

**A SUMMARY OF RESPONSES
FROM THE CONSULTATION ON
THE NEW FURTHER EDUCATION
STRATEGY**

Introduction

A public consultation on the proposals relating to the new further education strategy for Northern Ireland was launched by the DEL Minister on the 10th July 2015. The consultation ran for 12 weeks closing on the 2 October 2015. The purpose of this consultation was to offer stakeholders an opportunity to put forward their views on the 18 policy commitments across the nine themes in the consultation document.

The themes were:

- Economic Development;
- Social Inclusion;
- Curriculum Delivery;
- Excellence;
- International Dimension;
- Governance;
- College partnerships;
- Funding Model and College Sustainability; and
- Promoting the Further Education Sector.

The Department wishes to thank all respondents that contributed to the consultation. The high level of engagement demonstrates the very strong interest from stakeholders in the future of the further education sector in Northern Ireland.

This report provides an overview of the responses received from the consultation process and summarises the main points that were raised.

Responses

A total of 45 responses to the consultation were received. Of these, 29 respondents completed the template questionnaire, and 16 respondents sent in written responses. Responses were received from a variety of sources including employer representative bodies, voluntary and community groups, colleges, training

organisations, district councils and various other bodies. A list of respondents is attached at Annex A.

Respondents were asked to provide responses to a number of questions covering the nine themes within the strategy. The majority of these questions allowed respondents to provide a tick box response to gauge their support rating on specific commitments within each theme on a five point rating ranging from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree'. The remaining questions were open-ended seeking respondents views on how various issues could be addressed. A total of 45 responses to the consultation were received. Of these, 29 respondents completed the template questionnaire, and 16 respondents sent in written responses.

Overall, the responses received were very positive and supportive of the policy commitments in the document, with general agreement across all of the policy commitments. Of those who completed the template questionnaire, almost 80% either strongly agreed or agreed with the questions posed, with just under 6% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. There was strong agreement for the following:

- colleges should focus provision on those areas that contribute to rebalancing and rebuilding the economy;
- colleges should be identified as specialists in key areas of the economy and develop networks of experts to enable the sharing of the latest developments;
- the development of relationships with voluntary and community groups, and the new regional Councils;
- provision of work placements for learners;
- a strong focus should be placed on continual professional development, including industrial placements; and that minimum standards for pedagogy and qualifications should be put in place for all lecturers; and
- colleges should operate more collectively in their delivery of corporate services by adopting shared services.

The main areas of concern expressed by respondents were as follows:

- the second part of the dual role, social inclusion, needs to be given more prominence in the strategy;
- concerns were expressed that the document gives the impression that colleges, going forward, will focus on level 3 and above, and that more needs to be included in the strategy on Level 1 and below;
- whereas there was strong support for the colleges focusing provision on areas that would rebalance and rebuild the economy there was also concern that the document gives the impression that colleges will focus only on priority areas of the sector, to the possible detriment of other areas of the economy which also need colleges' support;
- there were differing views on the use of "simulated work placements" as an alternative to actual work placements; and
- some concerns were expressed on the use of performance measures.

Strategy

Development of the strategy will take account of the responses to the consultation, and clarify and address the position with those areas which were raised as concerns. In particular, the role colleges play in social inclusion will be drawn out more; it will be made clearer that colleges will continue to deliver provision at all levels; and it will be explained that it is not the intention to use simulated work placements as a replacement to live work placements, but rather as an alternative when actual work placements are not appropriate or cannot be sourced.

Economic Development Theme

Overview:

The consultation asked respondents to provide answers to the following six questions on the Economic Development theme, which cover policy commitments 1 to 5 as outlined in Annex C:

Q.(1) Do you agree that colleges should focus provision on those areas that contribute to rebalancing and rebuilding the economy?

Q.(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?

Q.(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?

Q.(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?

Q.(5a) Do you agree that individual colleges should be identified as specialists in key sectors of the economy?

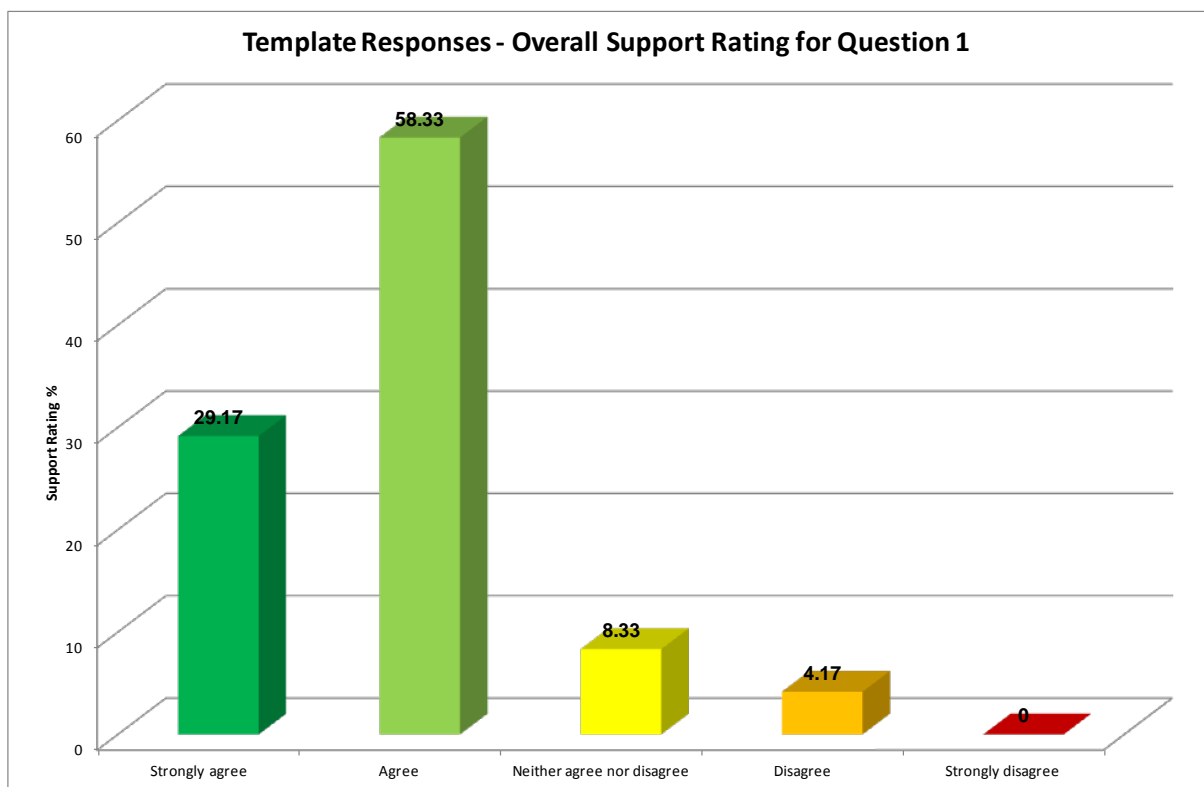
Q.(5b) Do you agree that colleges should develop networks of experts to enable the sharing of latest developments across Northern Ireland?

Within this theme, questions (1), (2), (5a) and (5b) asked respondents to provide a specific support rating, while questions 3 and 4 were open-ended. Of the 29 respondents, who replied using the template, 52% agreed with the commitments and 24% strongly agreed giving an overall approval rating of 76% for the commitments on Economic Development. A further 20% of respondents, using the template, neither agreed nor disagreed, while 3% disagreed and 1% strongly disagreed with the commitments. A detailed analysis of the support rating for individual questions is given in Table 1. Information on the small number of responses from those who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the commitments within the Economic Development theme is given in Table 2.

While there was strong overall support for the colleges focusing provision on areas that would rebalance and rebuild the economy, concerns were also expressed as follows:

- that colleges would focus only on priority areas of the sector, to the possible detriment of other areas of the economy which also need colleges' support; and
- the impression that colleges, going forward, will focus on level 3 and above, to the detriment of provision at Level 1 and below.

Q.(1) Do you agree that colleges should focus provision on those areas that contribute to rebalancing and rebuilding the economy?



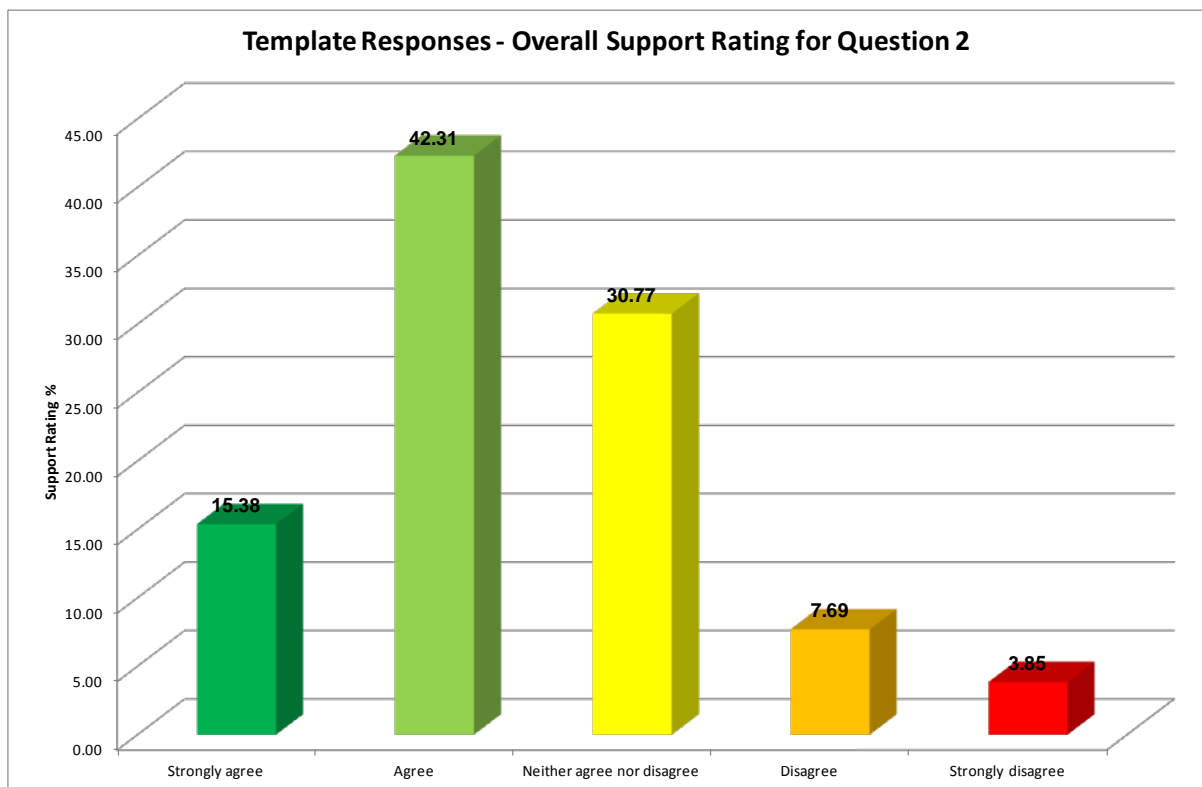
As can be seen from the chart above, the vast majority of respondents strongly agreed (29.14%) or agreed (58.33%) that colleges should focus provision on those areas that contribute to rebalancing and rebuilding the economy.

However, it was noted that while it is prudent to focus resources on economically important sectors, colleges must provide a broad based curriculum that provides skills for all sectors, including those that are not in priority areas or export driven, but

which nonetheless provide work for thousands and play an important role in the economy. One respondent commented that the curriculum offer must be agile, and reflect new and emerging industries such as life and health sciences, creative industries and sustainable construction.

It was also noted that provision should not be driven solely by the need to meet economic demands, and that we cannot simply grow the economy at the expense of disregarding existing avenues of further education provision which contribute either directly or indirectly to building a strong modern economy.

Q.(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?



Over half of respondents either strongly agreed (15.38%) or agreed (42.31%) 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.

Concerns were expressed by a number of respondents that it would be dangerous to focus on level 3 and above to the detriment of level 2 and below. It was felt that colleges should work to encourage progression for learners to the highest possible levels, however this must not be at the expense of people who can only study up to level 2.

It was commented that qualifications at all levels are important. One respondent noted that colleges should not dismiss provision at lower levels as this could have an impact on those with barriers to learning accessing training which could act as a potential progression route to higher level qualifications.

It was noted that the focus on level 3 and above should be set in the context of confirmed pathway/progression routes from level 2 and below, which will ensure there is a pipeline of learners to higher level courses.

Q.(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?

Comments and suggestions for this question were as follows:

- Colleges can give support to businesses with labour market intelligence analysis.
- Flexible and blended learning opportunities already exist which could be implemented in line with employers working demands.
- In trying to deliver more innovative solutions to meet the needs of employers, some colleges have already introduced research lecturer roles, others innovation and technology specialists to allow for more flexibility to meet business needs throughout the year.
- There is a need for increased provision of training academies for inward investment.

- Colleges can build on their experience in a manner which suits business needs making use of information and learning technology and emerging technologies.
- The lack of flexibility in the current provision of further education services is a key issue impacting on the ability of employers and staff to access the training they require.
- Business does not stop for summer break or half term, nor can it cram a programme in around a lecturer's gap between exams and marking.
- The six colleges must act in many ways as a single unit, we cannot afford to develop a programme for employer A at one college and then employer B at another. Employers would like to see the FE colleges engage with them to understand their requirements, deliver bespoke or specialist courses, provide out of hours training and provide more cost effective training.

Q.(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?

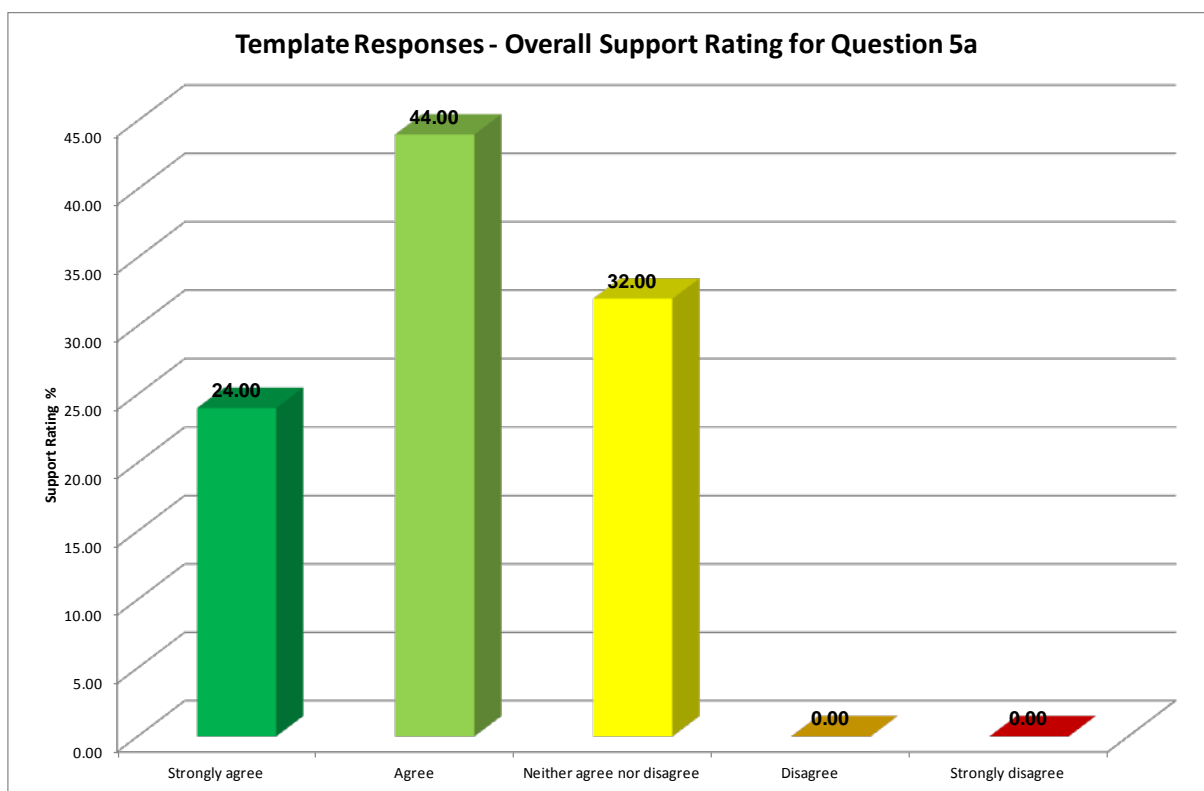
Comments and suggestions for this question were as follows:

- Developing bespoke or specialist courses.
- Further education colleges should examine gaps in technology and research that they could potentially specialise in, to create funding opportunities, and opportunities for business links that could deliver jobs for students.
- With the proposal to establish specialisms within each college in place, the colleges should be well placed to undertake effective knowledge transfer activity within their specialist areas.
- Some employers, particularly SMEs, may not be aware of the support available for innovation projects. Colleges, in their work with other local employers and their wider networks, might point out access to funding routes.
- The Employer Support Programme has successfully increased the levels of engagement with employers, but moving forward the funding model needs to be more flexible, i.e. not as focussed on qualifications as outcomes. In many

instances a short-term intervention by further education not underpinned by qualifications makes a high impact and in some instances progresses the company to the next level of development.

- Developing relationships with the councils and start up centres.

Q.(5a) Do you agree that individual colleges should be identified as specialists in key sectors of the economy?



Over two thirds of respondents agreed with the question, with 24% strongly agreeing and 44% agreeing that individual colleges should be identified as specialists in key sectors of the economy, while 32% neither agreed nor disagreed.

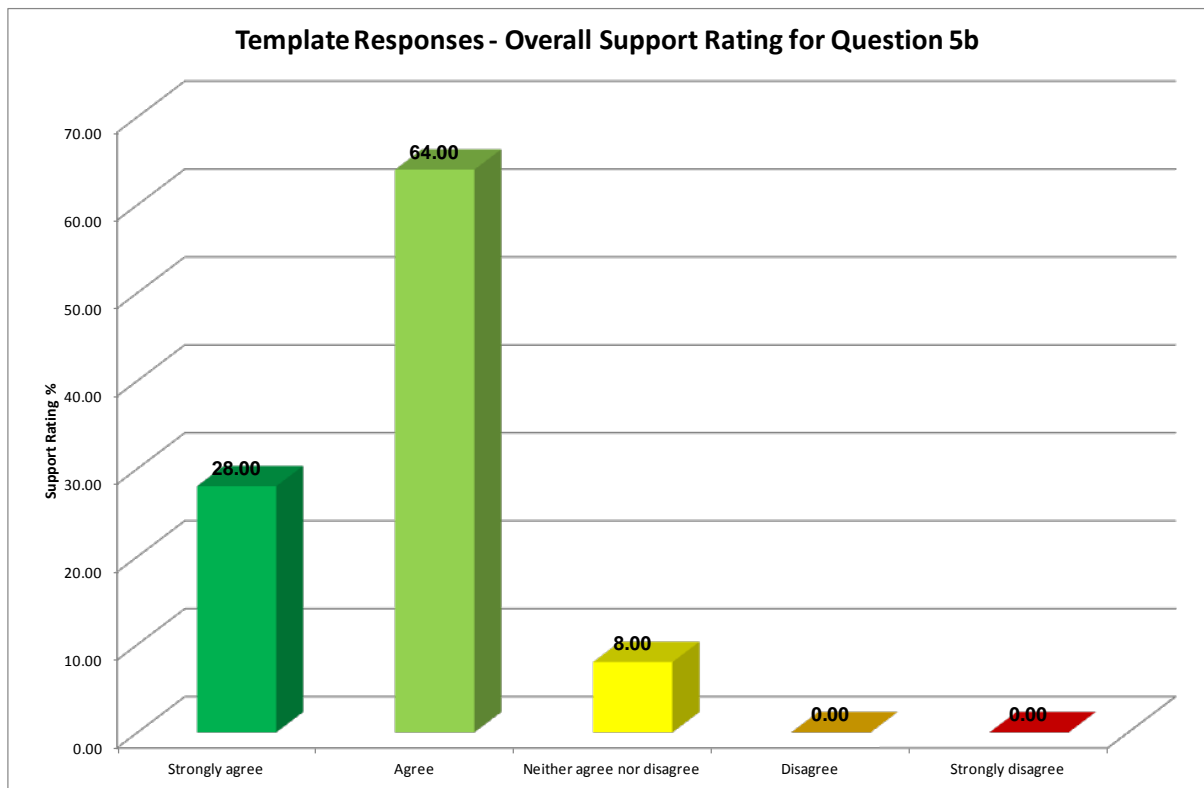
One respondent noted that to meet the needs of a growing economy and to meet the needs of inward investment, college specialisms are extremely important in order to match the economic labour needs within geographical areas. Another respondent stated that from a business perspective, knowing that college X is the 'go to' provider

for a particular skill or specialism simplifies its engagement with the further education sector, and enables it to make quicker decisions.

A number of respondents commented that while the case for specialism is strong, there is also a need to be mindful of potentially limiting access to students who may face geographical and financial barriers to travelling to colleges outside their catchment areas.

It was noted that care needs to be taken to ensure a balanced approach to specialisms is taken to ensure over/under supply in the system does not occur, and that in terms of delivering and meeting employer needs across Northern Ireland it will be critical for colleges to establish effective delivery partnerships with other colleges and that centres in specific specialisms should be accessible to all. It was also felt that colleges must be flexible in responding to emerging needs in the local as well as the regional economy.

Q.(5b) Do you agree that colleges should develop networks of experts to enable the sharing of latest developments across Northern Ireland?



As evidenced by the chart above, there was overwhelming support for colleges developing networks of experts to share best practice. 28% of respondents strongly agreed and 64% agreed with this question, and no respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

It was suggested that such networks should include experts drawn from a range of sectors including the private, and voluntary and community sectors, as appropriate, and that colleges should collaborate with the expert networks that are already well established, in organisations such as Enterprise Northern Ireland and Intertrade Ireland.

Table 1

THEME: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT			
Question	Number of Responses (Out of Possible 29)	Template Responses Overall Support Rating	% Support Rating
(1) Do you agree that colleges should focus provision on those areas that contribute to rebalancing and rebuilding the economy?	24	7 Strongly agree	29.17
		14 Agree	58.33
		2 Neither agree nor disagree	8.33
		1 Disagree	4.17
		0 Strongly disagree	0.00
(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?	26	4 Strongly agree	15.38
		11 Agree	42.31
		8 Neither agree nor disagree	30.77
		2 Disagree	7.69
		1 Strongly disagree	3.85
(5a) Do you agree that individual colleges should be identified as specialists in key sectors of the economy?	25	6 Strongly agree	24.00
		11 Agree	44.00
		8 Neither agree nor disagree	32.00
		0 Disagree	0.00
		0 Strongly disagree	0.00
(5b) Do you agree that colleges should develop networks of experts to enable the sharing of latest developments across Northern Ireland?	25	7 Strongly agree	28.00
		16 Agree	64.00
		2 Neither agree nor disagree	8.00
		0 Disagree	0.00
		0 Strongly disagree	0.00

Table 2

THEME: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT		
Question	Company /Response	Explanation
(1) Do you agree that colleges should focus provision on those areas that contribute to rebalancing and rebuilding the economy?	NUS –USI Disagree	FE should deliver courses which enable our economy to be as broad and diverse as possible. While STEM subjects are important, creative arts and tourism are also crucial to the economy and the sector should continue to provide these courses with equal priority to STEM. Investment in STEM should not mean a diminution in funding and course places for the arts.
(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?	Mencap Strongly disagree	Extremely concerned that the focus on level 3 and above fails to recognise the distinct needs of people with a learning disability or the significant barriers they face when accessing FE provision. The focus on provision at level 2 and above has, in effect, resulted in people with a learning disability experiencing disadvantage and reduced the opportunities available to them to gain skills and qualifications to progress to work. Ensure that FE provision is focused on supporting all students to progress.
	Respondent (1) requested anonymity Disagree	Agree this should be the key pillar of the strategy but it would be a significant and detrimental decision to remove activity at level 2. To effectively address economic issues the NEET's, long term unemployed and economically inactive must be given the skills to fill the gaps left by the upskilling activity to level 3, 4 and 5. Essential that learners within the FE sector see a clear progression pathway from level 3 to higher levels. Focus of the sector should be on providing professional and vocational qualifications that take the learner to technician type level and the initial stages of a full "professional" qualification.
	CITB NI Disagree	The majority of construction employers do not feel that Level 3 is appropriate. Construction employers surveyed felt that the following qualifications levels were important to the industry (more than one answer possible): Level 1 - 17%, Level 2 – 39%, Level 3 – 17%, Level 4 – 11%, Level 5 – 6%, all of the above depending on job role – 72%. The majority of the construction industry requires people with skills at Level 2 and some construction industry trades only go to Level 2. However, some

		employers do feel that provision at Level 3 will encourage more people to enter the industry as it will be seen as being on a higher level and therefore more attractive.
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Social Inclusion Theme

Overview:

The consultation asked respondents to provide answers to the following three questions on the Social Inclusion theme, which cover policy commitments 6 and 7 as outlined in Annex C.

Q.(6a) In what other ways can colleges support those with barriers to learning?

Q.(6b) How can colleges increase participation in further education, particularly those who are hardest to reach?

Q.(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?

All three questions on the commitments within this theme were open-ended and allowed respondents freedom to express a variety of proposals. There was broad overall support for the role of colleges in promoting social inclusion. The importance of the colleges working in partnership with the community and voluntary sector to widen access and increase participation was noted by a number of respondents. Some respondents expressed concerns that the social inclusion role of further education needs to be given more prominence in the strategy.

Q.(6a) In what other ways can colleges support those with barriers to learning?

Comments and suggestions for this question were as follows:

- An ability to gather points/credits towards an award with no stipulations on timescale.
- The pathway from the 3rd sector to further education must be effectively signposted and understood so that there is nothing acting as a constriction to entry to a level 3 course.
- Develop a range of widening participation programmes in partnership with youth/community/sporting groups, which map and respond to community learning needs.
- A well rounded education is not just about qualifications, but also about a broad curriculum which will help people learn and develop in their own way.
- Colleges must be able to fulfil their critical role with regard to not only delivering education but also stimulating demand for provision for those who are disengaged from education and learning.
- It is important that the community and voluntary sector become more involved in the front-end Entry Level and Level 1 programmes financed by ESF, United Youth, SIF and PEACE programmes, and that they do so in a more structured manner. This would help ensure that Level 1 outcomes/qualifications are closely aligned to Level 2 traineeships and onwards into Apprenticeships and HE.

Q.(6b) How can colleges increase participation in further education, particularly those who are hardest to reach?

Comments and suggestions for this question were as follows:

- Mapping out a qualifications pathway that will allow learners to move easily from courses provided in the community to higher level courses in FE.
- Possibly contracting out some provision from colleges to the community.

- There is immense scope to develop fruitful relationships between colleges and local communities to provide outreach services to those who are hardest to reach.
- Organisations with the expertise in engaging with young people with additional barriers, such as care leavers, NEETs etc can provide effective support to colleges.
- Outreach, working with the community and voluntary sector and in schools, can be used to encourage enrolment by making potential learners familiar with the colleges and the services they offer.
- Mentoring at times of critical transitions (from school to FE, from FE to work) will be needed by some students and this should be provided until such times as their barriers to education and employment have been resolved. Additional support for students should take into account the recent noted increase in student stress and mental health.
- Barriers disabled people face relate to availability of courses, awareness of staff and other students, and lack of knowledge of or support for reasonable adjustments.
- Creating collaborative networks with those directly involved to create sampler programmes, short courses that have an outcome and give the learner a positive experience of what they can achieve.
- FE colleges should create formal links with youth services teams in the new education authority and with councils to identify, assist and encourage people who may be hard to reach to get involved.
- Colleges are expected to deliver, for the most part, regulated qualifications. The hardest to reach learners are not necessarily ready or able to embark on qualifications but need access to preparatory provision.
- It would be useful to examine existing community provision to develop networks to allow colleges to be placed locally to strengthen pathways for those hardest to reach.

Q.(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?

Comments and suggestions for this question were as follows:

- Literacy and numeracy have to be embedded into real contexts and must be across all provision, not just bolted on as additions.
- Incorporate material tailored to the occupation into training programmes at levels 1 and 2.
- Provide in-house training in literacy and numeracy to ensure all lecturers and trainers across the curriculum exploit fully the opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy within their areas of provision.
- More provision out in communities, as many with literacy and numeracy problems are intimidated by having to attend courses in mainstream college settings.
- Essential Skills should be offered from entry level upwards and should be taught in context with the learner's experience and interests to encourage participation and maximise achievement. Essential Skills qualifications should be integrated into all mainstream courses in the FE and training sector where they have not already been achieved. A progression pathway should be available from Entry level up to Level 3. Better marketing and targeting of the Essential Skills support is required as well as a community based approach that addresses local needs. Participation should be promoted by celebration of local learning achievements and publicity around "good news stories" especially within the learner's peer group and community.
- Develop relevant regional/local forums to look at developing and sharing best practice.
- The development of blended content and materials jointly across the 6 FE colleges to underpin the delivery of Essential Skills programmes could be of considerable benefit.
- Colleges need to review and adapt the delivery models for Essential Skills and GCSE English and maths. Approaches such as developing virtual delivery

using Skype for business, which gives the opportunity to join a class live or watch later using Moodle, can make a real contribution to raising attainment levels as well as encouraging greater adult participation on literacy and numeracy programmes.

- Possibility of contracting out delivery of Essential Skills courses should be strongly considered.
- Colleges should be required to monitor the uptake of literacy, numeracy and ICT courses by persons with a learning disability and their levels of achievement and the steps that can be taken to improve their skills in these areas.

Curriculum Delivery Theme

Overview:

The consultation asked respondents to provide answers to the following six questions on the Curriculum Delivery theme, which cover policy commitments 8 and 9 as outlined in Annex C:

Q.(8a) Do you agree that colleges should use technology to support and improve their teaching and learning?

Q.(8b) What are the main barriers to achieving this, and how could these be overcome?

Q. (8c) What types of flexible approaches can be used to meet the needs of learners and employers?

Q.(9a) Do you agree that work placements are the best way to develop employability skills in learners?

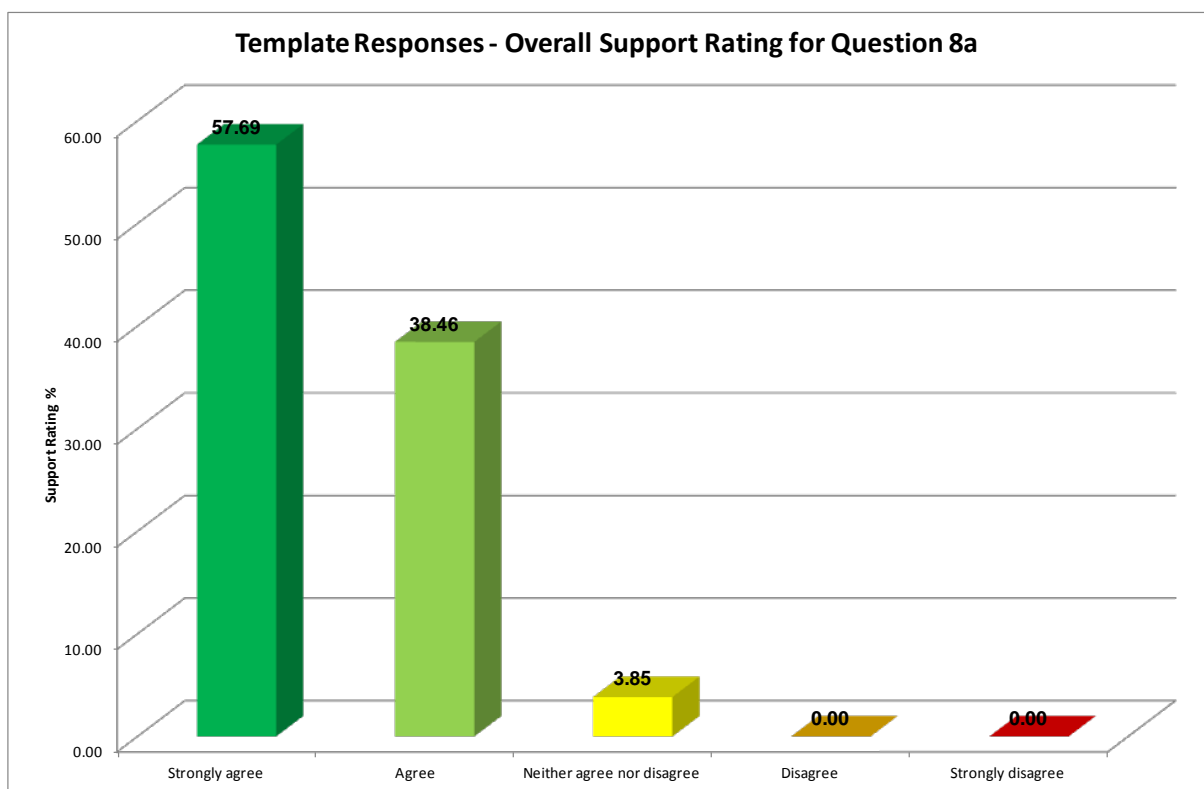
Q.(9b) Where work placements cannot be provided, do you agree that college based and simulated work placements are effective alternatives to employer based work placements?

Q.(9c) In what way can colleges develop enterprising learners who are innovative and creative, and who can adapt to change?

Within this theme, questions (8a), (9a) and (9b) asked respondents to provide a specific support rating while questions (8b), (8c) and (9c) were open-ended. Of the 29 respondents, who replied using the template, 39.24% agreed with the commitments and 39.24% strongly agreed giving an overall approval rating of 78.48% for the commitments on Curriculum Delivery. A further 11.39% of respondents, using the template, neither agreed nor disagreed, while 8.86% disagreed and 1.27% strongly disagreed with the commitments. A detailed analysis of the support rating for individual questions is given in Table 3. Information on the small number of responses from those who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the commitments within the Curriculum Development theme is given in Table 4.

While there was strong overall support for the colleges using technology to enhance learning and developing the employability and enterprise skills of learners, a number of respondents expressed concerns regarding the value and use of 'simulated work placements' as an alternative to actual work placements.

Q.(8a) Do you agree that colleges should use technology to support and improve their teaching and learning?



Almost all respondents (96.15%) either strongly agreed (57.69%) or agreed (38.46%) that colleges should use technology to support and improve their teaching and learning.

One respondent commented that the use of technology and e-learning have powerful potential to support teaching and learning by: providing flexible approaches to learning; promoting increasingly creative and independent learners; enabling collaborative thinking and working; providing on-going formative assessment through

rapid and personalised feedback; preparing the learners for the technological advances in the workplace; and providing performance and pastoral information, through a management information system, which helps to identify those learners who are having difficulties.

Another respondent said that online delivery can provide a richer and more efficient learning environment; expertise is free to travel almost anywhere and can reach more people; remote delivery of curriculum allows lecturers to keep materials up-to-date and should lead to lower costs; and, as NI businesses become more globally focused, online learning can help prepare employees to excel in the emerging virtual world.

Enhanced online capabilities will enable colleges to deliver more effective business solutions, thus ensuring that employees requiring up-skilling can access materials in their own time.

However, it was highlighted that some learners may not have the maturity or discipline to engage in online learning; they may not have access to the equipment; and may need to attend college to improve their social and employability skills.

Q.(8b) What are the main barriers to achieving this, and how could these be overcome?

Comments and suggestions for this question were as follows:

- Additional resources are needed to continue developing skills of college staff and provide technical and support infrastructure.
- At leadership and management level there is insufficient strategic importance attached to using technology to enhance learning. This could be overcome by setting this as a strategic priority, aligning it with workforce development and curriculum plans.

- There is insufficient planning and analysis of the provision for CPD. This could be overcome with effective quality assurance processes with standards set through online pedagogy and training.
- The development of blended learning is both time consuming and expensive.
- Investment will be needed to train staff and to make them available to create innovative content using all available resources.
- The existing lecturers contract with annualised hours, works against the flexibility that is required to develop new blended approaches. As it stands, lecturers work over a very structured timetable, which operates on the basis of learners in a classroom. New approaches might mean lecturers can engage with groups of learners in a virtual classroom, or mentor and support ongoing studies and pastoral care through online engagement at times which suit both parties.
- It should be noted that many technology savvy learners still prefer to attend college for the social engagement it brings even when a digital delivery alternative is available.

Q. (8c) What types of flexible approaches can be used to meet the needs of learners and employers?

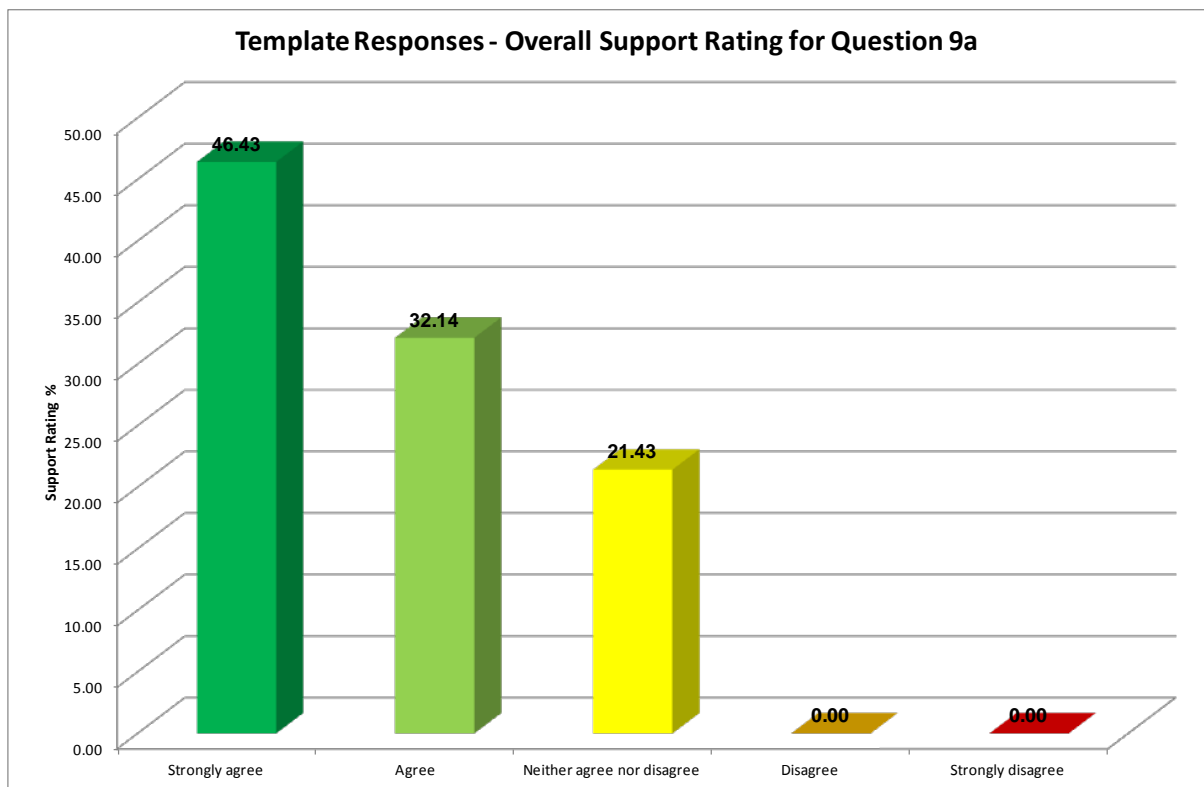
Comments and suggestions for this question were as follows:

- There are many types of flexible approach, varying from the teacher using technology in the classroom on a face to face basis with learners, to a complete virtual delivery method with no face to face contact at all. Methods need to be carefully considered alongside the digital competence of the teacher and the learner. Important to consider how technology will best assist the teacher in delivering teaching to any specific cohort.
- A range of possible approaches could be developed including: more widespread blended learning approaches; on-line tutoring and mentoring; the use of own devices including smart phones and tablets to access information and enable peer-to-peer learning; the use of virtual “master classes” by employers; the use of digital technology to support apprentices in the

workplace; and the use of electronic portfolios to collect, collate and organise work highlights.

- The use of short video presentations and Massive Open Online Courses could also help increase flexibility for learners.
- Personalising the learning experience with individual learning paths; close consideration of learner access; online content needs to be Interactive and make learners think and reach higher levels of learning through rich involving educational content; economically relevant curriculum working closely with industry during design and having frequent review sessions; intuitive learning objects so learners know where this slots into their curriculum roadmap and progression is transparent; and cross-platform software compatibility. The success of flexible learning approaches lie in the by-products of student empowerment, flexibility, accommodation and collaboration.

Q.(9a) Do you agree that work placements are the best way to develop employability skills in learners?



There was strong support for the use of work placements to develop employability skills, with 46.43% of respondents strongly agreeing and 32.14% agreeing with the question.

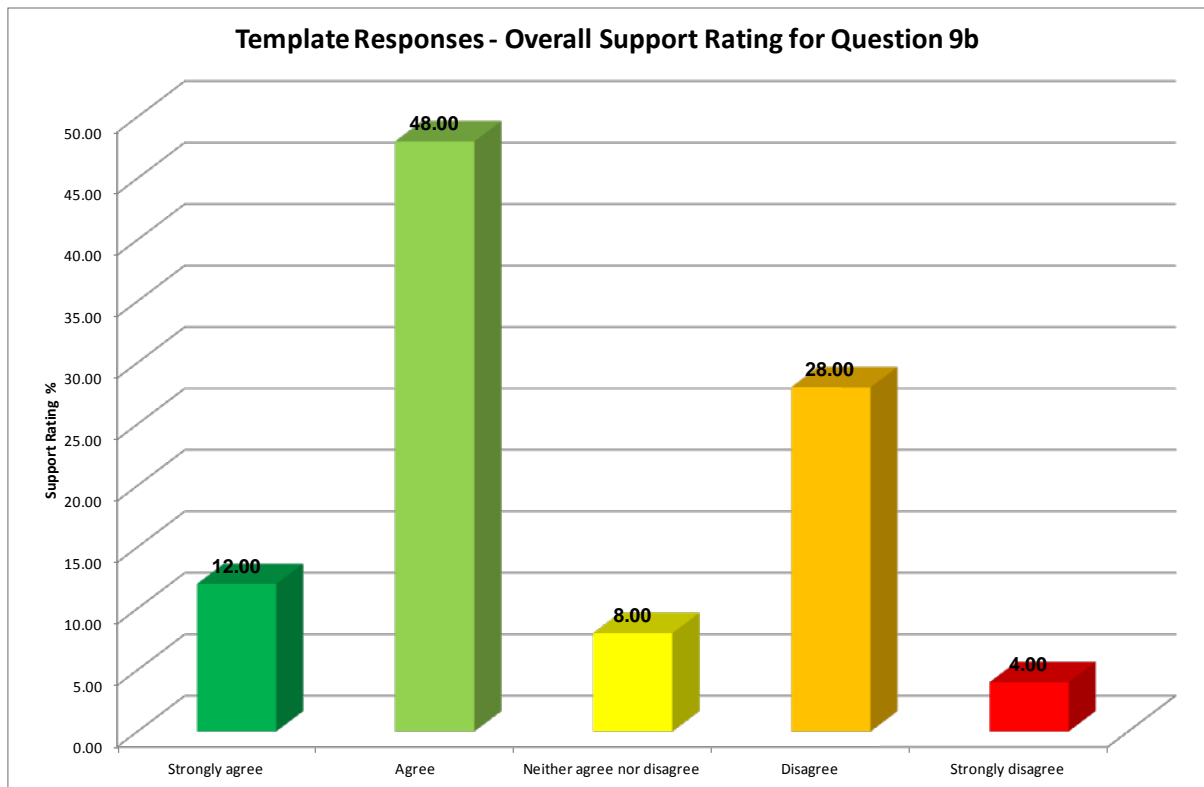
It was noted that work placements are an invaluable way to develop employability skills where they are well planned, managed and relevant and operate in conjunction with other college-based support. Work placements have a role to play but are not the only way to develop employability skills. Employability skills can also be developed through taught courses that include problem based learning projects, live company project undertaken with mentoring and lecturer support, ideas generation and enterprise competitions and EU study visits and student exchange projects.

One respondent believed that work placements are critical to the successful achievement of employment outcomes for many disabled people. They help challenge negative stereotypes and employer reticence and allow them to demonstrate ability on the job. Learning on the job is the preferred way to overcome the challenge of transferring classroom learning into the work setting.

Another respondent commented that on the job experience is vital, with some of the biggest criticisms by employers being that recruits don't appreciate time-keeping, discipline required, have poor communications skills and no experience of how to interact with customers.

However it was noted that a major challenge is providing work placements in sufficient numbers and of the required quality.

Q.(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?



There was majority support for this, with 12% strongly agreeing and 48% agreeing with the question. However, 28% of respondents disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed with this, while 8% neither agreed nor disagreed.

It was felt that there is no real substitute for work experience, but that being said, a college based or simulated environment would be better than having no understanding of the workplace. It was suggested that colleges could source sector specific industry mentors, willing to mentor in-house students and lead on managing real work projects, assisted by college teaching staff, and that more emphasis needs to go towards colleges creating real, live working environments on their own campuses.

One respondent commented that the notion of simulated work placements needs to be treated with caution for those learners at levels 2 and 3. A virtual work placement is no substitute for the real thing and may not hold the attention of weaker learners for very long.

Q.(9c) In what way can colleges develop enterprising learners who are innovative and creative, and who can adapt to change?

Comments and suggestions for this question were as follows:

- Curriculum may include introductory teaching 'about' enterprise in society, by looking at key players, how the discipline has evolved, and considering enterprise in terms of employability skills. Enable students to develop generic skills in enterprise by exploring problems and opportunities as vehicles for active learning and creative problem solving. Business simulations can be valuable. Activities are often group-based, especially when team-working skills are desired outcomes. Entrepreneurs and business advisers can make important contributions both to curricular and extra-curricular elements.
- Project based learning is a dynamic approach to teaching, in which students explore real world industry based problems and challenges.
- Base assessments on real-life work related projects
- Taught courses involving problem based learning projects; live company projects; ideas generation, and enterprise competitions.
- Developing industrial hubs at college campuses.

Table 3

THEME: CURRICULUM DELIVERY			
Question	Number of Responses (Out of Possible 29)	Template Responses Overall Support Rating	% Support Rating
(8a) Do you agree that colleges should use technology to support and improve their teaching and learning?	26	15 Strongly agree	57.69
		10 Agree	38.46
		1 Neither agree nor disagree	3.85
		0 Disagree	0.00
		0 Strongly disagree	0.00
(9a) Do you agree that work placements are the best way to develop employability skills in learners?	28	13 Strongly agree	46.43
		9 Agree	32.14
		6 Neither agree nor disagree	21.43
		0 Disagree	0.00
		0 Strongly disagree	0.00
(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?	25	3 Strongly agree	12.00
		12 Agree	48.00
		2 Neither agree nor disagree	8.00
		7 Disagree	28.00
		1 Strongly disagree	4.00

Table 4

THEME: CURRICULUM DELIVERY		
Question	Company /Response	Explanation
(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?	EOS NI Strongly disagree	Use of simulation does not equip learners with realistic and industry specific skills necessary to improve employability or add value for employers. Simulation strongly discouraged by Awarding Bodies who oversee their accredited training and qualifications. Simulation may have a role in certain areas such as ICT, business administration, catering or warehousing. Collaboration with employment support organisations to complement employer engagement strategies would reduce the dependence on simulated work placement.
	Respondent (2) requested anonymity Disagree	Work placement should be compulsory for full time learners at level 2 and above. A tailored work placement will enable learners to develop relevant employability and enterprise skills. Only in exceptional circumstances should a simulated workplace be considered.
	Respondent (3) requested anonymity Disagree	Students learn best during work placements and in our experience through the generation of evidence for vocational qualifications, simulation is not a substantial alternative to the employer work based placements for building knowledge, competence and confidence in the workplace.
	OCN NI Disagree	Simulated work placements are a poor alternative and do not provide the exposure to real situations that learners need. More effective for Colleges to offer real work placements in house. Work placements can only succeed in developing individuals and fitting them for employment if the key technical skills are complemented by greater competence to interact and integrate into the work environment.
	Ashton Community Trust Disagree	No comment was provided.
Mencap	Accept that simulated work placements can	

	Disagree	be part of the programme but do not believe it can be an effective alternative to employer based placements.
	CITB NI Disagree	Majority of construction employers do not agree that simulations are effective alternatives as it is not always possible to simulate the work environment and trainees need experience of real-life situations. Simulation could be used as a stepping stone to a work placement but it should not replace it.
	Institution of Civil Engineers Disagree	Simulation is better than nothing and may be necessary during periods of economic downturn, but even poor placements expose students to workplace culture and expected behaviours, which is a key element of employability.

Excellence Theme

Overview:

The consultation asked respondents to provide answers to the following five questions on the Excellence theme, which cover policy commitments 10 and 11 as outlined in Annex C:

Q.(10a) Do you agree that a strong focus should be placed on continual professional development, including industrial placements across the further education sector?

Q.(10b) Do you agree that minimum standards for pedagogy and qualifications should be put in place for all lecturers?

Q.(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?

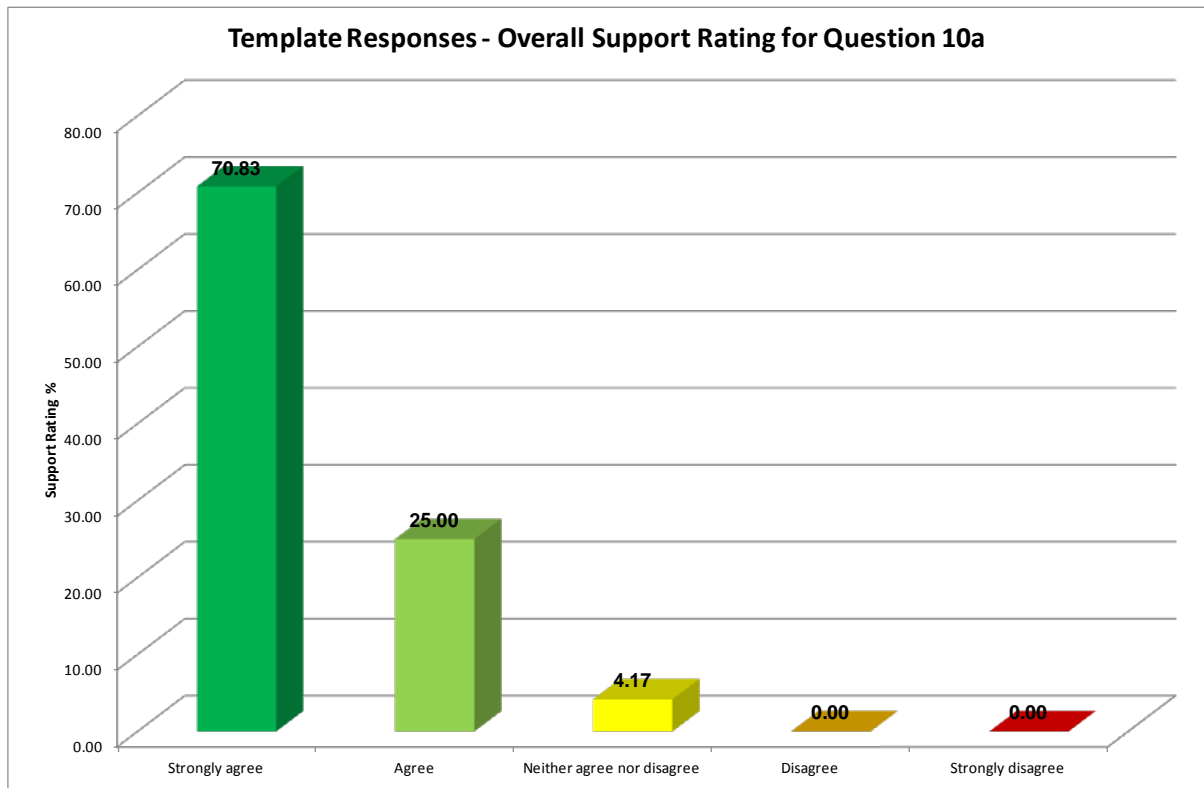
Q.(11a) Do you agree that standardised approaches to receiving and analysing feedback from learners and employers should be introduced across all colleges?

Q.(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?

Within this theme, all five questions asked respondents to provide a specific support rating. Of the 29 respondents, who replied using the template, 32.20% agreed with the commitments and 49.15% strongly agreed giving an overall approval rating of 81.35% for the commitments on Excellence. A further 13.56% of respondents, using the template, neither agreed nor disagreed, while 5.08% disagreed and no respondents strongly disagreed with the commitments. A detailed analysis of the support rating for individual questions is given in Table 5. Information on the small number of responses from those who disagreed with the commitments within the Excellence theme is given in Table 6.

While there was strong overall support for the colleges embedding high quality teaching and improving performance, a number of respondents expressed concerns regarding the use of performance measures and that publication could lead to unfair comparisons being made between colleges.

Q.(10a) Do you agree that a strong focus should be placed on continual professional development, including industrial placements across the further education sector?



The overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that a strong focus should be placed on continual professional development, including industrial placements across the further education sector. 70.83% of respondents strongly agreed and 25% of respondents agreed, and no respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

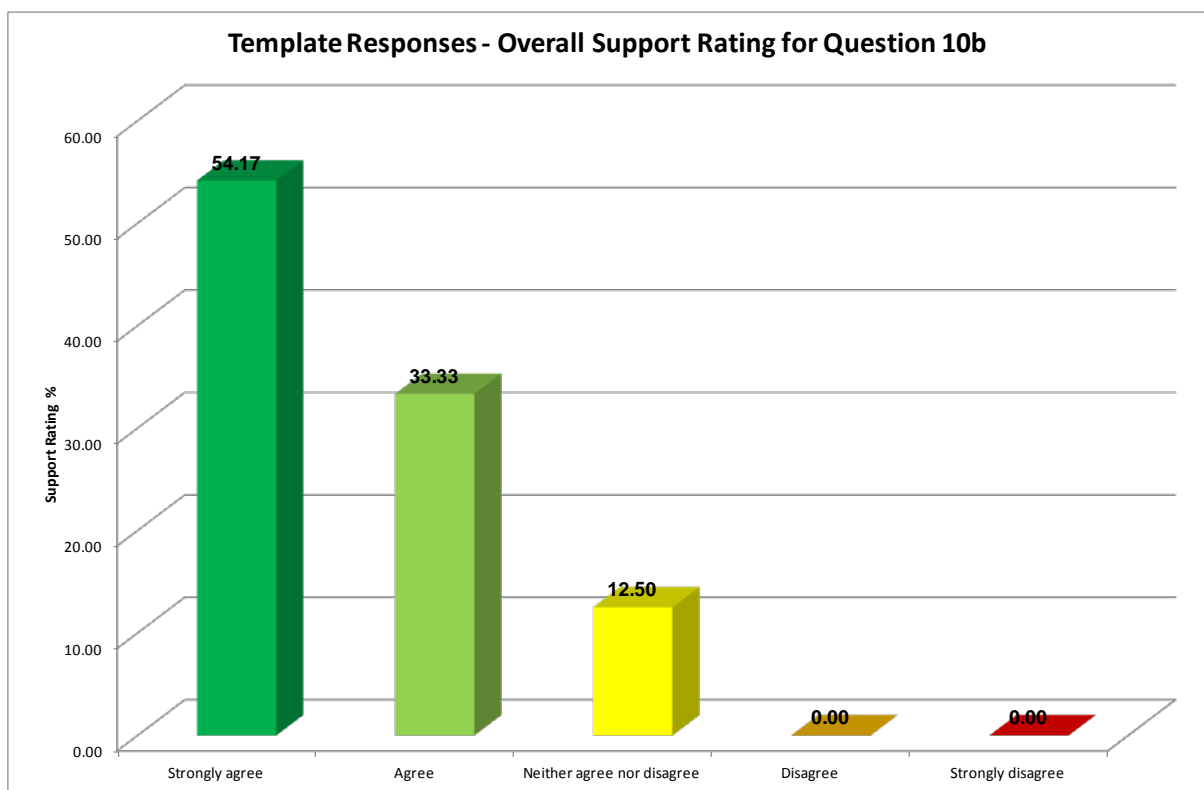
One respondent commented that for colleges to remain relevant, it is important that staff engage with industry and ensure that their skills and knowledge are current. With increasing numbers of further education staff working with the business community, there are excellent opportunities for staff to spend development time with those businesses, so that they can bring back a better understanding of current developments within the world of work back to the learner.

Another respondent said that if colleges are to convince employers of the value of qualifications, employers need to know they are developed on the basis of current

and future work practices, and the best way to do this is to have lecturers, tutors and assessors involved in regular CPD.

It was noted that the large number of part time lecturers in the colleges should have access to CPD opportunities to ensure that all students receive the highest possible learning experiences.

Q.(10b) Do you agree that minimum standards for pedagogy and qualifications should be put in place for all lecturers?



87.5% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that minimum standards for pedagogy and qualifications should be put in place for all lecturers.

It was noted that it is critical that there are minimum standards for all lecturing staff employed on academic contracts. One respondent said that it is imperative that those who provide the learning experience are the best we can produce. This starts

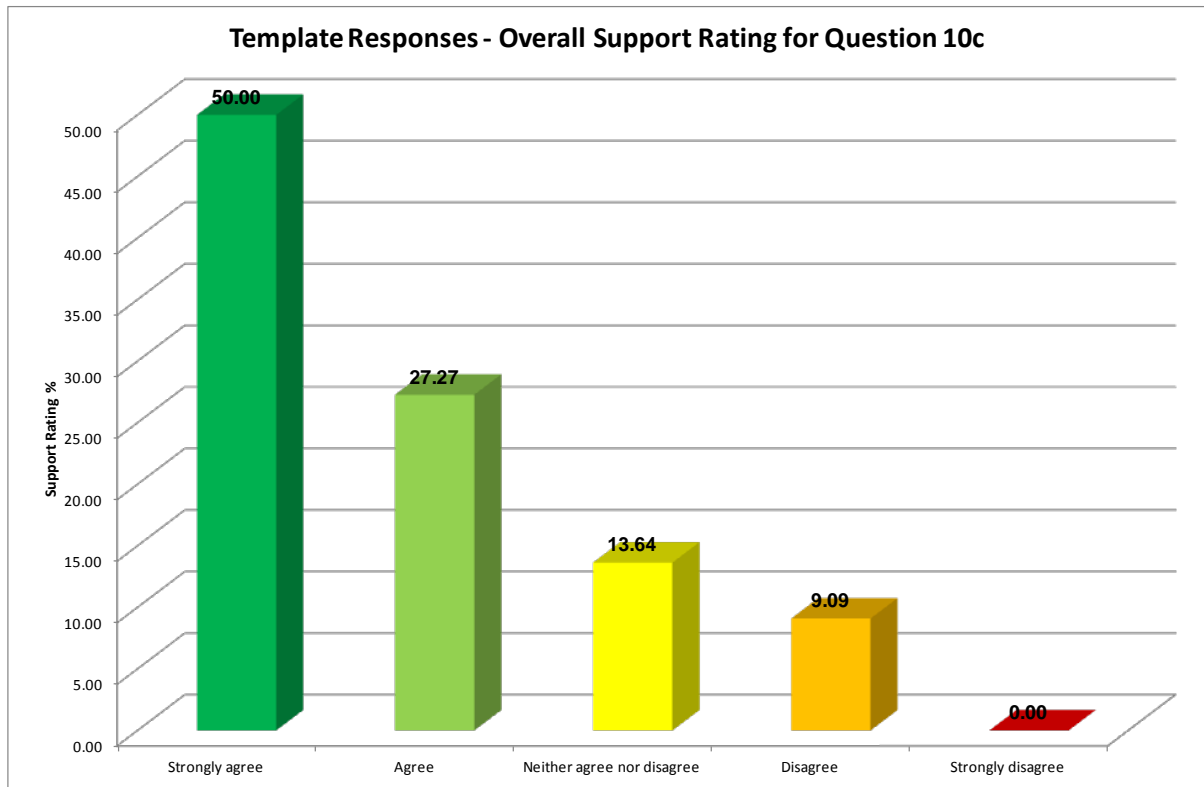
by getting the initial training on a robust footing and continues by ensuring that there is high quality CPD and leadership training in place.

Another respondent commented that minimum standards of qualifications, matched with a programme of CPD, will provide our colleges with the highest standards of lecturers and trainers, benefitting our residents and businesses. This expertise needs to be continuously updated in response to ever-changing working practices and advances in technology to maintain high quality provision.

One respondent commented that part time lecturers make up a significant cohort of further education staff, and that it is important that all staff, including part-time lecturers have an appropriate range of basic teaching skills which have been accredited, in order to meet effectively the wide range of needs and abilities of all students. In addition to delivering practical skills and technical expertise, the lecturers need to support the wide range of pastoral needs of their learners and help them to address the barriers to learning that many have.

Some concerns were raised with regard to this question. One respondent commented that colleges are heavily reliant on industry experts who provide first rate industry insight and skills on a part time basis. Applying a teaching qualification as an essential entry requirement would in most instances remove these first rate teachers /trainers from colleges.

Q.(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?



Over three quarters of respondents strongly agreed or agreed 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.

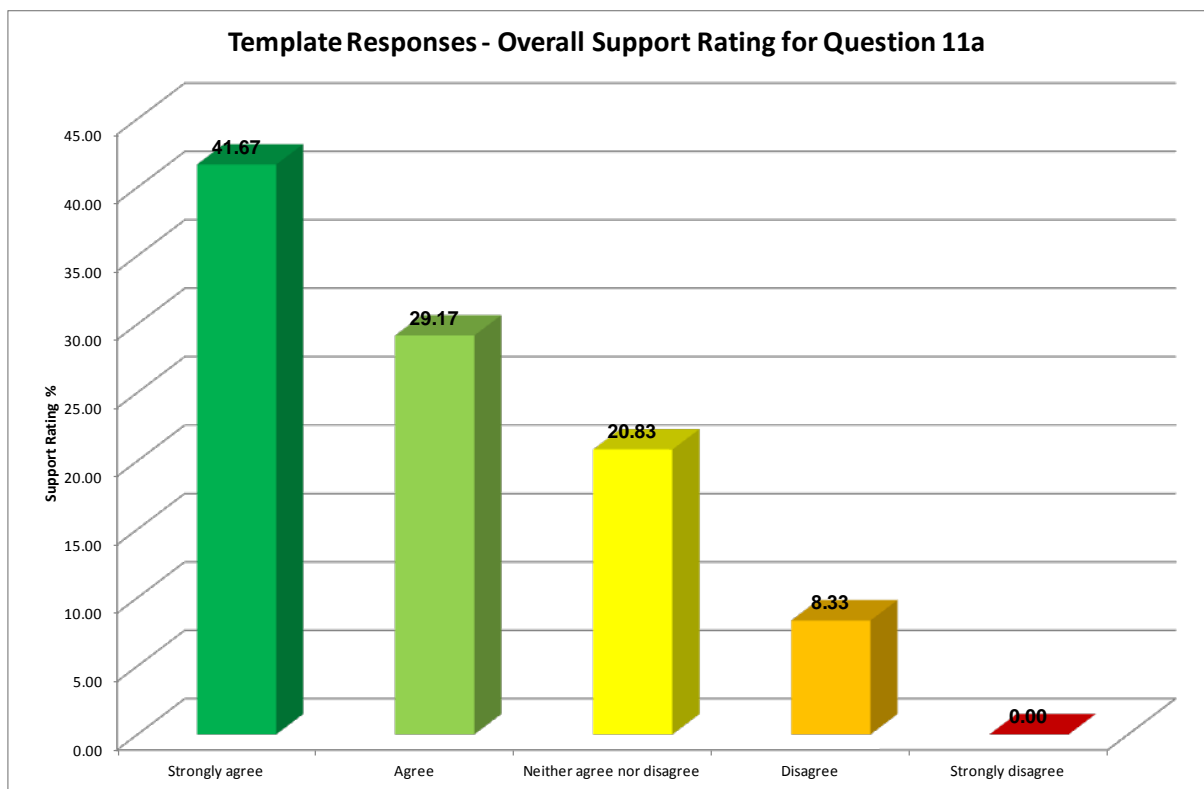
One respondent commented that the improvement process should be underpinned by rigorous, regular and systematic self-evaluation which includes the gathering of a wide range of evidence including observation of teaching and training, discussions with students, scrutiny of leavers' destinations.

Another respondent stated that any new process should be proportionate, unbureaucratic and the information it provides must be clear to stakeholders, including staff. The substantial investment by colleges in developing and refining

self-evaluation processes should not be lost with a new inspection regime. Keep the parts that work and dispose of those aspects that do not add value.

It was noted by another respondent that if colleges want to develop relations with both employers and similar institutions abroad, quality assurance is important. Robust inspection frameworks enable providers to evaluate and improve the quality and effectiveness of their educational delivery.

Q.(11a) Do you agree that standardised approaches to receiving and analysing feedback from learners and employers should be introduced across all colleges?



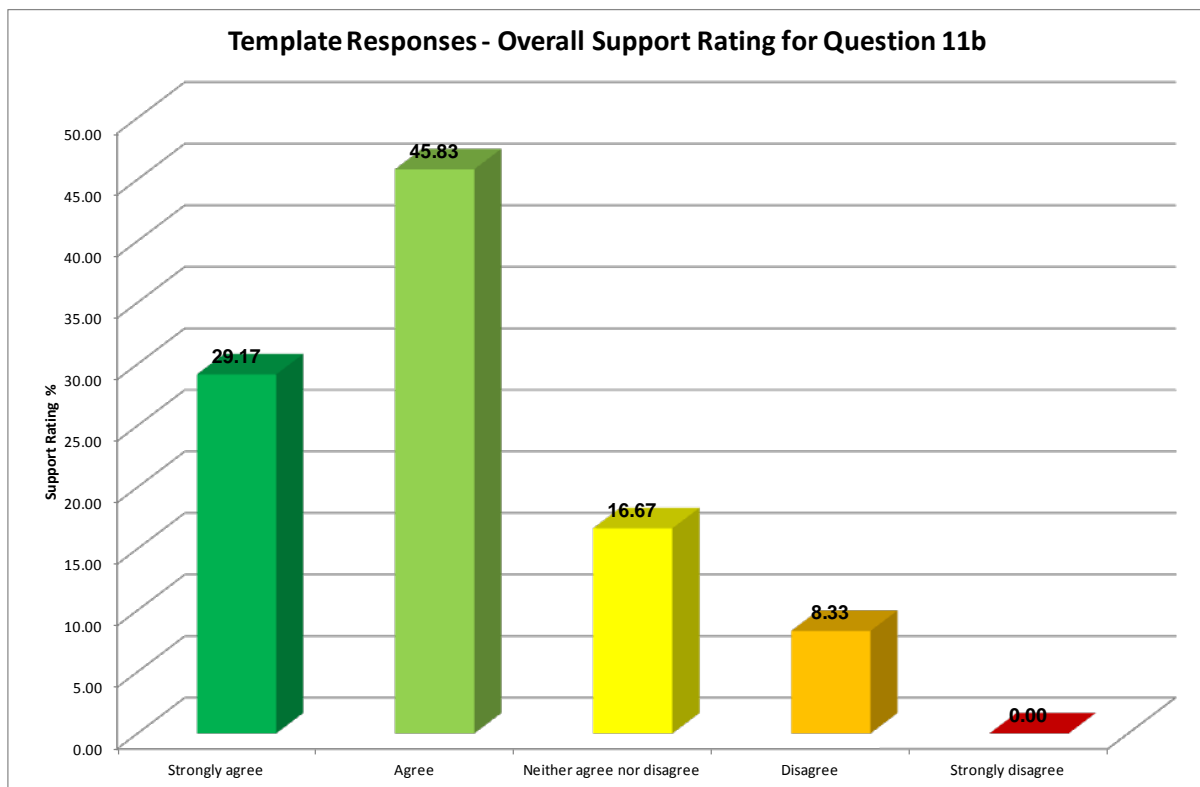
As can be seen from the chart above, 70.84% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that standardised approaches to receiving and analysing feedback from learners and employers should be introduced across all colleges.

A number of respondents raised the concern that there must be recognition that the 6 colleges are not homogenous organisations and that the range of services, curriculum offer, progression opportunities, estate, class size etc will be different.

There is a danger that published benchmarked data may not take sufficient account of the differences between individual colleges especially when it is in the public domain and being used by the media.

The point was also raised that it is not adequate within the FE sector to measure performance simply in terms of outputs such as retention, achievement and success rates. Quite often when a young person drops out of a course it is because they have secure employment. Therefore this needs to be captured within performance measures. Measuring students' destinations and the extent to which students are provided with the relevant skills and attributes to enter the world of work or progress to further study is important.

Q.(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?



Three quarters of respondents supported this with 29.17% strongly agreeing and 45.83% agreeing 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.

It was noted that the introduction of a consistent sector wide methodology for review and evaluation of student progression data is essential. There should be a measure for recording those students who withdraw from programmes early to take up job opportunities yet these are recorded as early leavers/non achievers.

Key to evaluating progression of learners is tracking their progression post engagement to ensure learning has enhanced their opportunities not only to secure but to sustain employment.

Although there was broad support for this there was concern that setting more performance measures for colleges in addition to those already set across a range of DEL funded programmes should be carefully considered. There already exist performance measures/benchmarking data on comparative performance measures, CDPs, retention, achievement, success, inspection reports, and audit reports.

Table 5

THEME: EXCELLENCE				
Question	Number of Responses	Template Responses Overall Support Rating		% Support Rating
(10a) Do you agree that a strong focus should be placed on continual professional development, including industrial placements across the further education sector?	24	17	Strongly agree	70.83
		6	Agree	25.00
		1	Neither agree nor disagree	4.17
		0	Disagree	0.00
		0	Strongly disagree	0.00
(10b) Do you agree that minimum standards for pedagogy and qualifications should be put in place for all lecturers?	24	13	Strongly agree	54.17
		8	Agree	33.33
		3	Neither agree nor disagree	12.50
		0	Disagree	0.00
		0	Strongly disagree	0.00
(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?	22	11	Strongly agree	50.00
		6	Agree	27.27
		3	Neither agree nor disagree	13.64
		2	Disagree	9.09
		0	Strongly disagree	0.00
(11a) Do you agree that standardised approaches to receiving and analysing feedback from learners and employers should be introduced across all colleges?	24	10	Strongly agree	41.67
		7	Agree	29.17
		5	Neither agree nor disagree	20.83
		2	Disagree	8.33
		0	Strongly disagree	0.00
(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?	24	7	Strongly agree	29.17
		11	Agree	45.83
		4	Neither agree nor disagree	16.67
		2	Disagree	8.33
		0	Strongly disagree	0.00

Table 6

THEME: EXCELLENCE		
Question	Company /Response	Explanation
(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?	Western Region Education Authority Disagree	Question need for a review as current accountability frameworks are sufficiently robust. Quality assurance frameworks and monitoring, evaluation and reviews already place significant accountability burdens on colleges. The quality improvement process should be streamlined to reduce duplication.
	OCN NI Disagree	Colleges are already over inspected. Aware ETI cannot be expected to have 'in house' expertise across the extensive FE curriculum and therefore rely on associate assessors from within the Colleges. Given colleges thorough understanding of inspection process would suggest that the option of a combination of inspection and self regulation.
(11a) Do you agree that standardised approaches to receiving and analysing feedback from learners and employers should be introduced across all colleges?	Western Region Education Authority Disagree	Standardising data collection will be limited by methodologies applied and data coding. Qualitative data requires sophisticated analysis. Question value of another performance indicator that is costly to develop and implement.
	UCU Disagree	The assumption that valid comparisons can be made between colleges delivering similar programmes devoid of context in which the learning takes place and amongst whom is erroneous. Do not believe it is possible to design a quantitative measure capable of capturing accurately the true benefits experienced by learners. Does not agree that publishing data about retention, etc. will assist prospective students to make an informed course choice. Believes that performance indicators will exercise a negative impact upon lecturing staff and lead to a prioritization of number crunching above learner centred pastoral care.
(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	NWRC Disagree	No, this could lead to unfair comparisons eg Foyle parliamentary constituency has the highest unemployment rate of the constituencies in the UK.
	UCU Disagree	Does not believe it will be easy for colleges to collect this information or that in the context of diminishing resources this is a reasonable additional burden to levy.

websites?

International Dimension Theme

Overview:

The consultation asked respondents to provide answers to the following three questions on the International Dimension theme, which covers policy commitment 12 as outlined in Annex C:

Q.(12a) How might colleges maximise placements for learners and the use of secondments and exchanges for staff outside of Northern Ireland?

Q.(12b) How might colleges develop further partnerships with international organisations, including educational institutions and employers?

Q.(12c) Do you agree that colleges should explore opportunities to sell their education and training expertise internationally?

Within this theme, question (12c) asked respondents to provide a specific support rating while questions (12a) and (12b) were open-ended. Of the 29 respondents, who replied using the template, 43.48% agreed with the commitments and 26.09% strongly agreed giving an overall approval rating of 69.57% with the proposal that colleges should explore international opportunities. A further 17.39% of respondents, using the template, neither agreed nor disagreed, while 13.04% disagreed and no respondents strongly disagreed with the commitments. A detailed analysis of the support rating for question (12c) is given in Table 7. Information on the small number of responses from those who disagreed with the commitments within the International Dimension theme is given in Table 8.

There was strong overall support for colleges exploring opportunities to sell their expertise internationally. The two open-ended questions allowed respondents to express a variety of proposals in relation to placements and international partnerships including:

- opportunities for Colleges to provide staff and learners with placements and exchanges through European Union (EU) funded programmes such as Erasmus+; and
- collaboration with local councils given their role in promoting economic development and their experience in accessing EU funds.

However, some respondents noted that careful balancing of risk and opportunity is required against colleges' priorities and resources while exploring international opportunities.

Q.(12a) How might colleges maximise placements for learners and the use of secondments and exchanges for staff outside of Northern Ireland?

Comments and suggestions for this question were as follows:

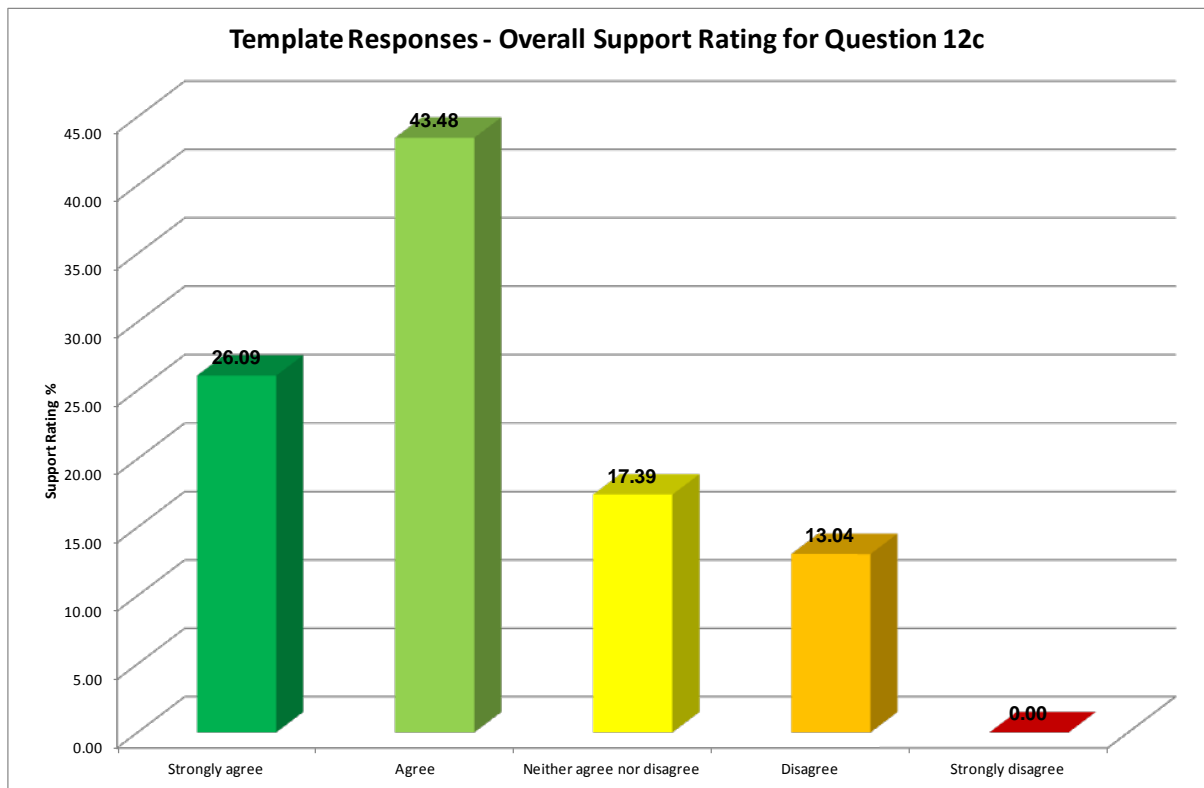
- Increased collaboration between DEL and its counterpart in ROI (DES) could jointly promote the ERASMUS+ programme. Greater scope exists for the FE sector to collaborate with counterparts in the Republic Of Ireland to securing EU funding for mobility.
- Colleges should work with local councils in this regard, given their role in promoting economic development and their experience in accessing EU funds and their links with international partners.
- There are opportunities for colleges to access funding from the EU and to form partnerships outside the UK through collaborative working with other training providers on projects of shared interest.
- The ERASMUS programmes presents significant opportunities for Colleges to engage in partnerships which would lead to the elaboration of new curriculum and the possibility of long lasting partnerships, with learner and lecturer exchanges.
- International activity could be treated as a shared service. Alternatively, colleges should have a dedicated international office to work on building relationships and developing strategic partnerships with other VET and HEI providers.
- There should be a clear and holistic international skills strategy at both national and institutional level.

Q.(12b) How might colleges develop further partnerships with international organisations, including educational institutions and employers?

Comments and suggestions for this question were as follows:

- Further links could be developed through the use of an intermediary organisation such as the British Council, or through sponsorship arrangements with the business organisations the colleges work with.
- Engagement with European partners is an opportunity to learn from shared practice and using this to support a process of continuous improvement within the curriculum. Key specific actions could include: development of sustainable, strategic European partnerships for mutual benefit, including benchmarking and observation of best practice in the delivery of the curriculum; visits to European companies and host organisations to observe best practice; facilitation of the sharing of best practice with other regional Colleges and international partners; and further development of international internships.
- Funding should be provided either to colleges or to Colleges NI to develop and deliver a consistent approach to internationalisation, with specific performance targets and a focus on regions where Northern Ireland has a strategic interest in a partnership.
- Attendance at networking events that target education providers/placement providers. Colleges offering inward visits to intermediary organisations that would promote the colleges capabilities within their extended networks. Streamlined curriculum that delivers at European or International level to ease exchanges between partners. Allow extended periods where block release opportunities are available for staff and students to participate in placements/exchanges without missing core time.

Q.(12c) Do you agree that colleges should explore opportunities to sell their education and training expertise internationally?



Respondents were generally supportive of this question, with 26.09 strongly agreeing and 43.48 agreeing that colleges should explore opportunities to sell their education and training expertise internationally.

Some respondents felt that this should not be a priority for colleges and there will need to be a careful balancing of risk and opportunity against colleges' priorities and resources at a time of reduced core funding. However, one respondent noted that in an environment where colleges face increasing financial pressures, selling education and training expertise overseas makes compelling business sense and opportunities should certainly be explored.

Another respondent commented that colleges should take advantage of these opportunities but on the assumption that they operate on a full cost recovery basis and do not ultimately divert resources from Northern Ireland.

It was noted that there has been mixed success in colleges selling education and training expertise, and time and resources may have to be devoted to this with limited returns in the initial years. There will need to be a careful balancing of risk and opportunity against colleges' priorities and resources at a time of reducing core funding.

Table 7

THEME: INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION			
Question	Number of Responses (Out of Possible 29)	Template Responses Overall Support Rating	% Support Rating
(12c) Do you agree that colleges should explore opportunities to sell their education and training expertise internationally?	23	6 Strongly agree	26.09
		10 Agree	43.48
		4 Neither agree nor disagree	17.39
		3 Disagree	13.04
		0 Strongly disagree	0.00

Table 8

THEME: INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION	
Company /Response	Explanation
John Quinn (Individual) Disagree	Should not contemplate 'selling' abroad until NI is acknowledged as having a world-class FE system. Many examples of good, even very good, practice but significant satisfactory provision as well.
UCU Disagree	This should not be a priority for colleges. Only one grade one college is arguably in a position to expand its focus internationally. Colleges that are achieving grades of 3 and 4 in inspections need to improve their expertise in education and training before engaging in international marketing of that provision. Devoting attention to this policy direction will further divert resources from the disadvantaged N.I population who most need it.
Western Region Education Authority Disagree	Acknowledge that colleges need to seek funding, but this would detract from their core mission and purpose. Motivation to have an international training arm may distort focus from other priority areas for development.

Governance Theme

The consultation asked respondents to provide proposals to the following question on the Governance theme, which covers policy commitment 13 as outlined in Annex C:

Q.(13) In what ways can colleges create income outside of funding provided by the department and wider public sector?

The single question on the proposal within this theme was open-ended and allowed respondents freedom to express a variety of proposals in relation to income generation.

Comments and suggestions for this question were as follows:

- Selling expertise through consultancy work; selling intellectual property, hiring out the state of the art buildings for conferences and events; streamlining business processes.
- Colleges can create income outside of funding currently provided by offering specialist training that people/employers are prepared to pay for.
- Use of estate throughout the year; development of spin out programmes with Intellectual Property that has been developed within the college; provision of support services to local businesses e.g. website development, marketing material.
- By increasing the reputation of the further education sector to deliver a product that companies want, the sector may be able to attract more funding
- Developing strategic partnerships with industry locally, regionally and internationally is key to increasing additional income streams.
- The Department needs to explore and understand the alternative corporate delivery models.

College Partnerships Theme

Overview:

The consultation asked respondents to provide answers to the following three questions on the College Partnerships theme, which cover strategy policy commitments 14 to 16 as outlined in Annex C:

Q.(14) Do you agree that colleges should operate more collectively in their delivery of corporate services by adopting shared services through their NDPB status?

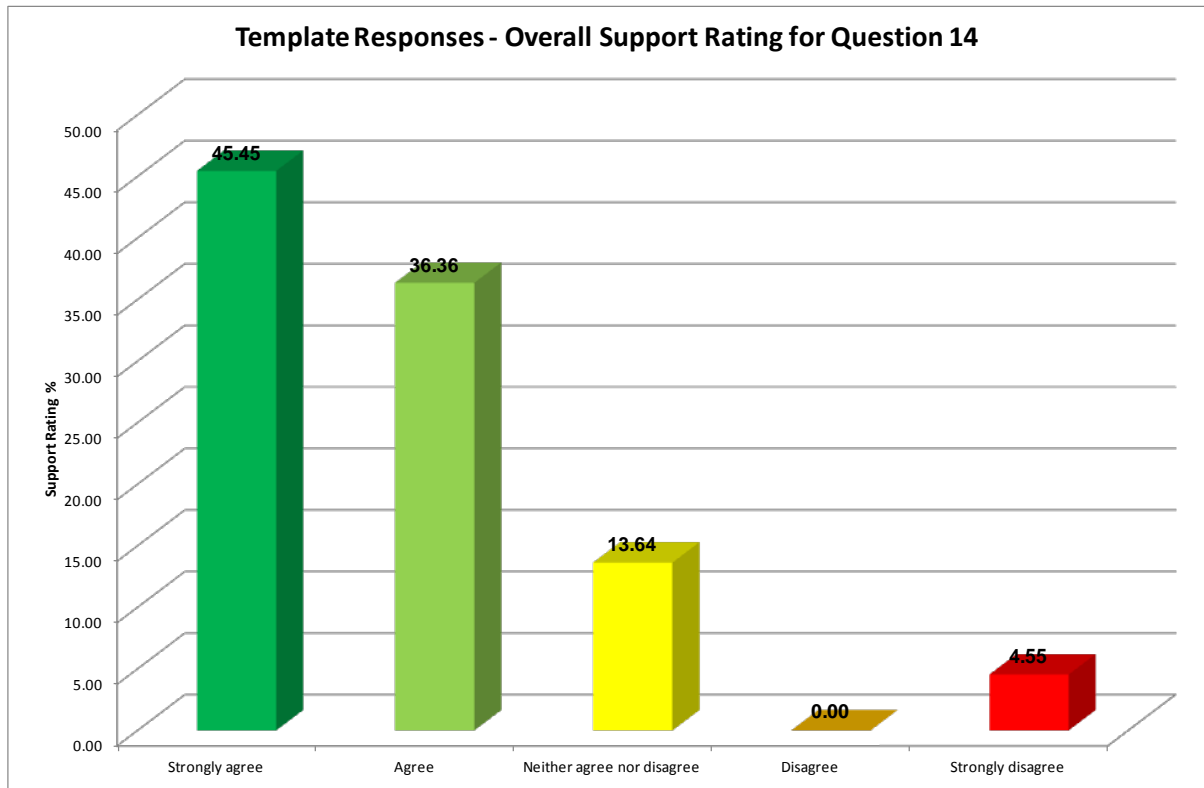
Q.(15) In what way can colleges share best practice in the efficient and effective delivery of services to learners and employers, including the use of technology?

Q.(16) Do you agree that a mechanism should be established to manage and oversee collaboration and sharing of best practice between colleges?

Within this theme, questions (14) and (16) asked respondents to provide a specific support rating while question (15) was open-ended. Of the 29 respondents, who replied using the template, 42.22% agreed with the commitments and 44.44% strongly agreed giving an overall approval rating of 86.66% with the commitments on College Partnerships. A further 11.11% of respondents, using the template, neither agreed nor disagreed, while no respondents disagreed and one respondent (2.22%) strongly disagreed with the commitments. A detailed analysis of the support rating for the individual questions is given in Table 9. Information on the response from the single respondent who strongly disagreed with commitments within the College Partnerships theme is given in Table 10.

While there was strong overall support for the colleges maximising their efficiency and effectiveness through partnerships and sharing best practice, one respondent raised the issue that shared services could result in a reduction in the level of service available to students and staff at individual colleges.

Q.(14) Do you agree that colleges should operate more collectively in their delivery of corporate services by adopting shared services through their NDPB status?



As can be seen from the chart above, there was strong support for this, with 45.45% of respondents strongly agreeing and 36.36% agreeing that colleges should operate more collectively in their delivery of corporate services by adopting shared services through their NDPB status.

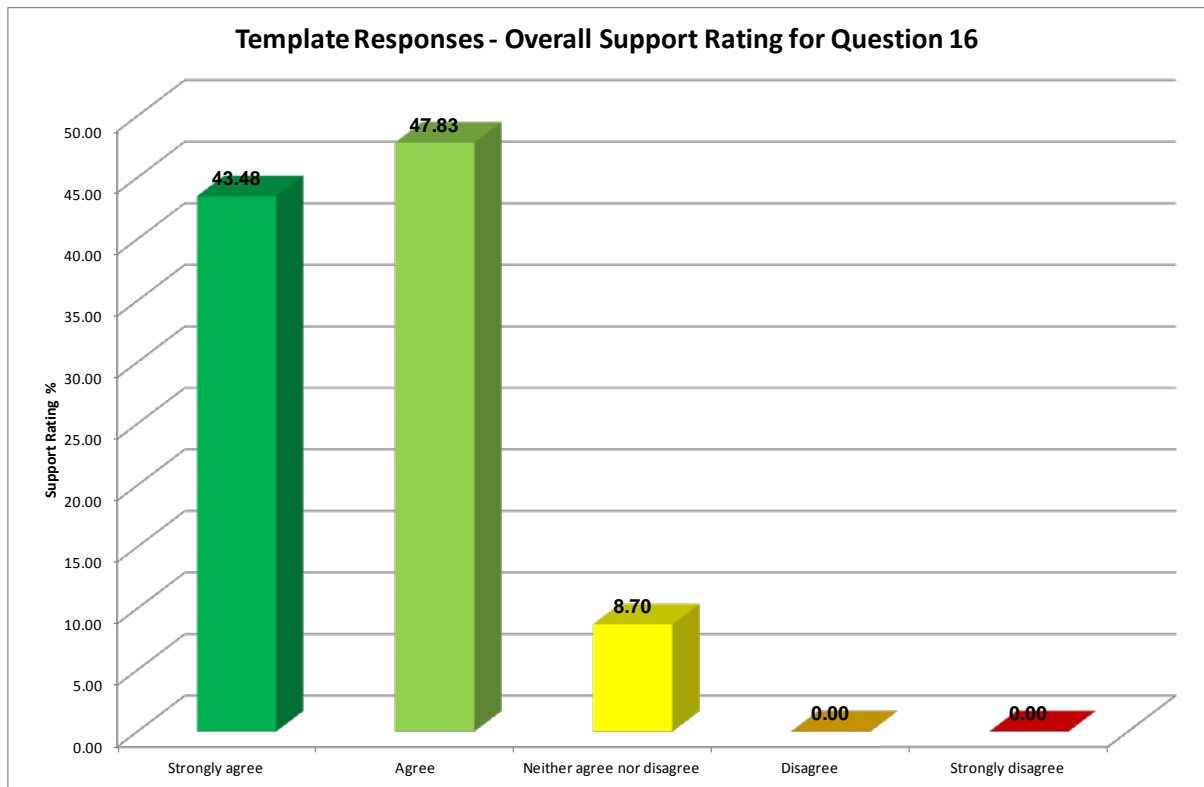
It was noted that in the context of shrinking education budgets it is imperative that the six colleges swiftly identify areas, such as payroll, human resources, IT support and finance services where centralised collaboration could lead to further resource savings.

Q.(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?

Comments and suggestions for this question were as follows:

- Colleges should establish key thematic working groups to share expertise and practice.
- There should be increased collaboration with the two universities, other training institutions, employer bodies, professional associations, national and international organisations and the new Councils.
- Each college could agree to take the lead in developing blended learning materials for 6 courses over a one year period, to an agreed template and quality standard, with embedded video content and reference material.
- Given the need to embed employability across all of the future youth training programmes and enterprise, the colleges could establish a cross-sectoral team to develop a blended learning solution with local employer input.

Q.(16) Do you agree that a mechanism should be established to manage and oversee collaboration and sharing of best practice between colleges?



As can be seen from the chart above, there was overwhelming support for establishing a mechanism to manage and oversee collaboration and sharing of best practice between colleges.

It was noted that colleges should be subject to a coherent mechanism which manages and oversees sharing of best practice and arbitrates any emerging issues, and that a more consistent approach to sharing best practice between colleges would add value. Exchanges and secondments between colleges might be another approach for sharing expertise within the sector on curriculum and delivery issues.

Table 9

THEME: COLLEGE PARTNERSHIPS			
Question	Number of Responses (Out of Possible 29)	Template Responses Overall Support Rating	% Support Rating
(14) Do you agree that colleges should operate more collectively in their delivery of corporate services by adopting shared services through their NDPB status?	22	10 Strongly agree	45.45
		8 Agree	36.36
		3 Neither agree nor disagree	13.64
		0 Disagree	0.00
		1 Strongly disagree	4.55
(16) Do you agree that a mechanism should be established to manage and oversee collaboration and sharing of best practice between colleges?	23	10 Strongly agree	43.48
		11 Agree	47.83
		2 Neither agree nor disagree	8.70
		0 Disagree	0.00
		0 Strongly disagree	0.00

Table 10

THEME: COLLEGE PARTNERSHIPS	
Company /Response	Explanation
NUS –USI Strongly Disagree	Shared services could result in a reduction in the level of service available to students and staff at the colleges. Could be a lack of ability to be responsive to needs of all students and colleges due to large geographical size of region and may not have the same level of knowledge for each college as current staff. There must be dedicated students' union staff and student support staff at each college.

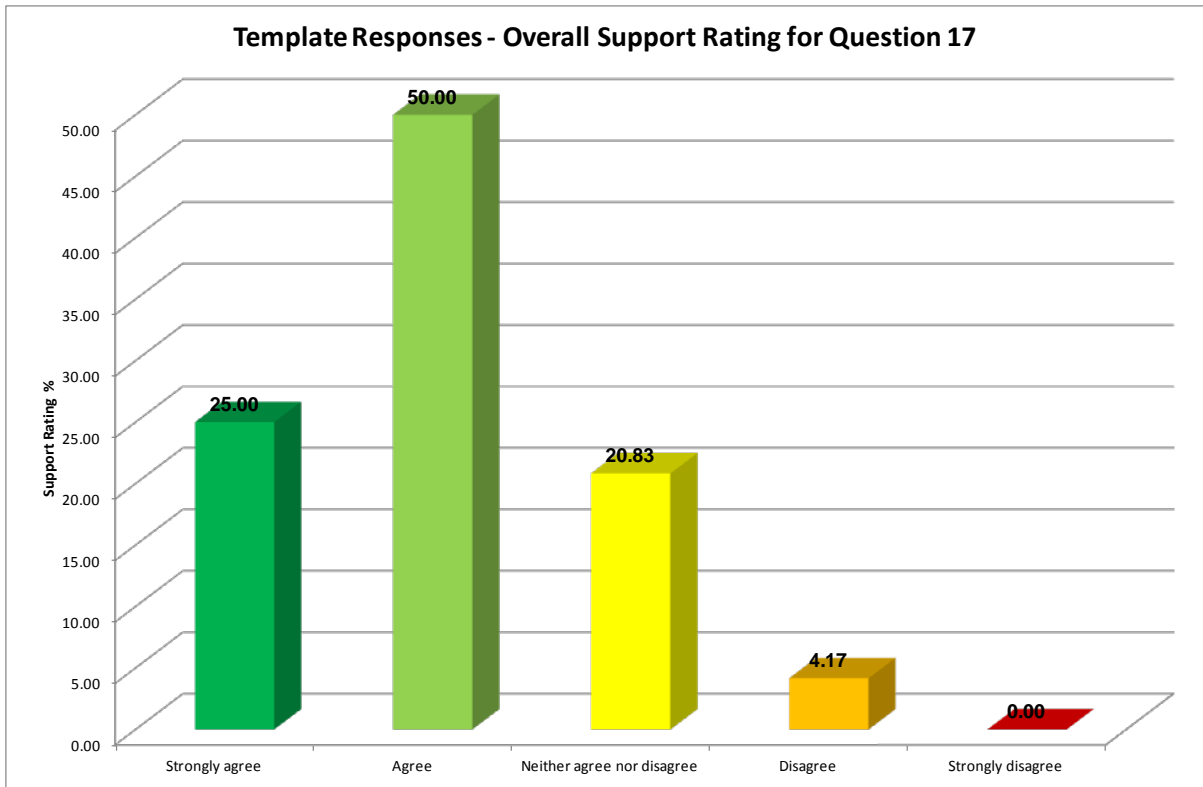
Funding Model and College Sustainability Theme

The consultation asked respondents to provide answers to the following question on the Funding Model and College Sustainability theme, which covers strategy policy commitment 17 as outlined in Annex C:

Q.(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?

Within this theme, the single question asked respondents to provide a specific support rating. Of the 29 respondents, who replied using the template, 50% agreed with the commitment and 25% strongly agreed giving an overall approval rating of 75% for the commitment on the Funding Model and College Sustainability. A further 20.83% of respondents, using the template, neither agreed nor disagreed, while one respondent (4.07%) disagreed and no respondents strongly disagreed with the commitments.

Further details on the number of responses are given in Table 11. Information on the response from the single respondent who disagreed with the proposal within the Funding Model and College Sustainability theme is given in Table 12.



It was suggested that any review of funding should take account of the current disparity between full-time and part-time provision, and that consideration should be given to introducing a model which is not based on outcomes.

While there was strong overall support for reviewing the Further Education Funding Model, one respondent raised the issue that revisiting the funding model in the current climate of budget reductions may impact negatively on staffing levels within the colleges.

Table 11

THEME: FUNDING MODEL AND COLLEGE SUSTAINABILITY				
Question	Number of Responses (Out of Possible 29)	Template Responses Overall Support Rating		% Support Rating
(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?	24	6	Strongly agree	25.00
		12	Agree	50.00
		5	Neither agree nor disagree	20.83
		1	Disagree	4.17
		0	Strongly disagree	0.00

Table 12

THEME: FUNDING MODEL AND COLLEGE SUSTAINABILITY	
Company /Response	Explanation
UCU Disagree	Nervous of revisiting the funding model in circumstances of budget reductions. Any diminution to the funding formula will invariably negatively impact upon staffing levels which are already over-stretched. Questions the truly consultative nature of this exercise if it has already been determined that the purpose of reviewing the funding model is to deliver the new FE strategy as proposed.

Promoting the Further Education Sector Theme

Overview:

The consultation asked respondents to provide answers to the following two questions on the Promoting the Further Education theme, which cover strategy policy commitment 18 as outlined in Annex C:

Q.(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?

Q.(18b) How could the benefits of professional and technical qualifications be promoted to the users of qualifications?

The two questions on the commitments within this theme were open-ended and allowed respondents freedom to express a variety of proposals in relation to promoting the sector including:

- the use of case studies celebrating success stories;
- identification of champion alumni, who hold important roles regionally and globally, showing how FE colleges played a role in their development;
- help parents understand the sector and the technical and professional pathways it offers via the creation of pathway diagrams;
- raising the awareness of careers advisers who have a key role in promoting technical and professional training as an alternative to academic study;
- demonstrate that professional and technical qualifications lead to jobs valued by employers and show the clear links between qualifications, jobs and reasonable salaries; and
- promotion should be done across all media platforms including digital media.

Q.(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?

Comments and suggestions for this question were as follows:

- Identification of individuals, who now hold important roles across Northern Ireland and the world, as FE champions stating how further education played a role in their skills development. Articulation of the scale of the FE sector in NI as most do not understand what it does. Promotion of the value of colleges versus universities for Higher Education delivery by targeting parents of children in post primary school. Consideration of a greater role for college governors in promotion of the sector in their business networks. Better communication with improved Public Relations and more effective use of college social media.
- Collectively, colleges and the Department need to demonstrate that professional and technical qualifications lead to jobs valued by employers and show the clear links between qualifications, jobs and reasonable salaries using case studies.
- Further work is required within the compulsory education sector (teachers and careers' teachers) and with parents to demonstrate that FE is an equally credible alternative to A-Levels and university.
- The benefits to employers need to be highlighted and tailored to potential employers. There needs to be a central hub/website which can provide information on courses and careers across Northern Ireland rather than each college competing for places/funding. There should be one central point of contact for each industry sector representing all colleges. There should be clear, precise guidelines for FE and industry. FE and Industry Forums should be held frequently - at least twice yearly. Promote the versatility of provision and ensure that this is really tailored to employer needs. Focus on the fact that further education allows more practical skills to be developed.

Q.(18b) How could the benefits of professional and technical qualifications be promoted to the users of qualifications?

Comments and suggestions for this question were as follows:

- Best promoted through case studies and success stories of other learners. Employers should be engaged in the process to promote the benefits of learning and the economic benefits for learners. Social media and good news stories can also be used.
- Colleges and DEL need to collectively demonstrate that professional and technical qualifications lead to jobs valued by employers and show the clear links between qualifications, jobs and reasonable salaries through following a technical and professional pathway.
- A range of internal and external communications activities should be considered including college intranet and portal sites supported by email campaigns and distribution of promotional materials during relevant events for students and college websites and social media for prospective learners and other stakeholders. Public Relations activities using local and national print and broadcast media should be central to any strategy. Student profiling can provide increased credibility and this would complement promotional print content.

Overall Strategy

The analysis on a theme by theme basis demonstrates there was strong overall support for the commitments within the New Further Education Strategy consultation document. In terms of the 29 respondents who completed their response using the template there were 389 responses in total to the consultation which can be broken down as follows:

- 145 responses (37.28%) strongly agreed with the commitments;
- 162 responses (41.65%) agreed with the commitments;
- 59 responses (15.17%) neither agreed nor disagreed;
- 20 responses (5.14%) disagreed with the commitments; and
- 3 responses (0.77%) strongly disagreed with the commitments.

This gives an overall support rating of 78.93% for the commitments within the Further Education Strategy Consultation. The table below provides a summary of the support rating for each theme and the overall strategy for the 29 respondents who completed their response using the template.

ANALYSIS OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES – where a “tick box” response was required			
Further Education Strategy Theme	Support Rating (Template Responses)		
Overall Strategy (16 questions)	144	Strongly agree	37.21%
	162	Agree	41.86%
	58	Neither agree nor disagree	14.99%
	20	Disagree	5.17%
	3	Strongly disagree	0.78%
	77	No answer given	
Economic Engagement (4 questions)	24	Strongly agree	24.00%
	52	Agree	52.00%
	20	Neither agree nor disagree	20.00%
	3	Disagree	3.00%
	1	Strongly disagree	1.00%
	16	No answer given	
Curriculum Delivery (3 questions)	31	Strongly agree	39.24%
	31	Agree	39.24%
	9	Neither agree nor disagree	11.39%
	7	Disagree	8.86%
	1	Strongly disagree	1.27%
	8	No answer given	
Excellence (5 questions)	57	Strongly agree	48.72%
	38	Agree	32.48%
	16	Neither agree nor disagree	13.68%
	6	Disagree	5.13%
	0	Strongly disagree	0.00%
	28	No answer given	
International Dimension (1 question)	6	Strongly agree	26.09%
	10	Agree	43.48%
	4	Neither agree nor disagree	17.39%
	3	Disagree	13.04%
	0	Strongly disagree	0.00%
	6	No answer given	
College Partnerships (2 questions)	20	Strongly agree	45.45%
	19	Agree	43.18%
	4	Neither agree nor disagree	9.09%
	0	Disagree	0.00%
	1	Strongly disagree	2.27%
	14	No answer given	
Funding Model and College Sustainability (1 question)	6	Strongly agree	25.00%
	12	Agree	50.00%
	5	Neither agree nor disagree	20.83%
	1	Disagree	4.17%
	0	Strongly disagree	0.00%
	5	No answer given	

Annex A - List of respondents to the consultation

LIST OF RESPONDENTS TO FURTHER EDUCATION STRATEGY CONSULTATION	
SOCIAL INCLUSION & VOLUNTARY SECTOR RESPONDENTS	EDUCATION SECTOR
NI Social Care Council	CCEA
Start 360	OCR
NICVA	CCMS
PlayBoard NI	GTCNI
Include Youth	NUS-USI
Voice of Young People in Care	NRC
Ashton Community Trust	SERC
Training for Women Network	SRC
Disability Action	Belfast Met
Blind Children UK (NI)	NWRC
Mencap	Colleges NI
Commissioner for Older People NI	UCU
NIACRO	Education Authority – Western Region
Equality Commission	S. McGuinness (Individual Response)
EMPLOYERS & REPRESENTATIVE BODIES	John Quinn (Individual Response)
CITB NI	Open College Network NI
CBI NI	LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESPONDENTS
Institute of Directors	Mid Ulster District Council
NI Chamber of Commerce and Industry	Newry, Mourne & Down District Council
Institution of Civil Engineers (NI)	ArmaghCity, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
The Institution of Engineering and Technology - Policy Committee (NI)	NILGA
Enterprise NI	INTERNATIONAL
EOS NI	British Council
JheSolutions	Centre for Cross-Border Studies

Annex B - Consultation questions

Economic Development Theme

Q.(1) Do you agree that colleges should focus provision on those areas that contribute to rebalancing and rebuilding the economy?;

Q.(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?

Q.(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?

Q.(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?

Q.(5a) Do you agree that individual colleges should be identified as specialists in key sectors of the economy?

Q.(5b) Do you agree that colleges should develop networks of experts to enable the sharing of latest developments across Northern Ireland?

Social Inclusion Theme

Q.(6a) In what other ways can colleges support those with barriers to learning?

Q.(6b) How can colleges increase participation in further education, particularly those who are hardest to reach?

Q.(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 Theme

Q.(8a) Do you agree that colleges should use technology to support and improve their teaching and learning?

Q.(8b) What are the main barriers to achieving this, and how could these be overcome?

Q. (8c) What types of flexible approaches can be used to meet the needs of learners and employers?

Q.(9a) Do you agree that work placements are the best way to develop employability skills in learners?

Q.(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?

Q.(9c) In what way can colleges develop enterprising learners who are innovative and creative, and who can adapt to change?

Excellence Theme

Q.(10a) Do you agree that a strong focus should be placed on continual professional development, including industrial placements across the further education sector?

Q.(10b) Do you agree that minimum standards for pedagogy and qualifications should be put in place for all lecturers?

Q.(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?

Q.(11a) Do you agree that standardised approaches to receiving and analysing feedback from learners and employers should be introduced across all colleges?

Q.(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?

International Dimension Theme

Q.(12a) How might colleges maximise placements for learners and the use of secondments and exchanges for staff outside of Northern Ireland?

Q.(12b) How might colleges develop further partnerships with international organisations, including educational institutions and employers?

Q.(12c) Do you agree that colleges should explore opportunities to sell their education and training expertise internationally?

Governance Theme

Q.(13) In what ways can colleges create income outside of funding provided by the department and wider public sector?

College Partnerships Theme

Q.(14) Do you agree that colleges should operate more collectively in their delivery of corporate services by adopting shared services through their NDPB status?

Q.(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?

Q.(16) Do you agree that a mechanism should be established to manage and oversee collaboration and sharing of best practice between colleges?

Funding Model and College Sustainability Theme

Q.(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?

Promoting the Further Education Sector Theme

Q.(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?

Q.(18b) How could the benefits of professional and technical qualifications be promoted to the users of qualifications?

Annex C – Policy Commitments

THEME 1: 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.

THEME 2: 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.

THEME 3: 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.

THEME 4: EXCELLENCE: <i>to achieve the highest possible quality standards</i>
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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.

THEME 5: 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.

THEME 6: 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.

THEME 7: 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.

THEME 8: FUNDING MODEL AND COLLEGE SUSTAINABILITY: *to underpin priorities*

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.

THEME 9: PROMOTING THE FURTHER EDUCATION SECTOR: *with colleges ambitious for learners, employers and the wider region*

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.