



‘Underpinning Success’

Progress Report

The Department for
Employment and Learning’s
Research Agenda 2012/13 – 2015/16

September 2015



Prepared by Analytical Services, Department for Employment and Learning

Background

This paper has been prepared in order to provide an update on progress on 'Underpinning Success' – The DEL Research Agenda 2012-15 and to capture new strategic research needs that have emerged since that agenda was published.

The Northern Ireland Practical Guide to Policy Making¹ underlines the need for good quality research and evidence to be central to all stages of the policy development cycle. Since publishing its first Research Agenda in 2004², the Department has accumulated a robust and diverse evidence base through its wide ranging research activities.

In early 2012, the Department undertook a thorough review of its research needs through to 2015/16. This process identified the strategically important research priorities for that period and subsequently the Department's latest Research Agenda 2012-15 'Underpinning Success' was published in July 2012. The Agenda identified 29 research projects and in order to consider and prioritise these projects a separate Implementation Plan was published in November 2012. This Plan placed the 29 projects into two groups, the first were to be commissioned in 2012/13 and were referred to as projects of '*immediate priority*'. The second group identified those projects that were to be commissioned in the subsequent years up to the end of 2015/16. These were labelled as '*medium term priority*' projects, but it was envisaged that they would be commissioned within the life of '*Underpinning Success*'.

A previous evaluation of the Research Agenda noted that '*to ensure the needs of the Department are being met and that research outcomes influence policy considerations, a progress report should be produced which will highlight progress over the period.*' This paper seeks to address that recommendation by setting out progress towards delivery of the current DEL research agenda and to capture any new emerging strategic research needs for the period up to the end of 2015/16. It should however be noted that these projects identified may be subject to financial constraints in the current tight fiscal environment and thus will be subject to availability of resources.

¹ <http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/policylink-a-practical-guide-to-policy-making>

² <http://www.delni.gov.uk/stats-research>

A previous progress report was published in July 2014³. That report identified two additional research projects over and above the original twenty nine projects and a further eleven projects have been identified since the last progress report was published, details of which are set out in the next section.

This report represents the last which will be compiled as the Department for Employment and Learning. Future research needs and a new agenda will be drawn up as part of the new Department for the Economy.

³ <http://www.delni.gov.uk/underpinng-success-progress-report-research-agenda-2012-2015.pdf>

Progress to date

It is clear from the review of work undertaken to date that positive progress has been made on delivering each strategically important research area that was identified in Research Agenda 2012-2015. An overview of progress to date is summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Underpinning Success – Progress to date

Project Title	Priority as per Implementation Plan	Expected/Actual Completion Date
A1 – Skills and the Productivity Gap (Scoping paper)	Immediate	Complete June 2014
A2 – Benchmarking Skills Performance	Immediate	Complete March 2013
A3 – Employer Engagement with Skills Provision	Immediate	Complete December 2012
A4 – Secondary Analysis of Employer Skills Survey	Medium	Analysis provided on an ongoing basis as required
A5i – Widening Access to Higher Education - ADRC	Immediate	Initiated and expected December 2015
A5ii - Widening Access to Higher Education - Review	Immediate	Complete July 2014
A6 – Factors Affecting Essential Skills Completion	Immediate	Complete July 2014
A7 – Skills Beyond School	Immediate	Complete January 2014
A8 – International Survey of Adult Skills	Medium	Complete October 2013
A9 – Sub Regional Literacy and Numeracy	Immediate	Initiated however completion unknown due to resources
A10 – Fees, Support and Participation	Medium	To be commissioned during 2015/16, if funding is available
A11 – Student Flows	Immediate	Complete June 2015
A12 – FE Success Rates	Medium	Complete January 2014
A13 – FE and Training Outcomes	Immediate	Initiated and expected Autumn 2015
A14 – Value of Education and Training to Society	Medium	Initiated and expected Autumn 2015
A15 – Management and Leadership Research	Medium	To be commissioned during 2015/16
A16 – Skills Utilisation and Upskilling	Medium	To be considered during 2015/16
A17 – Employer Support for Upskilling	Medium	To be commissioned during 2015/16
A18 – Innovation Impact of HEIs	Medium	Complete January 2015
A19 – University Business Interaction	Immediate	Complete July 2015
B1 – Labour Mobility in Northern Ireland	Immediate	Complete September 2014


Project Title	Priority as per Implementation Plan	Expected/Actual Completion Date
B2 – Mapping NEET Provision	Immediate	Complete July 2015
B3 – Local Job Creation	Immediate	Complete April 2014
B4 – Economic Benefits of Steps to Work	Medium	Complete February 2015
B5 – Helping People Into Work (Employer Engagement)	Medium	Complete August 2014
B6 – Economic Inactivity	Immediate	Complete April 2013
B7 – Employment Law - Regulation	Medium	Complete November 2012
B8 – Employment Law - Review	Immediate	Complete June 2013
B9 – Development of Employment Relations	Medium	To be commissioned 2015/16, if funding is available
B10 – Review of Employment Rights	Immediate	Complete August 2014
Extra 1 – Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering	New	Complete December 2013
Extra 2 – Zero Hour Contracts	New	Complete September 2014
Extra 3 – Skills Barometer	New	Initiated and Year 1 report expected September 2015
Extra 4 – UKCES Employer Skills Survey	New	Expected January 2016
Extra 5 – Tourism Skills Research	New	Expected Winter 2015
Extra 6 – Apprenticeship occupations	New	To be commissioned 2015/16
Extra 7 – Widening access to apprenticeships	New	To be commissioned 2015/16
Extra 8 – Labour market dynamics	New	To be commissioned 2015/16
Extra 9 – Health issues of the inactive	New	To be commissioned 2015/16
Extra 10 - Low skilled workers	New	To be commissioned 2015/16
Extra 11 – Demand for Upskilling in the NI economy	New	To be commissioned 2015/16
Extra 12 – Productivity and Skills	New	To be commissioned 2015/16
Extra 13 – Skills Targets	New	To be commissioned 2015/16

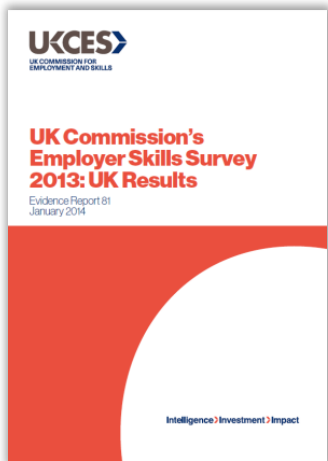
The report now moves on to present a more detailed review of progress which is split along the lines of the original Implementation plan⁴. As outlined at table 1 above, the Plan presented the Department's research priorities as '*immediate*' and '*medium term*', these are considered separately below:

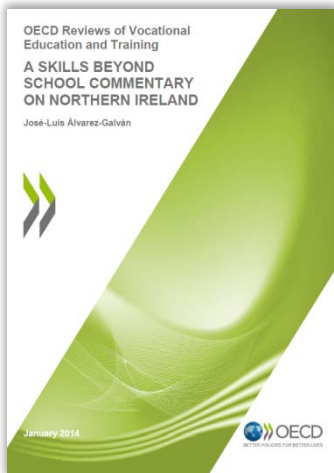
⁴ <http://www.delni.gov.uk/final-implementation-plan-research-agenda-2012.pdf>


Immediate priorities

It is clear from the assessment of the progress to date that, of the “immediate priority” research projects, those which were due to be commissioned over the period 2012/13, all sixteen have commenced. Furthermore, of those projects, thirteen have been completed. Each project has been detailed below and where relevant, work that has been published is noted below along with embedded weblinks to each respective report.

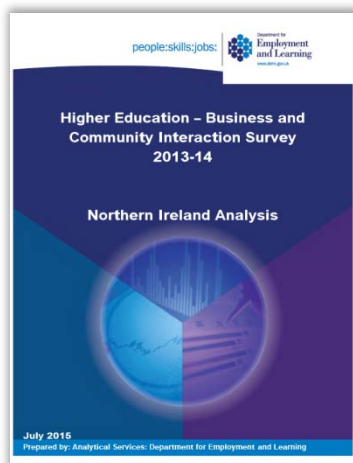
Internal scoping paper completed June 2014	A1 – Skills and the Productivity Gap: DEL’s Analysts have carried out an initial literature review and scoping study on the range of measures of productivity and its application to Northern Ireland. This will now be passed to a range of experts within Northern Ireland and elsewhere to take their views on how best to proceed. This will help inform the Department in deciding on the best way forward as it seeks to quantify the skills impact on productivity here.
Completed March 2013 	A2 – Benchmarking Skills Performance: The Northern Ireland Skills Base Benchmarking report, published in March 2013, examines 26 countries and assesses how Northern Ireland compares internationally on a range of skills indicators. The paper also highlights areas where Northern Ireland could learn from international examples of good practice.
Completed January 2014	A3 – Employer Engagement with Skills Provision: The UK Commission’s Employer Skills Survey, published in January 2014,

	<p>compares results from the most recent survey (2013) with the 2011 survey. The paper explores the skills challenges that employers face both within their existing workforces and in terms of bringing in new skilled labour. It also examines the levels and nature of training investment, recruitment of young people and education leavers and the relationship between skills challenges, training activity and business strategy.</p>
<p>Estimated Completion December 2015</p>	<p>A5i – Widening Access to Higher Education - ADRC: In the period since the Agenda was published the main source for this research has changed. Previously data was to be sought from the Northern Ireland Longitudinal Survey (NILS) but is now being sourced from the Administrative Data Research Centre (ADRC). Legal issues surrounding access to the data for the project have now been resolved and the data successfully linked. This project will seek to identify those population groups that are underrepresented in Higher Education.</p>
<p>Internal review of information availability completed July 2014</p>	<p>A5ii - Widening Access to Higher Education – Review: Analytical Services within DEL have completed a review of wider data sources in regards participation in Higher Education. This internal review included an identification of gaps in the provision of information. The review will complement project A5i above and expand the</p>

	Department's understanding on the factors influencing participation in HE.
Internal analysis completed July 2014	<p>A6 – Factors Affecting Essential Skills Completion: The Department had previously completed a similar analysis on data for the period 2011/12. The updated analysis, again completed internally by Analytical Services in DEL, was based on 2011/12 and 2012/13 combined data and this identified variances in retention and completion rates across individuals and providers. Advice from experts in the area of econometrics however recommended this type of analysis should be undertaken across a three year period of amalgamated data and thus undertaking that analysis will be considered post 15/16.</p>
<p>Completed January 2014</p> 	<p>A7 – Skills Beyond School: This report, published in January 2014 and conducted by the OECD, reviews post-secondary vocational education and training within Northern Ireland. The review addresses a number of policy considerations around vocational education and training including those on funding and governance; supply and demand; quality; access and equity. It provides further evidence to support the development of vocational education and training policy in Northern Ireland, against international best practice.</p>
Estimated Completion – unknown	<p>A9 – Sub Regional Literacy and Numeracy: It is intended that this work will build on the</p>

	<p>high level results from the International Survey of Adult Skills 2012 (A8i) and provide policy makers with a clearer picture of Essential Skills needs in Northern Ireland at a local level. Work commenced on developing a model which in turn would be applied to Census data to provide the basis for analysis. However, due to resource constraints, this work has not progressed further.</p>
<p>Completed June 2015</p> 	<p>A11 – Student Flows: The initial element of this work investigated HE and FE student flows between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. DEL Statisticians worked on a bilateral basis with the Irish Department for Education and the Higher Education Authority to produce a statistical report. This report was published in June 2015. It is now the Department's intention to carry out a similar research project, possibly based on applications rather than enrolments, across UK countries. Thereafter it is the Department's intention to carry out a similar research project across UK countries.</p>
<p>Estimated Completion Autumn 2015</p>	<p>A13 – FE and Training Outcomes: This research is intended to help the Department in the provision of robust careers advice and understanding of student choices. This work is progressing with fieldwork for the 2013/14 academic year cohort now completed. A final report is due in Autumn 2015.</p>

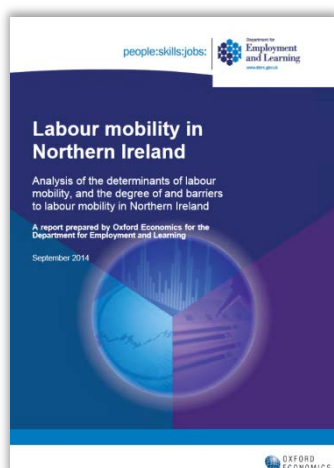
Completed July 2015



A19 – University Business Interaction:

The Higher Education Business and Community Interaction Survey (HE-BCI) NI Analysis for 2013/14, published in July 2015, is used to provide reliable and relevant information to support policy development and to inform funding decisions related to the Knowledge Transfer activities of UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Completed September 2014



B1 – Labour Mobility in Northern Ireland:

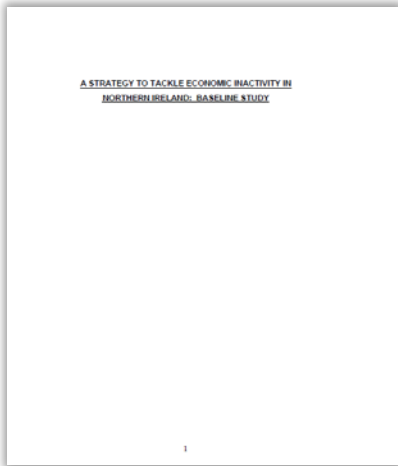
Labour mobility is an important aspect of a successful economy. It can help people gain the best return on their investment in skills. It is important for companies as it ensures they can access a wider pool of potential workers to address skills needs. This research report, completed externally by Oxford Economics, assesses the extent of current barriers to labour mobility in Northern Ireland.

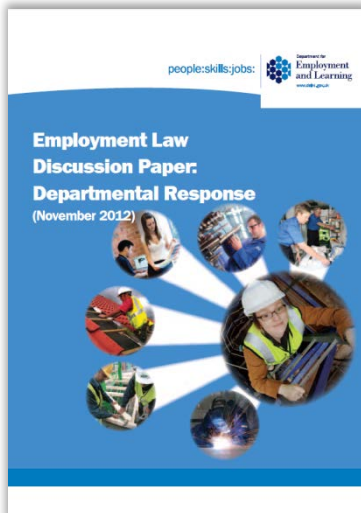
Completed July 2015

<http://neetni.org/>

B2 – Mapping NEET Provision:

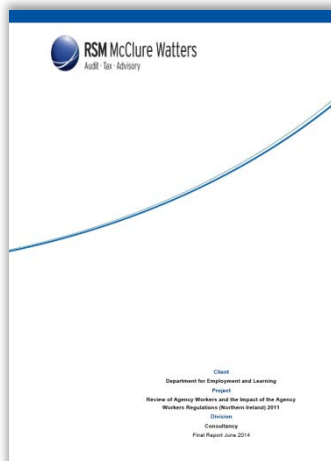
The Department worked with Bryson Charitable Group on the establishment of a comprehensive picture of provision for young people in the NEET category. This was a commitment in the NEET Strategy and it aims to assist policy makers in effective service planning and signposting. Information is

	currently being incrementally uploaded by the NEET Forum members to populate the Mapping Tool.
<p>Completed June 2014</p> 	<p>B3 – Local Job Creation: The OECD's Employment and Skills Strategies in Northern Ireland 2014, explores the best possible strategies to increase employment whilst also increasing the skills held within the economy. Whilst looking at various areas of the economy, their key recommendations are; better aligning programmes and policies to local economic development; adding value through skills; targeting policy to local employment sectors and investing in quality jobs; and being inclusive.</p>
<p>Completed April 2013</p> 	<p>B6 – Economic Inactivity: This work was intended to support the commitment to 'develop an Inactivity Strategy' as noted in the Programme for Government for the period 2011-15. For this project the Department worked with the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment to develop a baseline study which has provided an underpinning evidence base to support the Inactivity Strategy.</p>
<p>Completed November 2012</p>	<p>B7 – Employment Law - Review: An employment law discussion paper was published by the Department in May 2012 and this was followed by a 'Departmental</p>



Response' paper to the submissions received. This work and its outputs were used as an evidence base to support the Department's review of Employment Law.

Completed August 2014



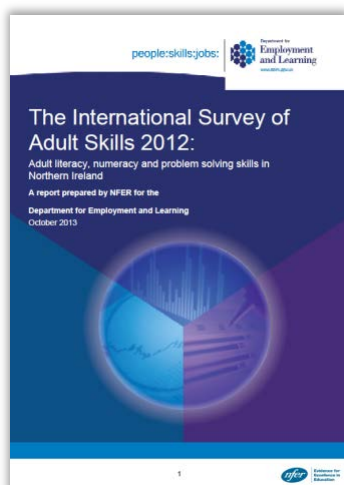
B10 – Review of Employment Rights: The aim of the review was to provide DEL with a better understanding of the impact of the Agency Workers Regulations on agency workers, agencies and hirers. The purpose was to enable DEL to take action to ensure that the Regulations are providing the required and appropriate rights for agency workers, at the same time ensuring that the regulatory requirements placed on agencies are not unnecessarily onerous.

Medium Term Priorities

Thirteen projects were originally identified as “medium term priority” and were to be commissioned in the period up to 2015/16. Of those, as noted (in table 1), seven have completed, one other commissioned and five are yet to be initiated. The table below provides a more detailed update on that progress:

Ongoing as analysis is required by relevant policy work https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukces-employer-skills-survey-2013-northern-ireland	A4 – Secondary Analysis of Employer Skills Survey: The 2013 Employer Skills Survey (ESS) was published by UKCES in January 2014. Analytical Services has to date, in conjunction with Divisions, utilised the data from the ESS for a number of policy and strategy reviews, for instance, those on Apprenticeships Essential Skills, Further Education and Youth Training. In addition the outcomes from the survey has been beneficial in the development of the Skills Barometer project.
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Completed October 2013



A8 – International Survey of

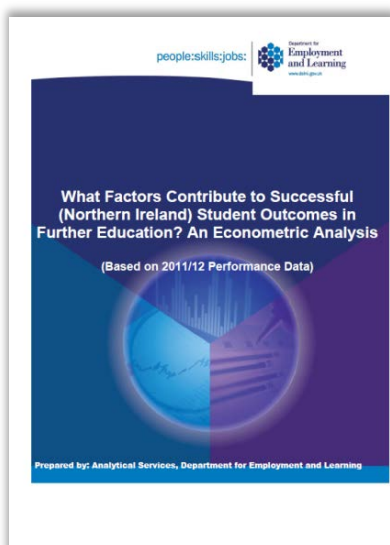
Adult Skills: The International Survey of Adult Skills 2012 was published in October 2013. It assessed the proficiency of adults, aged 16-65, in 'Literacy', 'Numeracy' and 'Problem solving in technology-rich environments', three skills which the OECD regard as essential for full participation in the knowledge-based economies and societies of the 21st century.

**To be commissioned during 2015/16
(dependent on availability of funding)**

A10 – Fees, Support and

Participation: This research will help to inform policy makers by providing evidence on the impact of the availability of finance and the level of student fees have had on students' choices about participating in HE. Given its correlation with project A11 the information from that completed project will feed into A10.

Completed January 2014



A12 – FE Success Rates: The econometric analysis of the factors contributing to successful student outcomes in Further Education was published in January 2014. This report utilises FE data on professional and technical qualification outcomes in the FE sector. The report produces a list of criteria which give a higher chance of an FE student being successful in further education.

Expected Autumn 2015

A14 – Value of Education and Training to Society: this research has been commissioned externally and will assess the economic impact of the Further Education sector and its institutions on the Northern Ireland economy. This work will inform the forthcoming Further Education Strategy review.

To be commissioned during 2015/16

A15 – Management and Leadership Research: This work will examine how management and leadership skills in Northern Ireland have been improving and what remains to

	be achieved and will inform the Management and Leadership Review.
To be considered during 2015/16	A16 – Skills Utilisation and Upskilling: Analytical Services and the Department's Skills and Industry Division are exploring whether a UKCES UK wide thematic report based on Employer Skills Survey data could meet DEL research needs in this area and in particular to inform the Skills Strategy review. This will be considered during 2015/16.
To be commissioned during 2015/16	A17 – Employer Support for Upskilling: This would seek to establish employer's attitudes to and support for part time study and foundation degrees.

Completed January 2015



A18 – Innovation Impact of

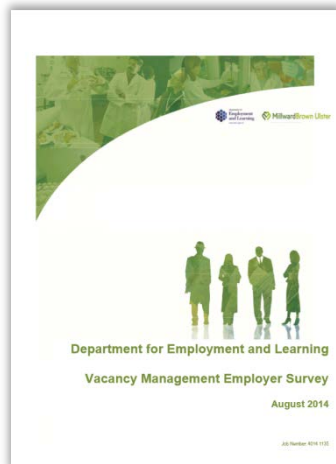
HEIs: This study provides an analysis of the economic impact of higher education institutions (HEIs) and their students on the Northern Ireland economy. The report's primary aim was to assess the economic impact of Northern Ireland's HEIs as businesses and the higher education sector as an industry - in terms of the jobs, output and GVA generated.

Internal literature review completed in February 2015

B4 – Economic Benefits of

Steps to Work: This literature review was commissioned in response to the evaluation of the Steps to Work programme which measured economic impact and more specifically deadweight via a qualitative survey. Therefore, the project set out to establish best practice in the evaluation of the economic impacts of return to work programmes. The resultant literature review was completed in February 2015.

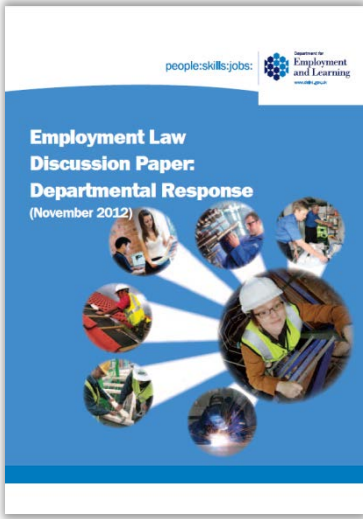
Completed August 2014



B5 – Helping People Into Work (Employer Engagement):

To ensure that the quality of services offered to employers is of a high standard at all times and to improve current services, the Department commissioned a survey

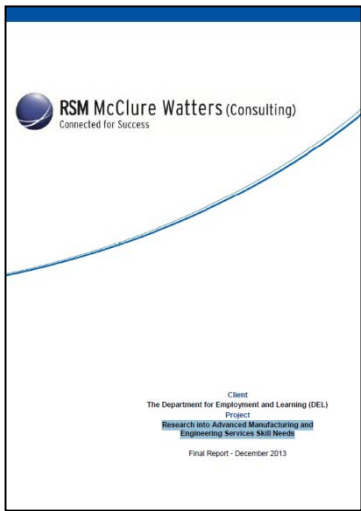
of its online vacancy service to seek the views of our customers and to improve self-help and automated services. This was captured through a comprehensive survey of employers to measure employer satisfaction and experience of using the current ES vacancy taking service. The results from this survey will assist the Department to improve customer service and gauge the appetite for our self-help automated service.

	<p>B7 – Employment Law - Regulation: This work and its outputs were used as an evidence base to support the Department's review of Employment Law. It has now been completed and has been used to underpin the Department's proposals in this critical policy area.</p>
<p>To be commissioned during 2015/16 (dependent on availability of funding)</p>	<p>B9 – Development of Employment Relations: This project will examine support for employees and gives consideration to alternative low cost non legal options which either prevent or address workplace conflict. This work has not yet commenced but is scheduled for completion in the period 2015/16, if funding becomes available.</p>

Newly identified research needs

As noted above, whilst the DEL Research Agenda seeks to take a strategic approach, it also recognises that previously unforeseen research requirements may emerge during the life span of the Agenda. In order to maximise the policy relevance of the research investment, it may not be appropriate to delay these until the subsequent three year Research Agenda cycle. Therefore allowance for emerging research priorities was built into the Agenda's Implementation Plan to

ensure it is sufficiently flexible to respond. With this in mind, cascading from this annual update process the Department has identified thirteen additional research projects, two of which has since completed and three additional projects have been commissioned. Others may be subject to financial constraints in the current tight fiscal environment and thus will be subject to availability of resources.

	<p>Extra 1 – Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering:</p> <p>This report provides detailed analysis on the current and future skill needs for the advanced manufacturing and engineering sector. It also includes analysis of salary information and an assessment of the supply of skills from schools, Further Education and Higher Education.</p>
<p>September 2014</p> <p>http://www.delni.gov.uk/zhc-factsheet-september-2014.pdf</p>	<p>Extra 2 – Zero Hour Contracts: DEL analysts have completed a Literature Review into Zero Hours Contracts and their impact.</p> <p>In addition as part of the review of Zero Hours Contracts the Department was able to add a series of questions about the use of these contracts within Intertrade Ireland's Quarterly Business Monitor.</p>
<p>Estimated completion for Year 1 – September 2015</p>	<p>Extra 3 – Skills Barometer: The Department is currently taking forward a project to develop a Northern Ireland Skills Barometer. It is anticipated that a tool of this nature will provide the Department with a clear indication of where the skills gaps are currently, where</p>

	<p>they are emerging and where they are likely to emerge over the longer term. It will provide a detailed picture of current skills demand by sector and occupation and also the skills areas where skills interventions require further targeting. The work is being undertaken by the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) as part of the Department's core sponsorship.</p>
<p>Estimated completion – January 2016</p>	<p>Extra 4 – UKCES Employer Skills Survey 2015: The UK Commission's Employer Skills Survey is the definitive source of intelligence on employer investment in skills in Northern Ireland. This project will seek to provide reliable, timely and valuable insight into the skills issues being faced by employers and the action they are taking to address these across the UK and specifically with Northern Ireland.</p>
<p>Estimated completion - Winter 2015</p>	<p>Extra 5 – Tourism Skills Research: This project will seek to gain a thorough understanding of the existing and future demand for skills within the tourism sector. In order to grow tourism's contribution to the economy and enable Northern Ireland to compete in the international tourism market, it is fundamental that the skills base of the workforce in the tourism industry is explored.</p>
<p>To be commissioned during 2015/16</p>	<p>Extra 6 – Apprenticeship occupations: undertake some analysis, based on international evidence, of those occupations that would be most amenable to meeting skills</p>

	requirements through apprenticeship provision. Such work would need to focus on sectors/occupations that are currently underrepresented in a Northern Ireland context in relation to apprenticeships.
To be commissioned during 2015/16	Extra 7 – Widening access to apprenticeships: a research project which looks at international best practice with respect to widening access to apprenticeships for underrepresented groups is required. This would look particularly at support for those with disabilities and/or in respect of gender (for instance, measures to promote female apprentices in traditionally male dominated occupations). The work will be undertaken internally by Analytical Services.
To be commissioned during 2015/16	Extra 8 – Labour market dynamics: An analysis of labour market dynamics in Northern Ireland to quantify the shifts and relationships between employment, unemployment and inactivity.
To be commissioned during 2015/16	Extra 9 – Health issues of inactive: A project to establish an evidence base around the characteristics of those who are inactive in the labour market due to health related issues in order to determine needs and to inform the design of future interventions to improve work / return to work outcomes.
To be commissioned during 2015/16	Extra 10 – Low skilled workers: Research to map the current range and quantity of low-skilled jobs in Northern Ireland and to forecast future demand for low-skilled workers.
To be commissioned during	Extra 11 - Demand for Upskilling in the NI

2015/16	economy: Research to estimate and quantify the extent to which the skills levels of existing jobs need to be upgraded annually to meet the need for rising productivity and competitiveness. This may form part of the year two areas of UUEPC future research associated with the Skills Barometer and is subject to confirmation.
To be commissioned during 2015/16	Extra 12 - Productivity and Skills: Forecasting the future path of productivity for the NI economy under different skills scenarios. This may also form part of the year two areas of UUEPC future research.
To be commissioned during 2015/16	Extra 13 - Skills Targets: Research to review current skills targets and to consider future indicators to be used as possible skills targets for the NI economy and what level these should be formulated to achieve Departmental goals. This may also form part of the year two areas of UUEPC future research.

Next Steps

This progress report presents the research projects which have already been commissioned under the Department's 'Underpinning success' Research Agenda 2012/13 to 2015/16. It also sets out those projects still to be commissioned and an additional ten projects which the Department has identified as a priority over the period. The findings of research projects to complete under this Research Agenda will continue to be published, including via the Labour Market Bulletin and lunchtime seminars.

The Department will also continue to seek to ensure that the evidence that is produced as part of this agenda will continue to shape its policy development and delivery.

The Department recognises that some of the research detailed within this progress report is relevant to individual divisions within the Department but much of it also has relevance to policy on a cross-divisional basis. To this end a cross-divisional working group has been established to ensure the research the Department produces is both shaped and has impact on a cross divisional basis.