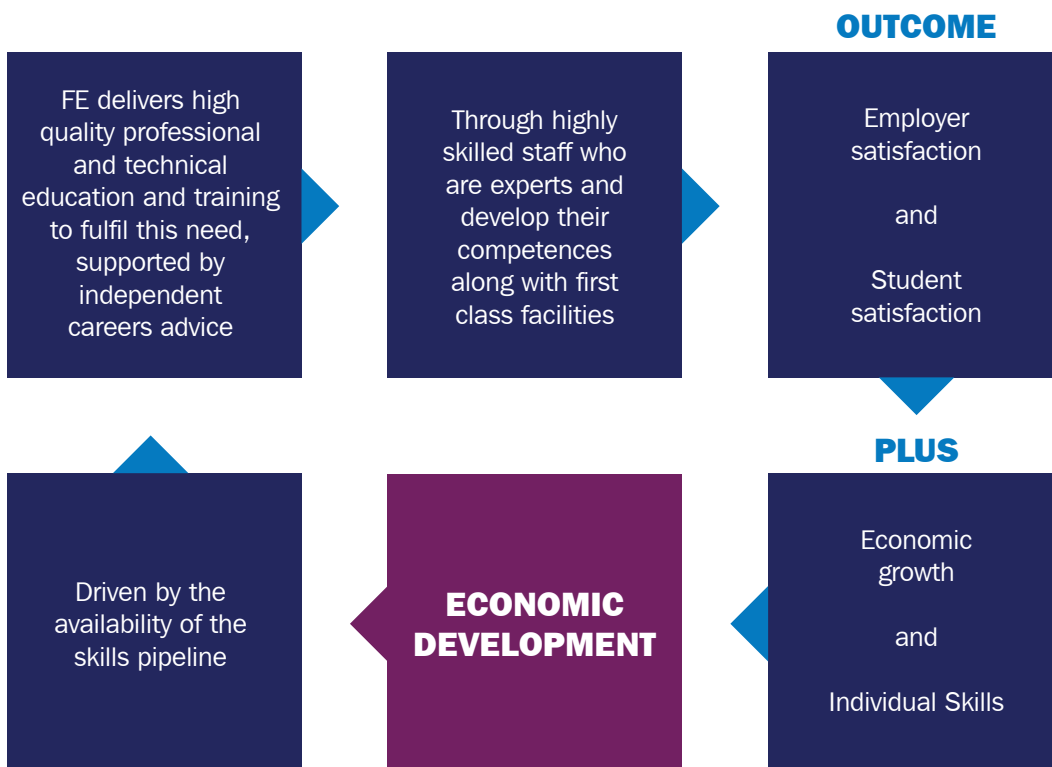
The introduction in recent years of a new economically focused curriculum is crucial to learners, and has offered a curriculum with clear pathways to professional and technical qualifications while continuing to address issues of social inclusion. This refocused curriculum is aligned to the economic vision for Northern Ireland, as outlined in the Programme for Government.

Going forward, the sector needs to be increasingly agile and responsive to the changing needs of employers to meet short-term skills pressures, but also to remain focused on meeting long term challenges and economic goals.

Role of Further Education in Economic Development

The diagram below sets out the role of further education in economic development; it also demonstrates how skills availability drives economic development. Colleges develop skilled individuals, to the benefit and satisfaction of their students and employers, enabled by excellent lecturers and physical resources. These skills are the engine of economic development. A virtuous feedback loop is, therefore, established.

Figure 2: Skills Availability Drives Economic Development



Identifying Future Skills and Qualifications Needs of Employers

With the substantial capital investment in further education in recent years, colleges are well placed to support the development of skills in the private sector in Northern Ireland. They will provide tailored solutions to the skills needs of employers based on regulated qualifications and industry standard training. Projects will be developed to meet the specific needs of individual employers or, where numbers are small, clustered projects will be developed to accommodate a group of companies requiring similar training.

Ensuring that the skills and qualifications provided to individual learners, including employees, meet the requirements of employers in Northern Ireland is of paramount importance. In broad terms, there need to be more higher level skills (at level 3 and above), a strong focus on STEM and other areas that will help to rebalance and rebuild the local economy, and more involvement of employers in the process of designing and developing qualifications and curriculum.

Research shows that labour productivity in Northern Ireland remains well below the UK average, with low productivity seen across a number of sectors. Higher skills levels are associated with higher productivity, higher wage levels, higher employment rates and increased economic growth. Consequently, there is an increasing need for higher level skills and

a reducing demand for lower level skills. The proportion of those in employment with qualifications at level 4 to level 8 will need to rise from 33% in 2008 to 52% in 2020,⁶ while the proportion of those in employment with low qualifications is forecast to fall to 10% by 2020. Evidence regarding the importance of training and educating people to level 3 and above has also been demonstrated in “Securing our Success – the Northern Ireland Strategy for Apprenticeships”.

Further education colleges will meet the need for higher level skills in three main ways: (i) their mainstream further education provision will be focused increasingly at Level 3, (ii) they will continue to be the sole providers of intermediate level (levels 4 and 5) higher education provision in Northern Ireland, and (iii) they will, together with universities, be key providers of the new apprenticeship programme at level 3 and above, and will have a particular role in ensuring pathways from lower to higher levels.

As well as being extremely valuable in its own right, level 3 further education provision also offers progression to higher education either in a college or at university. In 2013/14 there were 11,576 higher education enrolments in further education colleges. Intermediate level higher education is essential to the future development of the economy, as there is strong evidence to suggest that the current skills gaps are most acute at a level that is represented by higher education

⁶ Taken from The Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland “Success through Skills – Transforming Futures”, 2011 www.delni.gov.uk/success-through-skills-transforming-futures

qualifications below degree level. The new apprenticeships system will also make a significant contribution, and higher level apprenticeships, which colleges are already piloting, will complement more traditional forms of higher education provision. While colleges will begin to refocus at level 3 and above, it is recognised that there remain skills needs below level 3 and that colleges will still have a role in delivering and developing quality curriculum at this level.

The growing sectors of the Northern Ireland economy will also require an increasing number of skilled workers with qualifications in STEM subjects, and other priority areas that are essential to the rebalancing and rebuilding of the economy. A local workforce equipped with these skills is hugely important in supporting and developing our indigenous companies, in attracting direct foreign investment to Northern Ireland and in driving future competitiveness and economic growth. The skills barometer that is being introduced as part of the new apprenticeship system will help to ensure that the current and future needs of the economy are identified.

The identification of skills requirements cannot be left to government alone. Employers need to be at the heart of identifying the skills they need both now and in the future. Many of the recommendations in the OECD's "Skills beyond Schools" review of postsecondary vocational education and training indicate that vocational qualifications stand the best chance of being relevant to employers

Northern Ireland is a small business economy. Figures show that small businesses (fewer than 50 employees) account for 98.2% of all businesses...

and being valuable to students when they are developed, updated and delivered with the full engagement of all relevant labour market stakeholders.

In addition to qualifications development, there is compelling evidence to show that curriculum development and design should be a collaborative process so that colleges, training providers and employers are directly involved in shaping programmes that reflect up to date needs of occupations and workplaces, and which are based on a broader, more aspirational concept of competence.⁷ This in turn provides a clear line of sight to work on all vocational programmes for learners, employers and providers.⁸ Such engagement with employers sends a signal to the learner (and his/her parents who often have an important role in the learner's choice of pathways) that the programme has value in the labour market.

There is also a need to rationalise and simplify the professional and technical qualification landscape to make it easier to navigate and understand by users of

⁷ Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning: It's About Work – Excellent Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning 2013, Page 14. <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/26611>

⁸ Ibid Page 15.

qualifications including employers, learners and providers.

This approach to qualifications and curriculum design and development is being adopted in the Department's new apprenticeships and youth training systems. In particular, the Strategic Advisory Forum and the Sector Partnerships that will be established as part of the implementation of the apprenticeship programme will be instrumental in identifying skills demand and in ensuring that professional and technical qualifications meet the needs of employers and the economy. Further education colleges will be represented on the Strategic Advisory Forum, and will have a particularly prominent role in working with employers and other stakeholders on the Strategic Partnerships to design and develop high quality and economically relevant qualifications and curriculum. These qualifications will not only form the basis for apprenticeships by occupation, but will also be the basis for professional and technical qualifications that are delivered through mainstream further education provision.

Through the annual College Development Plans, which set targets and budgets for individual colleges, colleges will increase the proportion of their provision that is in Northern Ireland's identified priority skills areas, and this is monitored closely by the Department each year.

Up-skilling the Workforce

The further education sector has a pivotal role in up-skilling and re-skilling the workforce to meet the skills needs of employers, and as a result make a significant contribution to the growth of the economy. Northern Ireland is an economy with a preponderance of small businesses. Figures show that small businesses (fewer than 50 employees) account for 98.2% of all businesses, with medium sized businesses (50-249) accounting for 1.5%, and large businesses (250+) accounting for 0.3% of total business within Northern Ireland. Micro businesses (fewer than 10 employees) account for 89.1% of the total business in Northern Ireland. The role of small to medium enterprises (SMEs) is, therefore, vital in improving the economic competitiveness of Northern Ireland, and it is important that the colleges work with them to deliver the support they need.

Employers do not always recognise the further education sector as a first choice training provider. Findings from a 2014 survey conducted by the CBI⁹ show that private providers are the most common choice for employers using external training and development provision. Consequently, there is scope for the colleges to build upon their current excellent practice in supporting business and economic development. For many employers, the priority is tailored training which develops key and specific competencies

within their businesses. Employers seek training which is flexible and can be delivered on their own premises, and often out of standard working hours. Flexible, short-cycle and distance learning will be fundamental to meeting the changing requirements of employer training needs. Much good practice exists within the sector, but there is a perception that some college training activities are restricted to term time and business hours.

It will be important for the sector to raise awareness amongst the business community about the type, range, quality and flexibility of the support and services the colleges provide, so that they can become the training provider of first choice for Northern Ireland employers. The Department has developed the Employer Support Programme, consisting of 'Skills Focus' and 'Innovate Us', specifically to enable colleges to support employers.

The new 'Skills Focus' programme, is being introduced to support, promote, and facilitate collaborative working between business and colleges; through the programme, colleges will provide tailored skills provision to small to medium enterprises to increase the skills levels of their workforce to level 2 and above. Colleges will manage, and will be the sole providers of, this programme, and will be the first point of contact for employers who can benefit from participation on the programme.

The further education sector plays an increasingly important role in attracting

inward investment, particularly through delivery of the Assured Skills programme which is a joint initiative between DEL and Invest Northern Ireland. This programme is designed to help attract new foreign direct investment companies to Northern Ireland by assuring them that the skills they need to be successful are available here. The colleges will work with key partners in government, including Invest Northern Ireland and other economic development agencies, to attract and support inward investment, particularly in high value added sectors.

Flexibility of delivery is paramount in meeting the up-skilling needs of employers, and key issues to be considered are flexibility within college management, the skills sets and contracts of college staff, and the innovative and imaginative use of technology.

Innovation

The further education sector has a proven track record in delivering a range of programmes to Northern Ireland businesses, in areas such as product design, research and development, business incubation, innovation and knowledge transfer, and is a key delivery partner for a number of DEL initiatives. The Northern Ireland Innovation Strategy states that the further education sector (along with our universities) will play a vital role in the aspiration for Northern Ireland to be recognised as an innovation hub and one of the UK's leading high-growth, knowledge-based regions. There

is considerable scope for further education colleges and the university sector to develop stronger partnerships in order to collaborate in identifying and meeting the innovation and knowledge needs of Northern Ireland businesses.

In particular, colleges will use the 'Innovate Us' strand of the Employer Support Programme to increase and develop small employers' ability to innovate, and they will increase their research and development and knowledge transfer activities to complement and work in partnership with universities in these areas.

Organisational Arrangements

There is a need for the colleges to collaborate and provide a more synchronised approach to how they engage with employers in providing the types of support outlined above. Colleges have agreed to create a model for excellence based on the two pillars of (i) business engagement and (ii) subject specialisms, under the term Specialist Provision for Industry using College Expertise (SPICE). In effect, each college will have identified sectors where they will have a lead role and will be recognised for their expertise and specialisation; individual colleges will be identified as the first point of contact for Invest Northern Ireland and for local employers. The areas of specialism identified will be aligned to the priority skills areas. In addition, colleges will further build their own regional capacity in all priority areas by developing networks of experts across the regional colleges who will share the latest developments in curriculum and skills training across Northern Ireland.

Policy Commitment 1 – Priority Skills

Colleges will have a crucial role working with employers and other key stakeholders to ensure that the professional and technical qualifications and curriculum they provide support the rebalancing and rebuilding of the Northern Ireland economy.

Policy Commitment 2 – Levels of College Provision

Further education colleges will have a particular focus on further developing provision at level 3 (A level equivalent) and above in areas that will support the rebalancing and rebuilding of the Northern Ireland economy. Progression for learners who wish to study at higher levels will be encouraged and facilitated through the qualifications system, and through innovative delivery and clear pathways.

Policy Commitment 3 – Up-skilling the Existing Workforce

Colleges will support indigenous companies and new companies which are being established in Northern Ireland, to ensure that employees have the required knowledge, skills and qualifications. In doing this, colleges will operate in flexible ways in terms of where, when, and over what period of time up-skilling activities are provided, so that the needs of employers can be met effectively and in a manner which suits the business needs.

Policy Commitment 4 – Support to Employers

Colleges will be at the forefront of providing support to employers to enable them to innovate, to grow, to operate more effectively and efficiently, to develop new products and to identify new markets for their products.

Policy Commitment 5 – College Specialism and Regional Capacity

Centres of specialism and expertise will be developed in each college to enable the further education sector as a whole to deliver high quality professional and technical provision to employers. Through a collaborative approach, individual colleges will have identified sectors where they will be recognised for their expertise and specialism. As well as identifying specialisms, all colleges will develop networks of experts who will share the latest developments in curriculum and skills training across Northern Ireland.

The growing sectors of the Northern Ireland economy will also require an increasing number of skilled workers with qualifications in STEM subjects, and other priority areas that are essential to the rebalancing and rebuilding of the economy.

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Social Inclusion

This section outlines the second part of colleges' dual role, namely the distinctive contribution they make to providing learners with the knowledge, skills and qualifications required to avail of the benefits of economic participation; and their role in supporting diversity and social inclusion by encouraging participation from the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland and ensuring access for those with barriers to learning.

The global economic downturn impacted significantly on the Northern Ireland economy, and this compounded a number of longer term structural challenges including high youth unemployment, high inactivity rates, low levels of productivity, low employment rates, and reliance on the public sector. A poor level of educational achievement in some of the population, including in the important skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT, is a contributory factor which reduces access to employment and other life chances. Access to education and employment is the best way out of poverty and social exclusion, and towards social and economic participation. This is best achieved by providing people with the confidence, skills and qualifications to engage with the labour market. The

further education sector is critical to this process.

A key feature and strength of the further education sector is that it is accessible to all, both in terms of reaching all levels, types and age of learners, and also the fact that further education colleges are locally based and their reach extends into both urban and rural communities. Further education students come from a variety of backgrounds and have a range of learning, work, and life experiences. For many people further education provides a second chance to obtain the education, skills and qualifications that they did not obtain through their formal education.

The policy commitments under this theme will ensure that colleges continue to address the issue of social inclusion by widening participation in further education, including from learners with barriers, those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those who are furthest from the labour market. There will be strong linkages with other departmental programmes and policies, including NEETs, provision at level 1 and below and economic inactivity.

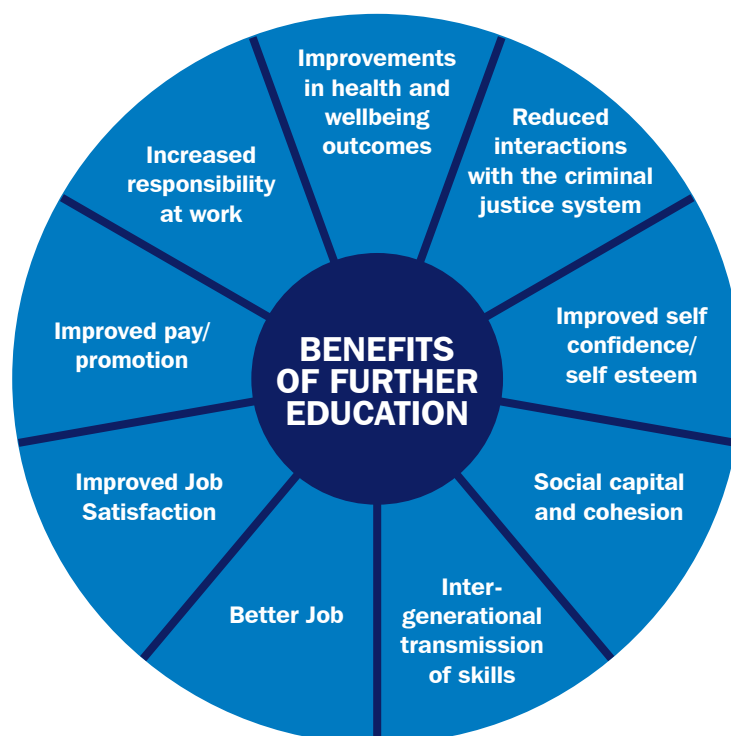
Benefits of Further Education

Participation in further education delivers many benefits, at an individual, economic and societal level. Professional and technical qualifications are strongly associated with improved labour market

outcomes, in terms of the likelihood of being in employment and the associated wage premium. Research shows that the impact of education and training on earnings increases over time and increases with higher levels of qualifications achieved. The same holds true for the impact of education and training on employment prospects.¹⁰

The Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) in England commissioned Ipsos MORI and London Economics to undertake a detailed analysis of the benefits associated with further education and skills¹¹. The research focussed particularly on the economic impact and wider benefits associated with learning and qualification attainment. The following benefits for the individual were identified:

Figure 3: Benefits of Further Education



10 Department for Employment and Learning, Further Education Review - Background Evidence Presentation, February 2015
 11 BIS Research Paper No.104, January 2013 – The Impact of Further Education

Further Education and Economic Participation

Education has become one of the clearest indicators of life outcomes, along with, employment, income, and social status, and is a strong predictor of attitudes and wellbeing. It is also a vital means to supporting the achievement of Northern Ireland's economic goals. It is fundamental that Northern Ireland utilises all of its human capital resources, including those currently excluded from the labour market, to attain enhanced productivity, employment and international competitiveness.

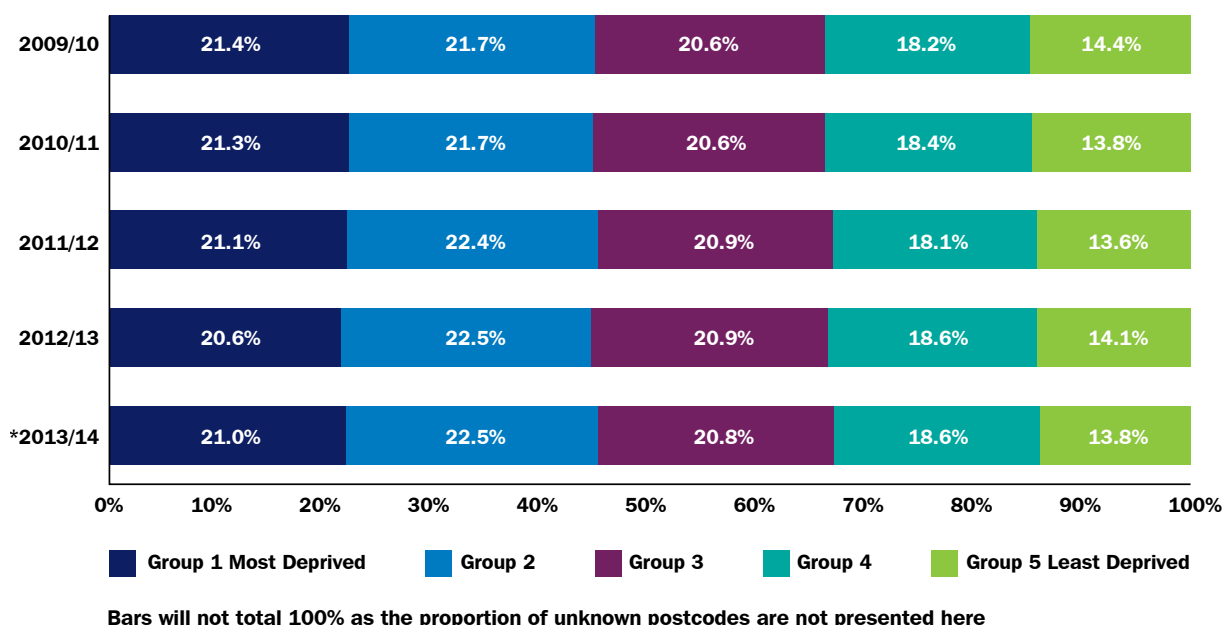
The further education sector engages with students with a wide variety of needs, many of whom have barriers to participating in learning such as: health and disability issues; accessibility of course provision; personal circumstances including caring responsibilities and ex-convictions; family or peer pressures and attitudes to learning; those who have low levels of qualifications or, in some cases, no qualifications at all; those with literacy and numeracy problems, or those in need of English language skills. The gaining of skills and qualifications, including in the important areas of literacy, numeracy and ICT, helps individuals to secure employment and/or to move up the skills ladder.

In the most recent academic year, 2013/14, there were 141,778 enrolments on courses that potentially lead to regulated qualifications. Of these enrolments, around 23.0% were at level 1 and below, 46.0% were at level 2, 23.0% are at level 3 and 8.2% were at level 4 and above. Also, of these enrolments, 58.0% were in respect of those aged 19 and under, 13.4% were aged between 20 and 24, and 28.6% were aged 25 and over.¹²

Importantly, colleges' enrolments are spread across the five recognised groupings of deprivation and, as demonstrated in the figure below, they deliver strongly to the two most deprived quintiles.

¹² Further Education in Northern Ireland: 2009/10 to 2013/14 <http://www.delni.gov.uk/annex-a-fe-activity-statistical-bulletin-0910-to-1314-december-2014-revised-as-at-24th-april-2015.pdf>

Figure 4: Regulated enrolments by deprivation quintiles¹³



Students with Learning Difficulties and / or Disabilities (SLDD)

The Department for Employment and Learning is currently developing a new Disability Employment and Skills Strategy, to ensure that disability support and the associated resources are focused on those people with more significant disability-related barriers to work, and who, therefore, need additional specialist, flexible and personalised support. The strategy presents an opportunity to take a collaborative and cohesive approach to

creating a clear pathway from education through to sustained employment for those young people who have significant disability-related barriers, but who want to work and are capable of doing so. Further education colleges will be key providers for this important group of learners.

A move to further education for those students, who range from 16 years upwards, also offers highly significant opportunities to become more independent, integrate with the wider community, and gain valuable life skills.

¹³ Table derived from: Further Education in Northern Ireland: 2009/10 to 2013/14 <http://www.delni.gov.uk/annex-a-fe-activity-statistical-bulletin-0910-to-1314-december-2014-revised-as-at-24th-april-2015.pdf>

This provision, therefore, provides a vital stepping stone for people to progress beyond statutory schooling, and to gain the additional skills, qualifications and life experience which will enable them to progress within further education and into employment, or, if appropriate, to independent living.

Entry level and level 1 provision is crucial to those with moderate to severe learning difficulties, those who are disengaged from education, and many of the groups identified as having barriers to learning.

Essential Skills

Improving the level of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills in Northern Ireland has been a top priority for the Northern Ireland Executive and for this Department, and further education colleges have been the major providers of essential skills since that strategy was introduced in 2004. The results of the International Survey of Adult Skills (ISAS) 2012¹⁴ provided the Department with a clear indication of progress in improving literacy and numeracy skills. While the survey confirmed that Northern Ireland has made progress since the previous survey in 1996 it also indicated that more needed to be done to raise the standard of achievement in English, Mathematics, and Problem Solving in a Technology Rich Environment for our young people and adults. Consequently, the Essential Skills strategy is currently being refreshed, alongside a separate piece of work being carried out

by the Department of Education to review GCSEs in English and mathematics. The outcomes of these reviews will help to determine the role that colleges will play in the future delivery of literacy, numeracy, and ICT as part of their wider programme delivery, including the implications for the reviews of apprenticeships and youth training.

Partnerships

Community based education provides a first point of access for many adults who missed the opportunity of education and training the first time round and, subsequently, became disengaged from the education system and the labour market. Colleges are committed to their work in this area, and they partner with numerous external bodies, including statutory agencies, private training organisations and the voluntary and community sector, to target and deliver training to those learners who are hardest to reach. There are many examples of high quality provision within the voluntary and community sectors, and many courses are provided in response to requests from local groups, and are provided in informal venues which are close to home for the students.

Partnerships with the voluntary and community sectors and other organisations will be considered further to improve levels of participation (college partnerships are developed further in section 11). The Department is committed to enabling and

¹⁴ International Study for Adult Skills 2012, led by the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), OECD

facilitating the progression of learners from education delivered in community and other settings to mainstream accredited further education delivered at main college campuses.

Policy Commitment 6 – Increasing Economic Participation through Engagement

Colleges' distinctive contribution to social inclusion will be to provide learners with the knowledge, skills and qualifications required to find, or progress within, employment in order to avail of the benefits of economic participation. Working in partnership with others, colleges will support diversity and social inclusion through widening access to provision for those with barriers to learning. They will work with other organisations in the voluntary, community and private sector to strengthen pathways for learners that can open up their ambitions and develop their talents.

Policy Commitment 7 – Improving Literacy, Numeracy and ICT

Colleges will raise the level of literacy, numeracy and ICT competency in Northern Ireland by adopting the new qualifications that are being developed through the refreshed Essential Skills strategy and the reviews of GCSEs in English and mathematics.

For many people further education provides a second chance to obtain the education, skills and qualifications that they did not obtain through their formal education.

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Curriculum Delivery

Section 5 emphasises the importance of the content of college provision meeting the needs of the economy. This section details how colleges will deliver future provision, making use of technology to engage learners and enhance the teaching and learning experience. It will also explore the importance of developing employability skills through work based learning and by developing enterprising students.

There is a need for innovative curriculum delivery, making imaginative and effective use of technology enhanced learning to support both classroom teaching and blended/distance learning. Where possible, work placements will be a part of all learning, as this is recognised widely as the best way to develop individuals' employability skills. Gamification and virtual reality technology will be used as part of teaching and learning and to simulate work placements where they are not available or suitable. Delivery needs to be flexible, accommodating different learning styles and developing enterprising students through various methods of teaching.

Greater use will be made of competitions such as WorldSkills to showcase the high standards of professional and technical training within Northern Ireland's colleges, and to stimulate individual learners. Over the past number of years colleges have developed the arena of skills competitions across a number of skill areas to excellent effect; for example, automotive, construction, engineering, creative and professional services. This has resulted in an excellent record of achievement for Northern Ireland in skills competitions at regional, national and world level and has placed Northern Ireland as the top UK region in relation to the number of competitors taking part and medals awarded in the last two WorldSkills competitions.

There will be a strong emphasis on learner progression, which should be monitored closely. Progression pathways will be underpinned with good quality career guidance and information available to learners both before entering and during professional programmes.

Teaching staff will be highly skilled and have up to date industrial knowledge in their respective areas of expertise, in order to deliver provision effectively as set out above.

Use of Technology to Enhance Learning

Professional and technical learning has always involved technologies. However, the challenge for vocational teachers and trainers now is that the speed at which businesses and learners will adapt to, and adopt, new technologies is outstripping the way that teaching and learning changes. This is happening on three fronts: in information technology, which is increasingly used to communicate across time and space; in learning technologies, for instance supporting blended learning and digital simulations; and in workplace technology, which supports and transforms working practices. Technological advances in the workplace need to be brought together with those in teaching and learning to drive forward leading edge vocational practice.

Student expectations of how they wish to learn have changed over the past ten years, due to the widespread use of digital technologies. An approach that incorporates the use of technology to enhance learning will help to address the changing learning environment; for example the “flipped classroom”, which creates a greater focus on activity based learning. Access to interactive online resources helps to develop self-paced, independent learning opportunities. Students respond positively to online assessment due to the immediacy of the feedback and the opportunities it provides for them to review and improve.

Collaborative learning develops peer to peer learning opportunities, and enhances communication, team working and other enterprise skills. The challenge for colleges, because of the breadth of provision that is offered from entry level to level 7, is to develop a differentiated approach that addresses the needs of diverse groups of learners. Expanding access to technology ensures that all students can engage with learning resources. This will require strategic planning, by colleges, of the network infrastructure. Tutor created content, alongside authored content, provides students with a range of interactive resources to engage them in their learning.

As the curriculum continues to innovate to meet the changing needs of diverse learning groups, colleges will examine methodologies for curriculum delivery. The growth of blended learning and e-learning options will be exploited fully to ensure colleges' programmes remain relevant to learners and supports the complexity of their lifestyles.

Teachers and trainers in professional and technical areas also have the opportunity to harness technology for pedagogical purposes, particularly because in future many more of their learners are likely to be distributed at different workplaces, at home or on the move, reflecting how people work and live. The Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning notes that vocational teachers and trainers should embrace the fact that their learners will be using technology as part of their every day and working lives, and will have things to teach their teachers.¹⁵

Developing Employability Skills – Work Placements

Work-based learning (WBL), whether through an apprenticeship-style programme or through a structured work placement, is a crucial element of effective professional and technical training. The review of youth training at level 2 has provided strong evidence of the benefits to learners and employers of well managed and relevant work

placements. In particular, the review identifies the important role that work placements play in the development of employability skills that are so important to employers. WBL contributes to the quality of initial VET and ensures that the skills young people acquire are those needed in the labour market.¹⁶ The OECD recommends that all professional education and training programmes should involve WBL as a mandatory condition of receiving government funding, and that it should be systematic, quality assured and credit-bearing.¹⁷ A recent European Commission report states there is “ample, long-standing and consistent evidence that educational systems which combine theoretical study with practical, work-related training are more effective in easing young people’s school-to-work transition”.¹⁸ Mandatory WBL is associated with improving the linkages between educational institutions and employers.

Managed effectively, WBL delivers a strong learning environment for students to gain practical and up-to-date technical skills and soft skills associated with employability. More widely, it provides a signal of the labour market value of a programme by ensuring employer involvement, which can be used as a recruiting tool for both students and employers. It can also result in production benefits to employers and as a cost saving measure for public authorities, particularly in terms of costs of bespoke equipment

15 Commission on Adult Vocational teaching and learning: Its About Work – Excellent Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning 2013, Page 14. <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/26611>

16 European Commission, Work-Based Learning in Europe: Practices and policy Pointers, June 2013, Page 45. http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/alliance/work-based-learning-in-europe_en.pdf

17 OECD, Skills Beyond Schools: A Review of Postsecondary Vocational Education and Training, April 2014, Page 7.

18 EC, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Study on a comprehensive overview on traineeship arrangements in Member States: Final Synthesis Report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, May 2012, <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=6717>, p. 114.

and trainer expertise.¹⁹ In the case of SMEs, while time and costs constraints can limit their engagement with WBL, in sectors with skills shortages it can provide a bespoke method of meeting the specific needs of the company at that time.²⁰

The OECD²¹ notes that, outside of apprenticeships, work-based learning is limited in training programmes within Northern Ireland, but it is difficult to quantify accurately how many young people are currently receiving it. Part of the reason for this is that the current delivery model is largely led by supply rather than by demand, with training providers playing the lead role in managing relationships with employers and training programme participants, and being solely responsible for maintaining records of employer engagement and placements. There are presently no mechanisms in place to allow work placements to be centrally recorded and for employers to be able to promote placement vacancies, or for young people to be given the opportunity to consider all available options in order to make better-informed decisions. However, a number of the proposals in the review of youth training will address these issues; in particular, the proposals to establish a process to facilitate the sourcing and advertising of work-based learning opportunities, and to have dedicated industry consultants who will source and manage work-based learning opportunities, and encourage

employers to recruit young people from the youth training system.

Many learners on mainstream further education programmes will also benefit from a period of work placement. Providing work placements in sufficient numbers and of the required quality will be a considerable challenge. To address this challenge, colleges will take advantage of the processes being established as part of the youth training system to source work placements. Colleges will also accelerate the innovative work they are doing to develop and use virtual reality environments to simulate work placements in effective and stimulating ways.

Technology can help to compensate for a lack of job based training by allowing the learner to practise in virtual environments. It helps the learner integrate practical job-based experience with theoretical learning or assessment, by giving more on-the-job access to these materials. Access to practical experience is a key component of vocational learning but in certain circumstances can be dangerous. Simulations, using digital technologies, can be an important part of enabling access to practical experience in a safer environment. They are also an ideal way to learn how to complete tasks where mistakes would be expensive.²²

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ European Commission, Study on a comprehensive overview on traineeship arrangements in Member States, May 2012, http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=6717_10 and 72

²¹ Alvarez-Galvin, J., OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training – A Skills Beyond School Commentary on Northern Ireland, OECD, January 2014. <http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/ASkillsBeyondSchoolCommentaryOnNorthernIreland.pdf>

²² City & Guilds: Culture, Coaching and Collaboration – How to Unlock the Potential of Digital Technology in Vocational teaching and Learning, Page 11. http://www.cityandguilds.com/~/_media/Documents/about-us/Broadsheet-news/Culture%20coaching%20and%20collaboration%20pdf.aspx

Developing Enterprising Students with Strong Employability Skills

One of the key drivers of Northern Ireland's economic success identified by the Executive is the promotion of enterprise.²³ The promotion of an enterprise culture as a means of stimulating economic growth and improving economic prosperity is a key focus of government and industry. The promotion of enterprise-related skills and entrepreneurial capability among young people entering the workforce has been seen as central to this. The further education sector has a major role in helping to foster an enterprise culture.²⁴

A European study on traineeships found that professional and technical training contributes to innovation within business, as young people bring with them “new ideas and fresh thinking”.²⁵ The development of enterprising individuals with positive attitudes and a range of employability skills sought by employers is a key aspect of professional and technical education and training programmes. Attitudes and skills may also prepare some individuals to proceed to become self employed or to start their own businesses.

The Department for Employment and Learning recently commissioned research into “left brain/right brain thinking”, the proposition being understanding students' learning preferences and learning styles has implications for teaching and learning, particularly in the fields of enterprise and entrepreneurship.

The research was undertaken in the context of the development of enterprise and entrepreneurship in further education colleges. The research identified a clear pattern of Right Brain Dominance learning preference amongst a sample of 55 Northern Ireland entrepreneurs. The research suggested that in order to foster entrepreneurship in Northern Ireland, Right Brained Dominance must be recognised and valued as the spark for entrepreneurship; that learning preferences should be taken more into account in curriculum delivery; and that those students with entrepreneurial characteristics should be encouraged to achieve success with tailored learning solutions.

The proposed approach to embedding this research into practice in Northern Ireland is through initial teacher education programmes and continual professional development opportunities. It is the intention that colleges will seek to develop enterprising learners who have the confidence, attitude and employability skills to make them attractive to employers, and to equip them to adapt to changes in the labour market that will inevitably occur during their working lives, including the need to change jobs and the possibility of self-employment. To do this, colleges will, for example, make increased use of work placements, project based learning, and competitions, which can be extremely valuable in motivating learners. Colleges will also take account of different learning styles and adopt

23 Department for Employment and Learning, Further Education Review - Background Evidence Presentation, February 2015

24 Ofsted – Promoting Enterprise in Vocational Courses for 16-19 Year Old Students in Colleges – A Good Practice Guide, November 2012. <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/16049/1/Promoting%20Enterprise%20in%20vocational%20courses%20for%2016-19-year-old%20students%20in%20colleges.pdf>

25 EC, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Study on a comprehensive overview on traineeship arrangements in Member States: Final Synthesis Report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, May 2012, <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=6717>

flexible approaches to meet the needs of individual learners. In short, colleges will develop an “enterprising culture” that fosters innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship.

Careers

A well developed and comprehensive system of career guidance is vital to provide learners with the relevant tools and knowledge to plan their career pathway. Good career guidance based on labour market outcomes can help align the mix of provision to the needs of employers.²⁶

A framework currently exists in Northern Ireland to ensure all learners in education have access to high quality careers education, information and advice to enable them to become effective career decision makers.

A joint review of the careers system in Northern Ireland has recently been carried out by the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education. This report was published in December 2014 and makes a number of recommendations, which, when implemented, will bring about significant change to the careers landscape in Northern Ireland. Recommendations such as gaining relevant work experience and a central system to advertise these opportunities will be aligned to the system being taken forward in the Apprenticeships and Youth Training strategies. An e-portfolio has also been

recommended, and this will need to align with the Individual Learning Plan approach currently used by colleges in Northern Ireland.

Policy Commitment 8 – Using Technology to Enhance Learning

Colleges will adopt international best practice in the use of technology enhanced learning to support and improve their teaching and learning, and will adopt flexible approaches to learning to meet the needs of learners and employers.

Policy Commitment 9 – Developing Employability and Enterprise Skills

A distinctive element of provision delivered by colleges will be the development of employability skills, through high quality and relevant work placements and the use of virtual reality technology to simulate work placements in innovative and effective ways. Through their teaching strategies and approaches, colleges will also seek to develop enterprising learners, who are innovative and creative, and are able to adapt to change.

26 OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training – Skills Beyond School Synthesis Report

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Excellence

This section describes how colleges will deliver excellence by embedding high quality teaching and by enhancing how performance is monitored.

Excellence will be at the heart of everything that colleges do, particularly in terms of improving the quality of provision that is delivered, and monitoring and evaluating the outcomes that have been achieved. The latest reports by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), and recent performance in terms of learner retention, achievement and success, indicate the high quality standards that most colleges are now achieving. In the most recent Chief Inspector's report²⁷, achievements and standards are described as consistently good with the quality of teaching and learning listed as good or better in 84% of the lessons evaluated in the colleges observed. Self evaluation and quality improvement planning at an

individual college level are building the capacity of each college to identify and take ownership of their own areas for improvement. The policy commitments under this theme will strengthen further colleges' performance in a number of key areas; in particular, the Department and colleges will focus on the continued professionalism of the college staff, the collection and analysis of feedback from students and employers on the quality of their experiences, a rigorous inspection regime, and the promotion of improvement through the sharing of best practice both at a national and international level.

²⁷ Education and Training Inspectorate Chief Inspector's Report 2012-2014 www.etini.gov.uk/index/inspection-reports/the-chief-inspectors-report/ci-report-2012-2014.htm

Teacher Qualifications

The policy commitments outlined in sections 5, 6 and 7 will only be implemented effectively by a highly qualified workforce who have access to on-going and relevant continual professional development. In Northern Ireland, the Department for Employment and Learning has made significant strides over the past few years in enhancing teacher education for college lecturers. In 2009, the Department extended the requirement for initial teacher education for full-time and associate college lecturers from the one year, in-service, Postgraduate Certificate in Further and Higher Education to the two year Postgraduate Certificate in Education (Further Education) (PGCE(FE) Level 7), to be completed within the first three years of appointment.

The aim of the increased requirement was to align the pedagogical qualifications held by further education lecturers with those of teachers in schools. In order to ensure that all staff delivering regulated qualifications are trained at least in basic pedagogical skills, during 2014 the Department also developed and piloted, very successfully, with Ulster University (UU), a module for part-time staff. Continuing professional development courses have also been developed in conjunction with UU, for example “a Lecturers into Industry” module relating to industry placements, and advanced essential skills teaching.

The Department will, as part of this new further education strategy, build on this good work and seek to make Northern Ireland a centre of excellence in teaching and learning in further education. It will seek to establish a new framework for teaching qualifications that are recognised by all providers of teacher education. The framework will include both initial teacher education and continuing professional development qualifications. Teacher education and development will also be linked to initial and continuing registration with the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) and to the latest developments in research pedagogy. Pedagogical knowledge and skills will also be underpinned by recent, relevant industrial experience to ensure that all lecturers are confident and competent practitioners.

This will be taken forward in conjunction with further education colleges’ existing and prospective providers of teacher education and the General Teaching Council as the representative voice of the profession, once it has been established as the regulator for the further education teaching profession. This will ensure that a new framework for further education teacher education is created with the agreement of the key players and should ensure ownership and common purpose. The possibility of colleges delivering some teacher education will also be explored. The intention is to seek proposals from both of the regional universities on how best to realise this ambition before developing specific proposals.

There is also a real opportunity, given Northern Ireland's size and the coherence of the further education sector, to develop new pedagogical practice in conjunction with providers of teaching qualifications and the General Teaching Council by encouraging research that takes place on-site to develop, identify and share good and developing practice. The Department also recognises the value of developing communities of practice across the sector to improve the sharing of research and expertise, and will support this approach where appropriate.

Lecturer Registration and the Professional Voice

Plans are already underway to establish the GTCNI as the independent regulator and professional voice of further education lecturers. This will enable a system of registration and professional support to be established that recognises the unique status of further education lecturers in the education system as dual professionals who are committed to delivering the best professional and technical education and training they can to their learners.

Staff in colleges who are delivering regulated qualifications will be registered on the basis of professional standards, including the accreditation of teaching qualifications appropriate for registration, along the lines already set out above. The GTCNI will also be empowered to take action when lecturers' conduct and competence falls short of those standards,

with the ultimate sanction of removal from the register and consequent removal from the teaching profession. The way in which the register is drawn up will be the result of wide consultation with stakeholders, but it is expected that the teaching qualifications system set out above will underpin the way in which registration criteria will be applied. A role for the GTCNI in the recognition of continuing professional development activities is also envisaged, with the use of 'active registration' available to it to ensure that members of the profession are keeping their skills and knowledge up-to-date. As such, the GTCNI will help to cement a lot of the actions set out in the foregoing section through a system of professional recognition and support for all its members.

Work Placements

Occupational expertise is the defining characteristic of effective vocational teachers.²⁸ Teachers and trainers are 'dual professionals'; they are both vocational/subject specialists and teaching experts, committed to maintaining and developing their expertise in both aspects of their role to ensure the best outcomes for their learners.²⁹ This expertise also needs to be continuously updated in response to ever-changing working practices and advances in technology as a prerequisite to maintaining high quality provision. There can be no standard approach to doing this, and it is recognised that it is a challenge for further education colleges, and particularly for full-time teaching

28 Commission on Adult Vocational teaching and learning: It's About Work – Excellent Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning 2013, Page 14. <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/26611>

29 Taken from the introduction to The 2014 Professional Standards for Teachers and Trainers in the Education and Training sector http://www.et-foundation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/4991-Prof-standards-A4_4-2.pdf

staff; however, placements in business and industry are a very effective means of keeping lecturers' skills and knowledge up to date. Contacts with business and industry also promote better relationships between colleges and the workplace, and encourage more effective curriculum and resource planning.

In Northern Ireland, the "Lecturers into Industry" scheme, which dates back a number of years and which was refreshed in January 2015, provides college lecturers with an opportunity to undertake a placement in industry, with the support of a continuous professional development module provided by UU. The activities supported through the programme are seen as a means of improving the quality and relevance of further education provision by ensuring that colleges' curriculum offer meets the needs of the modern workplace. Participation in the programme by individual lecturers is deemed to be an important element of colleges' commitment to continuous professional development and quality improvement. Consequently, Lecturers into Industry will form a key part of individual college self-evaluation processes and whole college quality improvement planning.

Leadership and Management Skills

It is generally recognised that leadership and management skills are integral to the success of any organisation, and colleges are no exception. The Department has

previously supported the development of management and leadership programmes for managers across the sector and has encouraged the sector to develop a common framework which recognises the diverse programmes that are delivered to staff in this area. Colleges will continue to support the development of these critical skills through the lifetime of this strategy, and the Department will consider how this activity can be best supported in future years.

Inspection Process

Inspection is an important part of the quality improvement process. The inspection process for further education provision (i.e. up to level 3) is carried out by the Education and Training Inspectorate, and there are well defined procedures in place ensuring ongoing inspection and a rigorous follow up process to ensure quality improvement takes place. The Quality Assurance Agency for higher education in the UK currently has a role in quality assurance of higher education provision delivered in further education colleges. The current quality improvement strategy in further education, including the inspection regime, will be reviewed to ensure that it is appropriate for all aspects of delivery in colleges, that it meets the needs of all key stakeholders, and that it is consistent with proposals in the apprenticeship strategy and the review of youth training.

Monitoring to Improve Performance

Colleges in Northern Ireland, working closely with the Department for Employment and Learning's statisticians, now have extremely reliable and very comprehensive data to inform policy and operational decisions. In particular, there is detailed data on students who are enrolled with colleges, on the courses they are following and on performance in terms of learner retention, achievement and success. This informs key aspects of colleges' quality improvement planning processes.

However, it is also important to understand the extent to which learning and qualifications can have an impact on the job prospects and potential earning power of learners, and the likelihood of learners progressing to higher levels of study. It could be argued that the real value of professional and technical education is whether learners make progress into or within employment or further learning. Therefore, as outlined below, we will identify ways to collect information on the destinations of students when they finish their courses of study, and to capture feedback from students and employers on their levels of satisfaction with the services provided by colleges.

Outcome Monitoring/Student Destination Data

The progression of learners, either into employment or on to higher levels of learning, following their programmes of study has been identified in this document as a distinctive role for further education colleges. Consequently, measuring student destinations is an important aspect of assessing the quality of further education. In particular, the extent to which students are provided with the relevant skills and attributes to enter the world of work or to progress to further study. There is much international experience with leavers' surveys, typically in higher education. According to a report by UKCES, 157 Group and Gazelle Group, a college's credibility is tied increasingly to the relevant destinations of its students, tracking them and using those who embark on successful careers as "advocates" for the college and courses³⁰.

It is, therefore, important that in Northern Ireland, student destination data is also tracked. The Department for Employment and Learning and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) have recently carried out a pilot exercise into destinations of leavers from one further education college, which involved 400 students. Following an evaluation, the pilot approach was extended in early 2015 to the 2013/14 cohort of leavers from all colleges. This first full cohort exercise will also be evaluated with a view to making any necessary amendments in future years.

³⁰ UKCES, 157 Group, Gazelle colleges; A new conversation: Employer and college engagement https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/306968/A_New_Conversation.pdf

Excellence will be at the heart of everything that colleges do, particularly in terms of improving the quality of provision that is delivered, and monitoring and evaluating the outcomes that have been achieved.

The Department will also consider with colleges how the information gathered in this way can be used to improve performance, and will consider meaningful targets that could be set in this area. Information on the performance and destination of students from different types of college courses is potentially very valuable to individuals who are considering their career options, including whether they should enrol at a college and, if so, what programme of study they should follow. This type of information would also be very helpful to those who are offering careers guidance to potential learners. Therefore, to enable this to happen, alongside information on the courses that they provide, colleges will also publish information on learner retention, achievement and success, and on learner destinations.

Employer and Student Satisfaction

Fundamental to the drive for quality improvement will be a greater emphasis on feedback from employers and from students. The Department and colleges will seek to use a standardised approach to receiving and analysing feedback from each of these key stakeholder groups across a number of criteria and at frequent intervals to facilitate improved benchmarking across the Northern Ireland further education sector and more widely. This will provide invaluable information on the relevance of qualifications and skills to employers and on the wider support provided by colleges.

It is proposed that colleges will develop a standardised approach to capturing feedback from employers on all aspects of the services provided to them by colleges, including the relevance and quality of the skills learnt in further education by new employees. As well as enabling local benchmarking, this will help to strengthen

curriculum design and delivery, and may create opportunities for work placements in future.

Capturing and analysing feedback from students on their experience of participating in further education is a crucial aspect of colleges' quality improvement processes. This can include feedback on a variety of dimensions including the delivery of their programmes of study, the use of technology, the flexibility of provision to meet their needs, the support they received from college staff, the extent to which their expectations were met, the facilities available at the college, etc.

Capturing this sort of information in a standardised way that enables effective and meaningful analysis, and which facilitates benchmarking with other colleges in Northern Ireland, and beyond, would add value to the information that is available to college management.

Therefore, it is proposed that a standardised approach to collecting and analysing feedback from learners will be introduced, which will enable colleges to benchmark against high performing colleges, and to identify and learn from good practice in Northern Ireland and in other parts of the UK and beyond.

Policy Commitment 10 – Embedding High Quality Teaching

Through a new teacher education framework there will be a renewed focus on high quality initial teacher education and continual professional development for all lecturing staff, with minimum standards for pedagogy and subject qualifications put in place. College staff will also have the opportunity to undertake relevant and good quality industrial placements to ensure that they understand the needs of employers and workforce development. The quality improvement process, including the inspection regime, will be reviewed to ensure that it is appropriate for all aspects of delivery in colleges. The Department will support the development of research in pedagogy to inform best practice in professional and technical education and training to establish Northern Ireland as an internationally renowned centre for excellence in teacher education in professional and technical subjects.

Policy Commitment 11 – Improving Performance

Standardised approaches to receiving and analysing feedback from learners and from employers will be developed and introduced. Additional performance measures will be adopted to enable colleges and the Department to monitor colleges' performance more effectively as part of quality management, including learner progression and learners' destinations after leaving further education. Colleges will publish information on learner retention, achievement, progression and destinations on their web sites in such a way as to inform learners' choice of courses on which to enrol.

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Internationally Connected

This section details how colleges will learn from best practise outside of Northern Ireland by maximising student and staff exchange opportunities and continuing to develop partnerships internationally.

Over recent years, colleges in Northern Ireland have become increasingly focussed on the need to operate in an international arena and to equip their students and staff with the skills required to work and compete in the global economy. Colleges will expand this aspect of their operations in ways that will support their own staff and students and will enable them to share and benefit from best practice in similar institutions in other parts of the world.

International experience is invaluable in today's interconnected world. Colleges will use international visits to further develop staff and to provide learners with the opportunity to undertake work and educational placements, particularly across the EU, supported by the Erasmus+ programme.

Across the colleges, learners have good opportunities to apply and enhance their learning through participation in international exchanges, and staff have the opportunity to develop their industrial and pedagogical skills through the sharing of knowledge, expertise and best practice. Colleges will build on partnerships already developed in a wide range of countries across Europe and also in Japan, the USA, India, China and Brazil.

International exchanges also provide an opportunity for the colleges to showcase their work and facilities, and the high standard of the professional and technical, education and training that is provided in Northern Ireland. Colleges will further explore ways in which to promote their work to support foreign direct investment into Northern Ireland. Colleges have been

participants on Invest Northern Ireland trade missions in the past and they will continue to be involved in this area. In addition to the benefits outlined above, international activity promotes less tangible benefits such as awareness of other cultures and their working methods, and wider global issues, all of which help to develop citizenship skills.

The Department already supports a range of EU-led mobility initiatives in the sphere of professional and technical education which, taken together, make it easier for learners, employees and job-seekers to undertake learning in other EU countries, and to have their qualifications recognised. Northern Ireland has had an excellent record of participation in EU mobility programmes which support learner and staff exchanges, and promote cross-border projects and network-building.

The Department and further education colleges will, therefore, take full advantage of existing and new sources of funding available from Europe to support the different aspects of colleges operating in an international context as outlined above.

A further element of international activity relates to the creation of commercial opportunities to sell educational services in other countries. As part of the implementation of this strategy, this opportunity will be scoped and evaluated. The international market for education and training is a complex one, which needs careful balancing of risk and opportunity alongside the core purpose of further education.

Policy Commitment 12 – Operating Internationally

Colleges will enhance the learner experience, and the professional development and industrial knowledge of their staff, through placements and exchanges with similar institutions in other countries. They will also build on the excellent partnerships that have already been created across the world to share best practice with, and to learn from others. In addition, colleges will, with the Department, explore commercial opportunities to deliver more services in the international market.

Governance

This section summarises the governance arrangements in further education colleges.

Governing bodies play an extremely important role in the strategic leadership of colleges. In particular, they are responsible for ensuring the effective management of colleges' education and training provision, and for planning colleges' future development. Governing bodies exercise both a support and a challenge function in respect of college principals and their executive teams, ensuring that colleges implement government priorities for the further education sector. Good governance adds real value and supports effective decision making within individual colleges, and the role of chairs and governors, and the standards they are expected to maintain, are set out in the Guide for Governors and in the Code of Governance.

The power to provide suitable and efficient further education to students in the areas

in which colleges are situated, having regard to the educational needs of industry and commerce, is derived from the Further Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. The Order also enables the Department to put in place Articles and Instruments of Government, which support and enable governing bodies to operate.

Since October 2010 the six further education colleges in Northern Ireland have been classified as NDPBs by the Office of National Statistics, and this is the overarching business model under which colleges now operate. Consequently, the Department has had to review the Management Statement/ Financial Memorandum (MS/FM) which sets out reporting arrangements and the parameters under which the further education colleges operate. The MS sets

out the broad framework within which colleges operate, and the associated FM sets out aspects of the financial provisions which colleges shall observe. In particular, the MS/FM has to be consistent with the model financial memorandum prescribed by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) for all NDPBs.

The MS/FM does not convey any legal powers or responsibilities. However, it does set out the framework under which colleges should utilise funding provided by the Department, how the institution should be governed, and how that funding should be accounted for. This document is supported by the Audit Code, College Development Plans, accounts direction, annual assurance statements and accountability meetings.

While NDPB status has presented colleges with a number of organisational issues to address, for example in terms of budgeting and funding arrangements, one of the most strategically important issues to address is to ensure that colleges are able to generate income outside of the funding provided by the Department. This is something that the Department is keen to encourage colleges to continue to do. However, it is equally important that colleges are able to retain income generated in this way, and that an entirely literal interpretation of NDPB status does not inhibit colleges' desire and ability to be innovative and flexible in the delivery of services to learners and employers.

Policy Commitment 13 – Further Education Governance and Business Model

Colleges and the Department will work together to maximise the benefits to colleges and their customers of the NDPB status, while also addressing any challenges posed.

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College Partnerships

This section details the two aspects of partnership through which colleges will deliver their services to learners, employers and communities more effectively and efficiently; these are partnerships between colleges, and colleges working in partnership with others.

College to College Partnerships

The rationalisation of further education colleges that took place in 2007 has been a strong enabling factor in colleges' successful delivery, in subsequent years, of the "Further Education Means Business" strategy. In particular, the six large area based colleges have played an increased leadership role in local and regional planning, and in the delivery of economically relevant qualifications and skills at all levels across Northern Ireland.

In the "OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training – Skills Beyond School Synthesis Report", the authors state that "professional education and training needs an institutional base that:consolidates training providers into

institutions of adequate size".³¹ The report goes on to state that "in many countries, mergers have encouraged institutions of efficient size", and that "mergers can be managed successfully, particularly when it does not involve closure of campuses". The report references the merger of Northern Ireland's 16 further education colleges down to six colleges as an example of good practice. The Northern Ireland college merger process was also highlighted in the Northern Ireland commentary that was produced by the OECD as part of their wider "Skills Beyond School" exercise.³²

Within the current structure there are opportunities for colleges to work together in partnership:

31 OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training: Skills Beyond School Synthesis Report <http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/Skills-Beyond-School-Synthesis-Report.pdf>

32 OECD Review of Vocational Education and Training: A Skills Beyond School Commentary on Northern Ireland – January 2014 <http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/ASkillsBeyondSchoolCommentaryOnNorthernIreland.pdf>

- ▶ through the use of collaborative working to enable colleges to operate with maximum efficiency; and
- ▶ through colleges sharing best practice to enable services to be delivered to learners and employers most effectively and to the highest standards of quality.

Efficient Operations

The use of a collaborative working approach to deliver greater efficiencies within the sector, to reduce duplication and to enhance cooperation between colleges is a policy which the Department has been promoting and supporting in recent years. The extension of shared services is one of a number of strategies that are identified as part of a “comprehensive programme of Public Sector Reform and Restructuring”, which the Northern Ireland Executive adopted in January 2015. Also, government departments, and their NDPBs, are required to work with Enterprise Shared Services, which provides a range of services to all Northern Ireland departments, to consider the extension of shared services coverage.

Early work on collaborative working has focused on colleges’ procurement activity, on college advertising, and on the development of a new management information system for use by colleges. Considerable progress has been made in these areas; for example, in the joint procurement of banking and insurance services and the printing of prospectuses.

In addition, other areas of collaboration such as energy provision and facilities management are subject to existing contracts which will be considered within the context of future collaborative procurement as the contracts end. However, the current tight financial climate provides an imperative to re-energise this work, and to take it to the next level.

The sector’s total income in 2013/14 was £254million, with significant variances in the administrative and processing costs in each of the six colleges. Therefore, to drive this work forward, a range of innovative collaborative projects will be taken forward across the six colleges. A strategically significant project is where all six colleges have agreed a shared vision for the provision of Management Information Systems (MIS) and Information Learning Technology (ILT) services for use by colleges. The vision commits all colleges to “the provision of MIS/ILT systems and supporting processes that facilitate delivery of high quality teaching and learning, meeting the needs of staff and students both now and in the future”. At the heart of this vision is the provision of a common unified information systems platform for colleges, ensuring common reporting and business intelligence capability, a consistent approach to data capture and validation, harmonisation and standardisation of all associated business processes, and a standardised platform supporting access for all stakeholders.

Other areas identified include payroll, human resources, IT support, finance, the efficient use of the available estate across the sector to minimise duplication of service and the considerable expertise that colleges have in the procurement and management of their estate.

In addition to collaborative working approaches, colleges, using their NDPB status, will explore, where appropriate, adopting corporate systems that are used by Northern Ireland Civil Service Departments such as Account Northern Ireland (budgeting and accounting system), and to use IT Assist (hardware and software IT support) to procure and support a range of computer hardware.

The further education sector has been operating with increased levels of efficiency in recent years, with colleges consistently meeting efficiency targets set by the Department. However, in the tightening budgetary environment, colleges have been exploring how this can be taken to the next level by collaborating to share a range of corporate services. Colleges will implement the projects identified above, and will seek to identify further opportunities to secure efficiencies through sharing services.

Effective Service Delivery

Individual colleges have demonstrated excellent practice in areas as diverse as engagement with employers, the development and use of learning technologies, innovative and flexible qualifications and curriculum design, working with disadvantaged learners, and

pastoral care arrangements. However, not all colleges exhibit best practice in all areas of activity. Therefore, colleges will make use of the considerable potential that exists to learn from each other to create a further education sector here which is genuinely world class.

Also, as set out in section 5, a process is in place through which individual colleges can be identified as specialists in key sectors of the economy. This approach to specialism will be extended to include other key areas of colleges activities; for example, qualifications and curriculum design and the development or acquisition of on-line learning materials. Specialist colleges will take the lead in these areas also, and then share the outcomes and products across the sector.

Therefore, as well as seeking increased organisational efficiency through partnership, colleges will also work together to increase the effectiveness of the services they provide to learners and employers.

Delivery of College Collaboration

It is important that the development and operation of college partnerships as described above are championed at senior management level and that they lead to the optimum use of resources, and deliver maximum benefit to colleges' customers. Therefore, a process will be established, involving the Department and the further education sector, to drive forward and oversee in a holistic way collaborative working, the sharing of best practice, and the application of the specialist colleges approach in relevant areas of activity.

College Partnerships with Others

In supporting employers and the wider economy, colleges have worked with government departments, Invest Northern Ireland and a range of local economic and enterprise organisations.

In curriculum design, colleges have worked in partnership with our universities and employers, and they have also partnered with training organisations in the private and voluntary and community sectors to create flexible delivery models that benefit certain learner groups. Colleges have also worked very successfully with government departments and the voluntary and community sector to deliver innovative and effective programmes, and, in partnerships with schools, colleges have been important providers of professional and technical qualifications as part of the curriculum made available to school pupils under the Department of Education's Entitlement Framework.

Working in partnership with others will be increasingly important to colleges in delivering the challenging vision that is set out in this consultation document. New partnerships will have to be formed – in particular, to ensure effective implementation of the new apprenticeships and youth training systems, and to ensure that colleges can complement the work of the new district councils in their respective economic and community development roles.

Policy Commitment 14 – Sectoral Efficiency through Collaborative Working

In order to ensure that their services are delivered with maximum efficiency, colleges will operate more collectively in the delivery of their corporate services through a more rigorous and comprehensive approach to collaborative (shared services) working. Where appropriate, the colleges will take advantage of their NDPB status by adopting collaborative working opportunities that are available across the public sector in Northern Ireland.

Policy Commitment 15 – Sectoral Effectiveness by Sharing Best Practice

Colleges will share best practice, and learn from each other, in the innovative and imaginative delivery of services to learners and employers. In particular, colleges will work together to ensure that technology can be developed and used in the most cost efficient and effective way to support learning.

Policy Commitment 16 – Delivery Mechanism to Drive Efficiency and Effectiveness

A mechanism will be established to stimulate, manage and oversee collaboration and sharing of best practice between colleges to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of services, and to maximise the level of resource that is available to fund front line services.

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Funding Model and College Sustainability

This section details how the current funding model will be reviewed to underpin future priorities.

The current Funded Learning Unit (FLU) Funding Model is a distributive funding mechanism through which the annual recurrent grant for further education is distributed between the six colleges. A single FLU equates approximately to one full-time enrolment, and part-time enrolments are calculated as a proportion of a FLU depending on the number of hours studied. The FLU model also has a small number of weightings to take account of course level and subject and of the overall deprivation measure of the college catchment area.

The value of the FLU has not been increased since the model was first used in the 2007/08 academic year, to coincide with the introduction of the six college structure. In addition, the model distinguishes, in financial value, between full-time and part-time provision; this could act as a disincentive to colleges to deliver part-time provision, even though part-time delivery is important in up-skilling the workforce. Increasingly, these issues are having an impact on colleges' sustainability.

Consequently, the funding model will have to be reviewed to ensure that it supports and incentivises colleges to deliver the strategy in a sustainable way. Account will also have to be taken of the new funding models that will be developed for the new apprenticeships and youth training systems, particularly as these systems will constitute a considerable proportion of the provision delivered by colleges.

Policy Commitment 17 – Reviewing the Further Education Funding Model

In partnership with colleges, the funding model will be reviewed to ensure that it supports and incentivises colleges to deliver this strategy, that it supports a sustainable further education sector and that it aligns with the funding models that will be developed for other departmental programmes that further education colleges will deliver, in particular apprenticeships and youth training.

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Promoting the Further Education Sector

This section details how colleges will work together and with the Department to identify ways in which to promote the further education sector.

While esteem for professional and technical education is growing in some of the newer EU member states, albeit from a low starting point, it is declining in Western Europe. In countries where it is held in relatively low esteem compared with general education, such as Ireland, Lithuania and Sweden, vocational policies tend to focus on the basics such as reducing the early drop-out rate from education and making sure courses are linked to the jobs market.³³

In countries where vocational education is held in high esteem, such as Austria, Finland and Hungary, more advanced initiatives are improving areas such as guidance and counselling for students, as well as marketing campaigns and skills competitions.³⁴

In research carried out by Cedefop on policy measures used to raise the attractiveness of initial VET for students across a number of countries, the following measures were most frequently mentioned: improved permeability and diversity of pathways and programmes; campaigns to raise awareness (internet, TV and media); improvements to guidance and counselling; financial incentives; improved quality of teachers and trainers; and use of skills competitions.³⁵ Other measures mentioned included improving the infrastructure of VET providers, revising and modernising the curriculum, improvements to the apprenticeship system, and increasing the involvement of employers, the labour market and social partners.³⁶ A high quality further education estate with state of the art facilities also enhances the image of the sector.

³³ Cedefop Attractiveness of Initial Vocational Education and Training: identifying what matters: Research Paper No.39 http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/5539_en.pdf

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid

Many of these measures are already in practice within the further education sector in Northern Ireland, and the Department will work with the colleges to market more effectively the benefits of professional and technical education to learners and employers, and the benefits of pursuing these types of courses in further education colleges. Particularly important in this regard is the ambition for professional and technical education and training to be valued equally to academic education by learners, employers and wider society; and for further education to be recognised as an equal and valued pillar of the education system in Northern Ireland, alongside higher education and the statutory school system.

Policy Commitment 18 – Promoting Further Education Provision

Colleges Northern Ireland, individual colleges and the Department will work together to demonstrate and explain the distinctive role that the further education sector has, as part of the wider education system, and the role that the sector plays in strengthening the Northern Ireland economy. More generally, the benefits and status of professional and technical qualifications will also be promoted.

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Consultation Questions

Economic Development

Policy Commitment 1 – Priority Skills

Colleges will have a crucial role working with employers and other key stakeholders to ensure that the professional and technical qualifications and curriculum they provide support the rebalancing and rebuilding of the Northern Ireland economy.

Question 1

Do you agree that colleges should focus provision on those areas that contribute to rebalancing and rebuilding the economy?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:

Policy Commitment 2 – Levels of College Provision

Further education colleges will have a particular focus on further developing provision at level 3 (A level equivalent) and above in areas that will support the rebalancing and rebuilding of the Northern Ireland economy. Progression for learners who wish to study at higher levels will be encouraged and facilitated through the qualifications system, and through innovative delivery and clear pathways.

Question 2

Do you agree that colleges should focus on developing provision at level 3 and above in areas that will support the economy and encourage progression for learners to study at higher levels?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>
Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:				

Policy Commitment 3 – Up-skilling the Existing Workforce

Colleges will support indigenous companies and new companies which are being established in Northern Ireland, to ensure that employees have the required knowledge, skills and qualifications. In doing this, colleges will operate in flexible ways in terms of where, when, and over what period of time up-skilling activities are provided, so that the needs of employers can be met effectively and in a manner which suits business needs.

Question 3

How can colleges build on the support they provide to employers with regards to up-skilling the workforce whilst ensuring they deliver services to employers in a flexible way?

Policy Commitment 4 – Support to Employers

Colleges will be at the forefront of providing support to employers to enable them to innovate, to grow, to operate more effectively and efficiently, to develop new products and to identify new markets for their products.

Question 4

How can colleges build on the support they provide employers to enable them to innovate, to grow, to operate more effectively and efficiently, to develop new products and to identify new markets for their products?

Policy Commitment 5 – College Specialism and Regional Capacity

Centres of specialism and expertise will be developed in each college to enable the further education sector as a whole to deliver high quality professional and technical provision to employers. Through a collaborative approach, individual colleges will have identified sectors where they will be recognised for their expertise and specialism. As well as identifying specialisms, all colleges will develop networks of experts who will share the latest developments in curriculum and skills training across Northern Ireland.

Question 5a

Do you agree that individual colleges should be identified as specialists in key sectors of the economy?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:

Question 5b

Do you agree that colleges should develop networks of experts to enable the sharing of latest developments across Northern Ireland.

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>
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Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:

Social Inclusion

Policy Commitment 6 – Increasing Economic Participation through Engagement

Colleges’ distinctive contribution to social inclusion will be to provide learners with the knowledge, skills and qualifications required to find, or progress within employment, in order to avail of the benefits of economic participation. Working in partnership with others, colleges will support diversity and social inclusion through widening access to provision for those with barriers to learning. They will work with other organisations in the voluntary, community and private sector to strengthen pathways for learners that can open up their ambition and develop their talents.

Question 6a

In what other ways can colleges support those with barriers to learning?

Question 6b

How can colleges increase participation in further education, particularly those who are hardest to reach?

Policy Commitment 7 – Improving Literacy Numeracy and ICT

Colleges will raise the level of literacy, numeracy and ICT competence in Northern Ireland by adopting the new qualifications that are being developed through the refreshed Essential Skills strategy and the reviews of GCSEs in English and mathematics.

Question 7

In what other ways can colleges assist in raising the level of literacy and numeracy competency in Northern Ireland? In particular, how can colleges encourage participation on literacy and numeracy programmes?

Curriculum Delivery

Policy Commitment 8 – Using Technology to Enhance Learning

Colleges will adopt international best practice in the use of technology enhanced learning to support and improve their teaching and learning, and will adopt flexible approaches to learning to meet the needs of learners and employers.

Question 8a

Do you agree that colleges should use technology to support and improve their teaching and learning?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:

Question 8b

What are the main barriers to achieving this, and how could these be overcome?

Question 8c

What types of flexible approaches can be used to meet the needs of learners and employers?

Curriculum Delivery

Policy Commitment 9 – Developing Employability and Enterprise Skills

A distinctive element of provision delivered by colleges will be the development of employability skills, through high quality and relevant work placements and the use of virtual reality technology to simulate work placements in innovative and effective ways. Through their teaching strategies and approaches, colleges will also seek to develop enterprising learners, who are innovative and creative, and are able to adapt to change.

Question 9a

Do you agree that work placements are the best way to develop employability skills in learners?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:

Question 9b

Where work placements cannot be provided, do you agree that college based and simulated work placements are effective alternatives to employer based work placements?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:

Question 9c

In what way can colleges develop enterprising learners who are innovative and creative, and who can adapt to change?

Excellence

Policy Commitment 10 – Embedding High Quality Teaching

Through a new teacher education framework there will be a renewed focus on high quality initial teacher education and continual professional development for all lecturing staff, with minimum standards for pedagogy and subject qualifications put in place. College staff will also have the opportunity to undertake relevant and good quality industrial placements to ensure that they understand the needs of employers and workforce development. The quality improvement process, including the inspection regime, will be reviewed to ensure that it is appropriate for all aspects of delivery in colleges. The Department will support the development of research in pedagogy to inform best practice in professional and technical education and training to establish Northern Ireland as an internationally renowned centre for excellence in teacher education in professional and technical subjects.

Question 10a

Do you agree that a strong focus should be placed on continual professional development, including industrial placements across the further education sector?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>
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Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:

Question 10b

Do you agree that minimum standards for pedagogy and qualifications should be put in place for all lecturers?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>
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Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:

Question 10c

Do you agree that the quality improvement process, including the inspection regime, should be reviewed to ensure that it is appropriate for all aspects of delivery in colleges?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:

Policy Commitment 11 – Improving Performance

Standardised approaches to receiving and analysing feedback from learners and from employers will be developed and introduced. Additional performance measures will be adopted to enable colleges and the Department to monitor colleges’ performance more effectively as part of quality management, including learner progression and learners’ destinations after leaving further education. Colleges will publish information on learner retention, achievement, progression and destinations on their web sites in such a way as to inform learners’ choice of courses on which to enrol.

Question 11a

Do you agree that standardised approaches to receiving and analysing feedback from learners and employers should be introduced across all colleges?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:

Question 11b

Do you agree that additional performance measures should be introduced to take account of learners’ progression into employment or further study, and that colleges should publish this information on their websites?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:

International Dimension

Policy Commitment 12 – Operating Internationally

Colleges will enhance the learner experience, and the professional development and industrial knowledge of their staff, through placements and exchanges with similar institutions in other countries. They will also build on the excellent partnerships that have already been created across the world to share best practice with, and to learn from others. In addition, colleges will, with the Department, explore commercial opportunities to deliver more services in the international market.

Question 12a

How might colleges maximise placements for learners and the use of secondments and exchanges for staff outside of Northern Ireland?

Question 12b

How might colleges develop further partnerships with international organisations, including educational institutions and employers?

Question 12c

Do you agree that colleges should explore opportunities to sell their education and training expertise internationally?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:

Governance

Policy Commitment 13 – Further Education Governance and Business Model

Colleges and the Department will work together to maximise the benefits to colleges and their customers of colleges' NDPB status, while also addressing any challenges posed.

Question 13

In what ways can colleges create income outside of funding provided by the department and wider public sector?

College Partnerships

Policy Commitment 14 – Sectoral Efficiency through Collaborative Working

In order to ensure that their services are delivered with maximum efficiency, colleges will operate more collectively in the delivery of their corporate services through a more rigorous and comprehensive approach to collaborative (shared services) working. Where appropriate, the colleges will take advantage of their NDPB status by adopting collaborative working opportunities that are available across the public sector in Northern Ireland.

Question 14

Do you agree that colleges should operate more collectively in their delivery of corporate services by adopting shared services through their NDPB status?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:

Policy Commitment 15 – Sectoral Effectiveness by Sharing Best Practice

Colleges will share best practice, and learn from each other, in the innovative and imaginative delivery of services to learners and employers. In particular, colleges will work together to ensure that technology can be developed and used in the most cost efficient and effective way to support learning.

Question 15

In what way can colleges share best practice in the efficient and effective delivery of services to learners and employers, including the use of technology?

Policy Commitment 16 – Delivery Mechanism to Drive Efficiency and Effectiveness

A mechanism will be established to stimulate, manage and oversee collaboration and sharing of best practice between colleges to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of services, and to maximise the level of resource that is available to fund front line services.

Question 16

Do you agree that a mechanism should be established to manage and oversee collaboration and sharing of best practice between colleges?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:

Funding Model and College Sustainability

Policy Commitment 17 – Reviewing the Further Education Funding Model

Jointly with colleges, the funding model will be reviewed to ensure that it supports and incentivises colleges to deliver this strategy, that it supports a sustainable further education sector and that it aligns with the funding models that will be developed for other departmental programmes that further education colleges will deliver, in particular apprenticeships and youth training.

Question 17

Do you agree that the further education funding model should be reviewed to take account of the new further education strategy and the funding models for other DEL programmes, including apprenticeships and youth training?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:

Promoting the Further Education Sector

Policy Commitment 18 – Promoting Further Education Provision

Colleges Northern Ireland, individual colleges and the Department will work together to demonstrate and explain the distinctive role that the further education sector has, as part of the wider education system, and the role that the sector plays in strengthening the Northern Ireland economy. More generally, the benefits and status of professional and technical qualifications will also be promoted.

Question 18a

What measures need to be taken to demonstrate and explain the distinctive role that the further education sector has as part of the wider education system, and the role that the sector plays in strengthening the Northern Ireland economy?

Question 18b

How could the benefits of professional and technical qualifications be promoted to the users of qualifications?

1. Does the proposed policy promote individuals from different religious, political, racial or other Section 75(1) backgrounds sharing or engaging together?	
Impact Positive negative none	Positive impact
Qualitative Evidence	<p>The further education colleges in Northern Ireland are designated as public authorities, for the purposes of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, and all six have their Equality Schemes approved by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. The colleges therefore have a legal obligation to promote equality of opportunity and good relations within the various Section 75 categories including religious belief, political opinion, race, sexual orientation, marital status, those with or without a disability and those with or without dependents. All of the colleges' activities including teaching and business and community engagement activities are undertaken within this context.</p> <p>Under the new strategy, the further education sector will continue to be open to people throughout Northern Ireland regardless of religious belief, political opinion, racial group, marital status and sexual orientation.</p> <p>The further education colleges will continue to deliver a wide range of professional and technical education and training across a wide range of occupations to ensure appeal to both male and female students.</p>
Quantitative Evidence	<p>Widening participation in education is an essential factor in promoting social inclusion, combating poverty, and helping people from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with other barriers to learning, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to become engaged with society in general. A wider impact of participation in further education is social integration and interaction, developing independence and self esteem.</p> <p>Students within the further education sector interact and learn from, and with, others from all areas and cultures and the environment is carefully nurtured to be welcoming and all-inclusive. In doing this the sector has made and continues to make a significant contribution to breaking down barriers and supporting social cohesion.</p> <p>In terms of gender profile, the proportion of females enrolled in regulated courses at further education colleges decreased from 50.9% in 2009/10 to 49.1% in 2013/14, while male regulated enrolments increased from 49.1% to 50.9% over the same period³⁷. The 2013/14 figures for enrolments are therefore broadly equivalent on a gender basis.</p> <p>There is existing provision via the colleges for young people who require assistance with childcare, to allow them to start or continue their education, in the form of financial support under the Department's Care to Learn scheme. The scheme is aimed at those aged under 20 at the time of enrolment. In the 2013/14 academic year 95 students were supported under the Scheme. There are no plans to change this under the new strategy.</p> <p>Figures for 2013/14 indicate that 36.1% of total regulated enrolments at further education colleges were from a Catholic background while 31.2% were from a Protestant background. However, it should be noted that the community background was not stated or unknown for 23.5% of total regulated enrolments in 2013/14³⁷.</p>
Possible Mitigating Measures	None required.

37 Further Education Activity in Northern Ireland: 2009/10 to 2013/14, Department for Employment and Learning <http://www.delni.gov.uk/fe-activity-in-fe-colleges-ni>

38 Further Education Statistical Return and Consolidated Data Return

2. Does the proposed policy inadvertently create a situation where people categorised in different groups under Section 75(1) backgrounds will be accessing services or facilities on a segregated or separate basis?

<p>Impact Positive negative none</p>	<p>Positive impact</p>
<p>Qualitative Evidence</p>	<p>Under the new strategy access to further education will continue to be open to and inclusive of: religious belief; political opinion; racial group; marital status; sexual orientation; disability; those with dependants; and men and women.</p> <p>The future further education provision will continue to be offered via the existing six colleges and their various campuses which provide geographic cover across Northern Ireland.</p> <p>The colleges will continue to be fully integrated and ensure the promotion of equality of opportunity by welcoming students from all backgrounds regardless of religious belief, political opinion, sexual orientation, gender, marital status, whether they have dependents or not, age, race or disability.</p>
<p>Quantitative Evidence</p>	<p>See number 1 above.</p>
<p>Possible Mitigating Measures</p>	<p>None required.</p>

3. Does the proposed policy remove or address any barriers to people sharing?

<p>Impact Positive negative none</p>	<p>Positive impact</p>
<p>Qualitative Evidence</p>	<p>One of the key strengths of the further education sector is that it is accessible to all, both in terms of reaching all levels, types and age of learners, and also the fact that the colleges are locally based and their reach extends into both urban and rural communities. Students within the sector come from a variety of backgrounds and have a range of learning, work and life experiences and the sector plays a valuable role in bringing together a wide cross-section of the community within Northern Ireland.</p> <p>The new Strategy will ensure that the further education sector continues to deliver a wide range of professional and technical education and training across a wide range of occupations to ensure appeal to both male and female students.</p>
<p>Quantitative Evidence</p>	<p>Under the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 colleges are required to provide accessibility to both their premises and the curriculum to all disabled/prospective students with disabilities. The Department assists the six colleges fulfil this obligation by making £4.5 million per annum funding available to support students with disabilities through the Additional Support Fund. This funding includes two elements, £2.5 million helps FE colleges provide technical and personal support for these students and £2 million to help meet the cost of providing tailored discrete courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities for whom mainstream courses are not appropriate due to the nature/degree of their disability/learning difficulty.</p> <p>In 2013/14, there were 1,299 students in regulated FE discrete provision. These are students with more severe learning difficulties and / or disabilities who are unable to participate in mainstream courses and therefore participate in discrete provision which has smaller class sizes and additional in built support as standard. A move to FE for these students, who range from 16 years upwards, offers highly significant opportunities for them to become more independent, integrate with the wider community and gain valuable life skills.</p> <p>Deprivation has been measured on the official Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM), which categorises areas across the region into five groups, termed 'quintiles'. Quintile 1 is the most deprived group of areas while quintile 5 is the least deprived or most affluent group of areas. Almost half (43.6%) of regulated enrolments are from the two most deprived quintiles. Just over a fifth (21.0%) of regulated enrolments in 2013/14 came from the most deprived quintile, compared to 13.8% from the least deprived or most affluent quintile³⁹.</p> <p>In 2013/14, females accounted for the vast majority of further education enrolments in 'Health, Public Services and care' (84.3%) and in 'Retail and Commercial Enterprise' enrolments (77.8%). Male-dominated subject areas included 'Construction, Planning and the Built Environment' (96.8%) and 'Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies' (93.3%). However, it is interesting to note, that there is a fairly even gender split in part-time provision regulated enrolments in 2013/14 while males are the majority (56.9%) in full-time regulated provision⁴⁰.</p>
<p>Possible Mitigating Measures</p>	<p>None required.</p>

39 Further Education Activity in Northern Ireland: 2009/10 to 2013/14, Department for Employment and Learning <http://www.delni.gov.uk/fe-activity-in-fe-colleges-ni>

40 Ibid

4. Does the proposed policy inadvertently erect any barriers to people sharing?

Impact Positive negative none	Positive impact
Qualitative Evidence	<p>Under the new strategy access to further education will continue to be open to and inclusive of: religious belief; political opinion; racial group; marital status; sexual orientation; disability; those with dependants; and men and women.</p> <p>The future further education provision will continue to be offered via the existing six colleges and their various campuses which provide geographic cover across Northern Ireland.</p> <p>The colleges will continue to be fully integrated and ensure the promotion of equality of opportunity by welcoming students from all backgrounds regardless of religious belief, political opinion, sexual orientation, gender, marital status, whether they have dependents or not, age, race or disability.</p>
Quantitative Evidence	See number 1 above.
Possible Mitigating Measures	None required.

Level	National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Examples	Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) Examples	Framework for Higher Education (FHEQ) Examples
8	City and Guilds Institute Fellowship	Diplomas in strategic direction	Doctorates
7	Post-graduate certificates and diplomas	Advanced professional certificates	Masters Degrees
6	National Diploma in Professional Production Skills	BTEC Advanced Professional Diplomas	Bachelor Degrees
5	Higher National Diplomas	Foundation Degrees	Diplomas of Higher Education
4	NVQs at level 4	BTEC Professional Diplomas	Certificates of Higher Education
3	A-levels	BTEC Nationals	
2	GCSEs at grades A*-C	BTEC diplomas at level 2	
1	GCSEs at grades D-C	BTEC Level 1 Certificate/Award	
Entry Level	Entry Level Certificates and Awards	Entry Level VQs	

BIS	Department for Business, Innovation & Skills
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
DE	Department of Education
DEL	Department for Employment and Learning
DETI	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
DFP	Department of Finance and Personnel
EC	European Commission
ESP	Employer Support Programme
ETI	Education and Training Inspectorate
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FE	Further Education
FHEQ	Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
FLU	Funded Learning Unit
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GTCNI	General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland
HE	Higher Education
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ILP	Individual Learning Plan
ILT	Information Learning Technology
IPPR	Institute for Public Policy Research
ISAS	International Survey of Adult Skills
IT	Information Technology
MIS	Management Information Systems
MPMNI	Managing Public Money Northern Ireland
MS/FM	Management Statement / Financial Memorandum
NIMDM	Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure

NDPB	Non-Departmental Public Body
NEET's	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency
NQF	National Qualification Framework
NVQ	National Vocational Qualifications
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OEE	Overall Equipment Efficiency
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
PIAAC	Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies
PLAQ	(The Department's) Prescribed List of Approved Non NQF/QCF Qualification
QCF	Qualifications & Credit Framework
RRQ	Register of Regulated Qualifications
SENDO	Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005
SLDD	Special Learning Difficulties and Disabilities
SME	Small to medium-sized enterprise
SPICE	Specialist Provision for Industry Using College Expertise
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
UKCES	UK Commission for Employment and Skills
UU	Ulster University
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
VQ's	Vocational Qualifications
WBL	Work based learning

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Commentary on Northern Ireland.

<http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/>

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Synthesis Report.

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Professional and Technical:

Professional and Technical provision is regarded as Regulated provision without Academic provision.

Regulated:

From academic year 2013/14, only those courses which appear on the Register of Regulated Qualifications ((RRQ) or the Department’s Prescribed List of Approved Non NQF/QCF Qualification (PLAQ) list (for level 3 and below) or are Higher Education (HE) in FE courses (level 4 and above), will be deemed as ‘regulated’ by the Department. Anything which falls outside this definition is not considered, in Departmental terms, as ‘regulated’ regardless of whether it is considered to produce “outcomes” e.g. internal college certification.

The term ‘regulated’ will be used from 2013/14 on, in regard to this type of provision within further education. This cohort of further education provision is comparable with the previous figures for Professional and Technical.

FE enrolment publications between 2003/04 and 2012/13 have used the term ‘Professional and Technical’ to describe this cohort of FE provision. ‘Professional and Technical’ were identified as any enrolment not coded as qualification aim ‘999’, ‘599’ or ‘199’ i.e. recreational and KeySkills provision are excluded. In each academic year students can be enrolled in multiple course and therefore the same individual can have enrolments in regulated and non-regulated courses within the one academic year.

Academic:

Academic provision is taken to mean A Levels and GCSEs.

Retention:

Retention rate is defined as the proportion of the number of enrolments who complete their final year of study to the number of final year enrolments. Since 2012/13, those who complete their course early (and recorded in the data as a withdrawal) and who have subsequently achieved their programme of study qualification have been regarded as a ‘completer’. This may inflate the retention rate from 2012/13 onwards in comparison to earlier academic years.

Retention rate =
$$\frac{\text{Number of non-withdrawals plus Number of withdrawals who achieve (both full and partial)}}{\text{Number of enrolments}}$$

Achievement:

Achievement rate relates to the percentage of the number of enrolments who complete their final year of study and achieve their qualification to the number of enrolments who complete their final year of study.

$$\text{Achievement rate} = \frac{\text{Number of achievements}}{\text{Number of non-withdrawals plus Number of Withdrawals who achieve (both full and partial)}}$$

Success:

Success rate is the overall measure of performance, which is the proportion of the number of enrolments who complete their final year of study and achieve their qualification to the number of final year enrolments.

$$\text{Success rate} = \frac{\text{Number of achievements OR Retention rate} \times \text{Achievement rate}}{\text{Number of Enrolments}}$$

STEM:

STEM provision is identified by the subject code entered by the FE college. If the subject code starts with a letter between A and K (Medicine, Dentistry and Allied Subjects; Biological and Physical Sciences; Agriculture, Building and Planning) then it is regarded as 'Broad' STEM. 'Narrow' STEM is those enrolment records with a subject code starting with the letter C, F, G, H or J (Biological and Physical Sciences; Mathematics and IT; Engineering and Technology).





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



The Department:

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.



**INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE**

Further Information:

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

telephone: 028 9025 7630

e-mail: FESstrategyProgrammeBranch@delni.gov.uk

website: www.delni.gov.uk/new-further-education-strategy-for-northern-ireland