**DEL QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE – A REFRESHED ACTION PLAN (2014)**

**A response to the key issues raised in the DEL Performance Report**

1. Annually, the Department for Employment and Learning (the Department) publishes a detailed quantitative assessment of performance across its key programmes and provision. The latest report, the fifth annual Performance Analysis report, was published in [November] 2014. The Department also publishes a Quality and Performance Action Plan to complement its annual performance report. The following Action Plan monitors the progress that is being made by the Department against the actions identified as a consequence of previous Performance Analysis reports but also updates and refreshes those actions so that they remain fully focused on the enhancement of performance. This body of work is an important element of the Department’s quality improvement strategy, ‘*Success through Excellence*’, which sets out its commitment to evidence based policy development and high quality service delivery. The Department is committed to ensuring that the provision it funds is of a high quality, and that those who provide these services on its behalf deliver high performance standards.
2. The Department has put in place an extensive framework for monitoring and delivering quality and performance across its programmes. A number of key examples are set out below:
3. Quality and Performance Monitoring in Further Education

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

1. Quality and Performance Monitoring in Higher Education

The Department charges the independent Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to undertake the quality assurance of Higher Education in Northern Ireland including that delivered through the six Further Education Colleges (HE in FE). The QAA’s core business is to externally review the quality and standards of UK higher education. It does this by auditing the way in which each university and college manages the overall quality and standards of its provision. It reviews the academic standards, academic quality and the quality of learning opportunities. The focused work of the QAA is further complemented by regular accountability meetings between senior staff in the Department and the local higher education institutions. These provide an opportunity to discuss issues on the performance, operation and accountability of each institution.

1. Quality and Performance Monitoring of Training and Employment Programmes

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

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

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

| **Key Issue** | **Planned Action from 2013 Action Plan Report** | **Progress Against 2013 planned action** | **Further Actions Planned from 2014** | **Timescale** | **Responsible Divisions** |
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| **The Department has exceeded its Programme for Government qualifications commitment; in the 2012/13 academic year there were almost 79,000 Level 2 and above full qualifications gained across mainstream Further Education, Essential Skills, funded Departmental Training programmes, and HE (including HE in FE) - against a target of 53,000. This represents 7.5% growth from the qualifications gained in 2011/12. In total, the Department has delivered 218,000 qualifications at Level 2 and above in the three years from 2010/11 to 2012/13.**  **However, enrolments in HE in FE provision have fallen in recent years, which could impact negatively on the number of qualifications achieved in that area in the future.** | Much of the decline relates to falling numbers in part-time HE in FE. Additional work is underway to encourage FE Colleges to increase part-time enrolments in proportion to full-time students. This includes the Department continuing to monitor college performance on enrolments and retention and achievements through the College Development Planning (CDP) process.  Introduce through the next (2013/14) CDP process a Quality Performance Adjustment process that penalises colleges financially for poor retention and achievement performance. | Overall enrolments increased during the period.  The Quality Performance Adjustment (QPA) was introduced in time to impact on the 2013-14 CDP process and resulting FE recurrent budget allocation. In 2013/14, the QPA related to full-time provision only, but in 2014/15 it will be extended to part-time and “bundled” provision, with the exception of GCSEs and A Levels. | Project 10 of the Higher Education Strategy for Northern Ireland - ‘Graduating to Success’ – will include a pilot to increase part time provision in bachelor degrees at selected colleges.  The Department is currently developing a revised strategy for further education in Northern Ireland, and quality and performance will be one of the main themes in the strategy.  DEL has been managing a media campaign to promote Foundation Degrees. Aimed in particular at employers and those already employed to encourage up-skilling in the workforce by undertaking a Foundation degree on a part-time basis. | Jan to Sept 2015  2015  Ongoing | HE & FE Divisions  FE Division  HE Division |

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

| **Key Issue** | **Planned Action from 2013 Action Plan Report** | **Progress Against 2013 planned action** | **Further Actions Planned from 2014** | **Timescale** | **Responsible Divisions** |
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| **The Northern Ireland Executive is committed, through its STEM Strategy - *Success through STEM*, to building the supply of STEM skills. This commitment is reflected also in the Executive’s Programme for Government and forms a central aspect of its Economic and Skills Strategies. Nevertheless, the latest DEL Annual Performance report indicated that more remains to be done to achieve the Executive’s ambitions in this important area.** | The Department is implementing a number of actions outlined within the STEM strategy. These actions are complemented by the actions contained within the Department’s sectoral action plans in ICT, Advanced Manufacturing and Food and Drink Processing.  Actions currently being taken forward as a result of this work include the continuation of the ‘BringITOn’ campaign and ‘Tasty Careers’, the provision of 1,350 additional undergraduate and 350 Phd places in areas of economic relevance, including STEM, by 2015/16, creation of industry backed STEM scholarships and further tranches of the software Testers Academy, Higher Level Apprentices in ICT and Engineering and the public / private sector ICT Apprenticeship.  The Department will consider if, and how, further education colleges could be incentivised to increase the number of enrolments in STEM areas.  Between December 2011 and November 2012, the Department announced a total of 1,060 additional STEM places for the two universities.  During the financial year 2013/14 Assured Skills will work in support of Invest NI’s Investment Strategy by contributing to 1,100 jobs, through the provision of bespoke training support, by March 2014. | Universities notified of their allocation of, and funding provided for, a total of 117 additional PhD places.  STEM supplement published in September 2013 in the regional newspapers to encourage more people to consider STEM subjects, courses and careers.  146 additional STEM places were allocated to HE in FE from September 2014  76 apprentices undertaking a Level 3 ICT Apprenticeship Programme  Through annual planning meetings with the Department, further education colleges are strongly encouraged to increase STEM enrolments.  A further 150 additional places allocated in June 2013 – a total of 1210 places for the two universities.  .  A total of 1,460 potential new jobs were created through the Assured Skills programme in Financial Services, ICT, Legal Services & Advanced manufacturing sectors. | 24 additional places are to be allocated to HE in FE by 2015/16  An additional 351 Phd places in areas of economic relevance, including STEM, by 2015/16  Support more students to undertake taught Masters programmes in strategically important subject areas agreed by the Department’s Working Groups (90 Masters scholarships provided in AY 2014/15 in economically relevant areas, covering the full cost of tuition fees).  STEM USA pilot scheme under development to enhance the teaching and learning experience of NI STEM undergraduates (narrow STEM) by providing a high quality US study experience.  The Department will continue to monitor college performance in this area. In addition, the Department is currently developing a revised strategy for further education in Northern Ireland, and one of the sub-themes will be to ensure that the funding model incentivises colleges to deliver the Department’s strategic priorities, including STEM .  549 additional STEM allocated places  STEM supplements in the regional newspapers are planned to encourage more people to consider STEM subjects, courses and careers.  STEM Charter commitment to gender equality launched  STEM Employers Equality Network (SEEN) to be established.  8 students attended a STEM related summer school at Worcester Polytechnic Institute  Support to the 2015 NI Science Festival.  A third cohort of the level 3 ICT apprenticeship.  During the financial year 2014/15 Assured Skills will work in support of Invest NI’s Investment Strategy by contributing to 1,100 jobs, through the provision of bespoke training support, by March 2015. | Sept 2015  Sept 2015  Sept 2014 to Aug 2015  Commence Summer 2015  2015  Academic Year 2014/15  Feb and Sept 2014 and Feb 2015  June 2014  On going  Summer 2014  Feb 2015  Launched in August 2014  Financial Year 2014/15 | HE & FE Divisions  HE Division  HE Division  HE Division  FE Division  HE Division  Skills & Industry Division  Skills & Industry Division  Skills & Industry Division  Skills & Industry Division  Skills & Industry Division  Skills & Industry Division  Skills & Industry Division |
| The Department has launched *Securing our Success*, a new Strategy on  apprenticeships.  The new Strategy is central to transforming our skills landscape and has a particular focus on raising skill levels in STEM areas.  The Department has commissioned a review of youth training, to align training provision at level 2 with the priority skills needed for the NI economy, including Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). | Securing our Success: NI Strategy on Apprenticeships was published June 2014.  The review of youth training interim report was published in November 2014. | Over the next 2 years we will deliver a number of actions to ensure the new system of apprenticeships is in place by September 2016.  This will include the establishment of sector partnerships to develop and agree new content/curriculum and the piloting of new Higher Level Apprenticeships in priority economic areas including STEM occupations.  Following a period of public consultation, a final strategy document and implementation plan for a new youth training system will be published in early 2015. The system will be fully operational by 2016. | The new system of apprenticeships will be operational by September 2016.  Final strategy on youth training due for publication in March/April 2015. | Youth Policy and Strategy  Youth Policy and Strategy |

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

| **Key Issue** | **Planned Action from 2013 Action Plan Report** | **Progress Against 2013 planned action** | **Further Actions Planned from 2014** | **Timescale** | **Responsible Divisions** |
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| Retention, achievement and course completion rates across the Department’s skills and training provision are a key indicator of wider quality and performance. There has been significant and sustained improvement in this area yet some variability remains in performance across providers. | The Department will continue to challenge colleges to improve their retention and achievement performance, through, for example:  • annual CDP process; • annual quality performance adjustment (financial); • annual publication of colleges’ retention and achievement performance; • benchmarking between 6 FE colleges in Northern Ireland; and • consider how to benchmark with FE colleges in the rest of the UK.  *Access to Success* – the integrated regional strategy for widening participation in Higher Education – will requireeach of Northern Ireland’s higher education providers, (including HE in FE), to produce a detailed annual Widening Access and Participation Plan (WAPP). The strategy seeks to put in place a student centred approach with tailored support mechanisms to ensure the successful retention and progression of students from widening participation backgrounds. | In the 2012/13 academic year, learner achievement rates in FE colleges were 87%, compared to 80% in 2010/11. Over this period, retention rates remained stable at around 89%.  New WAPP process introduced for all HE providers in April 2014. Plans have been agreed with almost all providers. | The Quality Performance Adjustment process outlined under A.1. is designed specifically to encourage and reward colleges to increase further their already high levels of retention and achievement. As indicated above, the Department is currently developing a revised strategy for further education in Northern Ireland, and quality and performance will be one of the main themes in the strategy. | Learner retention and achievement rates are monitored on an annual basis, and feature strongly in the annual college development planning meetings that are held with colleges. | FE Division |
|  |  |  | Training Programmes -  To use the individual supplier performance data more effectively to monitor key performance indicators and ensure suppliers are meeting and exceeding targets.  Address recurrent theme of weaknesses in leadership and management through requesting individual suppliers to present action plan to SID representatives outlining how they will address issues and improve performance . | Sept 2014-June 2015  Sept 2014-June 2015 | Skills & Industry Division  Skills & Industry Division |

1. **The Employment Agenda**

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

| **Key Issue** | **Planned Action from 2013 Action Plan Report** | **Progress Against 2013 planned action** | **Further Actions Planned from 2014** | **Timescale** | **Responsible Divisions** |
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| The desire to increase employment is central to the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy which sets a longer term strategic goal of increasing the employment rate in Northern Ireland so that, by 2030, it exceeds the average for the UK regions. In response to the downturn and to evidence from the Annual Performance report there is a particular need to focus on keeping young people close to the labour market and to move them into employment. | The Department is finalising the design of Steps 2 Success, the successor programme to Steps to Work. Participation will be mandatory for 18 -24 year olds after 9 months of a claim to JSA and mandatory for 25+ after 12 months of a claim.  The Youth Employment Scheme was launched in July 2012. Backed by a 3 year investment of £31 million, the Scheme will provide work experience, skills development and employment opportunities for 18 to 24 year old unemployed young people.  The Academy model is a short term intervention to help companies meet specific needs. To date, we have up-skilled unemployed graduates in software testing, cloud computing, data analytics and professional software skills, | Contracts for the delivery of Steps 2 Success were awarded in July 2014. Procurement was a 2 stage process with Stage 1 which examined financial and technical capacity and capability was completed in December 2013. After Stage 1 six contractors were brought forward in each contract lot to complete for the award of contract, Stage 2. Contracts were ultimately awarded to Ingeus (Belfast Contract area), EOS (Northern Contract Area) and Reed in partnership (Southern contract area).  11,043 Youth Employment Scheme placements had been secured by July 2014.  During the financial year 2013/14 116 graduates commenced training in a number of Academies, 93\* completed the training with 64 gaining full time employment. Software Professional course continues to be monitored to establish the number of students who gain employment following completion of the course. | The Steps 2 Success programme to ‘go live’  The Department is currently developing the specification for an ‘Into Work Skills Support Contract’ for use by Employment Service front line staff providing flexible external provision to that will help job ready clients find work before they become mandated to enter Steps 2 Success. | Commenced October 2014  Contract to be procured for delivery from April 2015 | Employment Service  Employment Service  Skills & Industry Division |
| During the financial year 2014/15 we intend to undertake further academies in DATA, software professional course, analytical training and sales & marketing. | Financial Year 2014/15 |

**B.2. Tackling economic inactivity through skills and training**

| **Key Issue** | **Planned Action from 2013 Action Plan Report** | **Progress Against 2013 planned action** | **Further Actions Planned from 2014** | **Timescale** | **Responsible Divisions** |
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| The Executive has committed to develop and implement a strategy to reduce economic inactivity in Northern Ireland. | The Economic Inactivity Strategy is being led by DEL and DETI and will develop interventions on the demand side and on the supply side. As a first step the Department has published a baseline study which provides a detailed analysis of factors contributing to the high rate of inactivity in Northern Ireland. The recommendations of the baseline study will underpin the draft strategy that will be presented to the Executive for agreement later this year. | In November 2013, the Executive agreed to a 12 week public consultation exercise on a draft strategic framework entitled “Enabling Success”. Consultation ended on 17 April 2014. | A revised draft Strategy will be presented to the Executive for approval later this year. | Dec 2014/Jan 2015 | Youth Policy and Strategy Division |

1. **The Innovation Agenda**

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

| **Key Issue** | **Planned Action from 2013 Action Plan Report** | **Progress Against 2013 planned action** | **Further Actions Planned from 2014** | **Timescale** | **Responsible Divisions** |
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| The higher education and further education sectors have the potential to significantly affect the level of innovative capacity through their role as knowledge-generators. | The Department will develop and implement a new formula funding model for the Higher Education Innovation Fund to be administered as part of the universities’ annual core funding allocation. This model will draw on best practice elsewhere to ensure that the Department is able to maximise the universities' performance against key knowledge transfer metrics while also ensuring that they are able to plan effectively, retain key staff and fully embed knowledge transfer within their overall Strategic Missions as their “Third Stream” of activity alongside, and closely integrated with, teaching and research. | Achieved. New NI HEIF 4 programme implemented from start of Academic Year 2013/14. | The Department will continue to support the Northern Ireland universities’ engagement with business and the wider community through the implementation of NI HEIF 4. The new FE strategy will provide an opportunity to review FE colleges’ contribution in this area. | Academic Year 2014/15 | He Division |

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

| **Key Issue** | **Planned Action from 2013 Action Plan Report** | **Progress Against 2013 planned action** | **Further Actions Planned from 2014** | **Timescale** | **Responsible Divisions** |
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| The university sector, in collaboration with the further education sector should continue to offer access to technology and knowledge capital to meet the development needs of business. | To develop and implement a third round of the Connected programme in order to build upon and sustain the progress to date in terms of collaborative working and transfer of knowledge between the FE and HE sectors, and knowledge transfer between these sectors and businesses. | Achieved. New Connected 3 programme implemented from start of Financial Year 2014/15. | The Department will continue to support coordinated knowledge transfer provision between the universities and further education colleges focussed on the meeting the needs of Northern Ireland businesses and the wider community through the implementation of Connected 3. The new FE strategy will provide an opportunity to review FE colleges’ contribution in this area. | Financial Year 2014/15 | He and FE Divisions |