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Welcome

Welcome to the second issue of the Higher Education Strategy E-zine, which we hope will continue to keep you up to date in relation to the implementation of the two Higher Education strategies for Northern Ireland, ‘Graduating to Success’ and ‘Access to Success’.

The first issue was a great success and we received very positive feedback that the E-zine was both informative and interesting. Thanks to those of you who forwarded the E-zine to colleagues.

The first issue of the E-zine provided an overview of all of the projects and the overall progress which had been made to that point. This issue focuses on a number of specific projects which have made significant progress over the last few months, including the first project to be successfully completed, Project 3, which focuses on knowledge transfer activities.

We recognise the difficult financial restrictions that the higher education sector in Northern Ireland is now facing. The Department is currently working through the impact of the budget cuts. Although the cuts to DEL’s budget are not as bad as had been anticipated, it is clear that the impact on the entire sector will still be quite significant. The impact of the cuts on the strategy projects will be considered within the context of how the wider budgetary pressures are managed.

Minister Farry has indicated that on foot of the budget settlement, he plans to engage with stakeholders to discuss the future resourcing of higher education in Northern Ireland. It is hoped that collectively, a way in which Northern Ireland can have a financially sustainable higher education system can be agreed and supported by all.

In closing, I would like to thank those of you involved in the project teams for your continued efforts and commitment to drive the projects forward.

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Sian McCleave
Acting Director of Higher Education Division, Department for Employment and Learning
In focus

Project 3: “Build Upon and Increase Sustainable Knowledge Transfer Activities”

Through the Connected initiative Queen’s, the University of Ulster and the six Further Education Colleges help businesses and the wider community to improve their performance by providing access to a broad portfolio of knowledge and technology support services.

The commercialisation of the research base in Northern Ireland is a critical factor in stimulating economic growth and job creation. It is through the transfer of knowledge to the local economy that the higher education sector’s contribution to wider society is maximised.

This project aims to build upon and increase sustainable knowledge transfer activities by committing the Department to undertaking four major actions in respect of knowledge transfer funding, namely:

• to maintain core funding for the universities’ knowledge transfer activities through the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) until 2013 and through the joint HE/FE Connected programme until 2014;
• to increase funding for the next rounds of HEIF and Connected to further underpin business and community engagement by both the higher and further education sectors;
• to develop and implement a new formula funding model for HEIF from 2013, to be administered as part of the universities’ annual core funding allocation; and
• to complement the investment in HEIF by developing and implementing a new Connected programme from 2014 (see Page 6) to further enhance the holistic approach of the higher and further education sectors in meeting the knowledge transfer needs of business and the wider community.

Not only has this project delivered all four of these actions in full, but it has enabled the HE Institutions and FE Colleges to deliver many other significant achievements, just a small subset of which are:

• the universities undertaking 2,707 business engagements, securing £9.299m in consultancy and securing £1.7m in income from Intellectual Property (against targets of 1,140, £6.94m and £0.863m respectively) during 11/12 to 12/13 through NI HEIF 3;
• the universities/FE colleges completing 313 knowledge transfer projects through DEL’s Connected 2 programme from 11/12 to 13/14 (against a target of 155); and
• the universities/FE colleges completing 37 major sectoral projects involving at least one university, FE college or agricultural body through DEL’s Connected 2 programme from 11/12 to 13/14 (against a target of 14).

Northern Ireland’s performance in the context of the annual UK wide ‘Higher Education – Business & Community Interaction’ (HE-BCI) survey helps set Project 3 in a wider context. HE-BCI reports on a range of activities including the commercialisation of new knowledge through collaborative research, the delivery of professional training, consultancy and services by universities to businesses and community groups culminating in activities intended to have direct social benefits to the community in Northern Ireland.

The latest HE-BCI survey for Academic Year 2012/13 shows that UK universities received £3.6 billion (including Government funding) from business and community interaction, an increase of around 4% in cash terms from the previous year. The comparable figure for NI universities is £92 million, which represents a 6% increase from 2011/12 income levels.
Furthermore, the NI universities’ income from business and community interaction represents 2.6% of the UK total which is an impressive statistic in a context where Northern Ireland accounts for only 2.1% of UK GVA (Gross Value Added) and for 2.0% of the UK’s FTE (Full Time Equivalent) academics.

NI HEIF 4 and Connected 3 are clear Departmental priorities and the Department’s support for this ‘Third Mission’ of knowledge transfer and innovation helps ensure that the entrepreneurial ethos of our universities remains strongly underpinned and can deliver real economic benefit.

Launching the third round of the Connected programme, Connected 3 on 15th October 2014 Minister Farry said...

“Connected 3 will continue to develop a broad and growing portfolio of industrial support networks spanning Queen’s, the University of Ulster and all six further education colleges, further developing the programme’s existing links with both the Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute and with the College of Agriculture, Food & Rural Enterprise, whilst also now seeking to build an entirely new relationship with the Open University in Northern Ireland.

“Businesses will now have coordinated access to the full portfolio of expertise represented by all of Northern Ireland’s regional colleges, universities and agricultural institutes - in terms of research, product development, knowledge transfer, innovation, skills and training.

“Connected 3 will make a key contribution to the economy over the next four years and deliver an even greater benefit to individual businesses, particularly small companies with little or no previous experience of working with universities and colleges.”
In focus  Launch of Revised Higher Education Information on NI Direct Website

Project 8 is focused on improving learning information in regard to higher education. One of the key target outcomes of the project is that “learners are able to access high quality, relevant and timely information on all aspects of higher education in Northern Ireland”. The development of a central web portal on the NI Direct website for all Northern Ireland higher education information is one of the key measures being taken forward in order to meet this target.

The Project Manager for project 8 has been working closely with the institutions over recent months to ensure that the portal links to the relevant institutional information. The Department has conducted an online survey and commissioned focus group research in order to obtain feedback from current users of the higher education section of the NI Direct website.

The research has helped inform the development of the new content and structure of the site. Research showed that most of the traffic to the site was from users seeking financial information about the cost of higher education courses and the availability of financial support to students. The project team therefore revised the financial information to ensure that it was prominent and easy to find and that useful links to external sites were included.

The research also showed that most survey respondents were adults considering entering higher education and that most respondents were from Britain rather than Northern Ireland. This led to the development of new case studies to show the diversity of the student population in Northern Ireland’s higher education institutions and more background information on Northern Ireland’s universities and colleges themselves.
The revised format and content on NI Direct aims to ensure that current and prospective learners:
• have easy access to accurate and relevant information of the highest possible quality;
• are better informed regarding all aspects of higher education;
• are assisted in their decision-making in regard to higher education; and
• can make informed choices regarding their course.

It is also hoped that the enhanced information provision will ultimately contribute to improvements in retention and progression.

The new content and structure went live at the end of November and can be accessed at the following link: [www.nidirect.gov.uk/higher-education](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/higher-education)
In focus Increasing Northern Ireland’s international Higher Education activity

Graduating to Success makes a commitment to significantly increase outward international mobility. As part of this commitment, through project 7, ‘Increase Northern Ireland’s international Higher Education activity’, it is intended to ensure that learners have the opportunity to undertake an international mobility programme, whether through government-funded programmes or opportunities provided by individual institutions.

To deliver on this vision a project team comprising key sector stakeholders was established. The project team has established a formal link with the UK Higher Education International Unit, who are implementing the UK HE Strategy for Outward Mobility. A Departmental representative sits on the HE UK Outward Mobility Strategy Board.

In terms of take-up of outgoing mobility opportunities, students in Northern Ireland seem more reluctant to go overseas than students in other UK nations. Therefore it is important that we understand the barriers to mobility and develop strategies to address these barriers. It is also important that we promote international mobility and help academics and students understand the benefits to academic and employability outcomes for the individual, to the institutions’ profile and to the nation as a whole.

To address this issue the Department for Employment and Learning and the UK Higher Education International Unit held two mobility workshops on 30 October – one in Queen’s University Belfast and one in the University of Ulster.
The workshops were attended by senior management, academics, International offices and Careers offices in NI higher education institutions, with programmes including:

- Introduction to Northern Ireland higher education strategy/UK Strategy on Outward Mobility;
- Discussion of current student mobility activity in Northern Ireland;
- Discussion of barriers to outward student mobility (to include academic structures, curricula content, credit recognition, attitudes, finance);
- Discussion of the benefits of outward mobility (including research evidence);
- Presentations/case studies of good practice; and
- Proposed solutions and next steps for promoting outward mobility in Northern Ireland.

Further workshops targeting students/NUS and employers will be considered in due course.
In focus  Promotion of Foundation degrees

One of the projects that readers may be aware of due to the media campaign which forms part of it is project 20 which aims to promote Foundation degrees.

The project aims to put in place a wide ranging and sustained advertising and promotion campaign for Foundation degrees in order to raise awareness of, and buy in to, the qualification, particularly among employers, with the ultimate aim of increasing enrolments.

The advertising campaign was first launched in January 2013 and runs across a variety of media platforms, including radio, online and outdoor locations. The employer aspect of the campaign focuses on informing employers about the various ways they can get involved with Foundation degrees and the potential benefits to their organisations. The campaign also informs employees about the up skilling and re skilling benefits of Foundation degrees.

The most recent tranche of advertising, targeting employees, launched at the beginning of September 2014. A larger tranche of advertising, targeting employers, will launch in March 2015.

Independent research into the impact of the advertising so far indicates a 15% increase in awareness of Foundation degrees amongst employers (since December 2012). Amongst employees, general awareness has also increased, by 7%, with an 18% increase in the key 25-34 year old age group.

The campaign forms part of the Department’s broader Skills to Succeed campaign.

Foundation degree – Employees
Foundation degree – Employers
The ‘Reach Higher’ advertising campaign, which is designed to raise awareness of HE among under-represented groups, was launched on 10 March 2014 and utilises TV, radio, outdoor and digital media to get key messages across to potential students.

The campaign forms part of the Department’s broader Skills to Succeed campaign.

Reach Higher contributes to outcomes in the following HE Strategy projects:

- Improve learner information in regard to higher education
- Enhance engagement between the higher education sector, the community and government.
- Development of Philanthropic / Community Bursaries

The Reach Higher campaign highlights additional support measures for disadvantaged students to sustain access for continuing participation in higher education. It also highlights inspiring stories of people who have successfully accessed higher education, overcoming barriers to enrich their own careers.
Further Information

We would be delighted to have any feedback, suggestions or queries. Please contact us via one of the following methods:

**T:** 028 90 25 7745  
**E:** HE.StrategyProgrammeManagementOffice@delni.gov.uk

You can also view copies of the strategies via the links below:

Graduating to Success  
Access to Success

Tell A Colleague

Do you know a colleague who might be interested in receiving this e-zine? If so please forward this issue of the e-zine to them **FORWARD**

If a colleague has forwarded this e-zine to you and you would like to subscribe to receive future issues please click here **SUBSCRIBE**

If you would like to unsubscribe from this newsletter, please click here **UNSUBSCRIBE**

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**Issue 1 - ‘Who’s Involved’ section**

In the first issue of the E-zine we inadvertently omitted the University and College Union Northern Ireland from the organisations listed in the ‘Who’s Involved?’ section.

We would like to apologise for this oversight - the UCU representatives make a huge contribution to the strategy through their participation on several of the Project Teams. We recognise and appreciate their continued commitment and input to help ensure successful implementation of the projects.