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Department for
**Employment
and Learning**

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NORTHERN IRELAND

Higher Education Strategy

ISSUE 1



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Welcome

Welcome to the first issue of what will be a regular e-zine designed to keep key stakeholders and interested parties up-to-date in relation to the implementation of 'Graduating to Success', the Higher Education Strategy for Northern Ireland, and 'Access to Success', the integrated regional strategy for widening participation in higher education.

This first issue of the e-zine aims to bring you up to speed on the background to the two strategies and the good early work which has been made to progress implementation of the projects which flow from the strategies.

Future issues of the e-zine will also focus on what the changes being brought about by the projects might mean for you as well as focusing in detail on particular projects.

The expertise and support of all of those involved in taking the projects forward has been invaluable in helping us to make significant progress as we aim

to maintain and further develop our dynamic, high quality, world-renowned higher education sector.

Please feel free to forward this e-zine, which we intend to issue a couple of times each year, to any of your colleagues who you think might be interested in receiving it.

I hope that you find the e-zine to be an informative and useful read.

Nuala Kerr
Director of Higher Education
Division, Department for
Employment and Learning



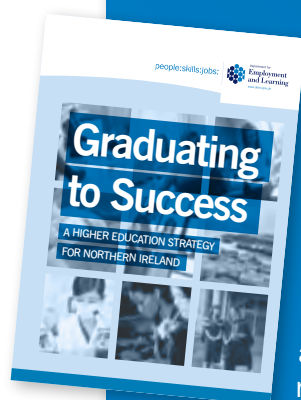
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Overview

Graduating to Success

- The first ever Higher Education Strategy for Northern Ireland
- Published in April 2012
- Provides a long term vision for the higher education sector and sets out in detail the direction for higher education policy in Northern Ireland
- Vision for higher education is of a sector which is vibrant and of international calibre; which pursues excellence in teaching and research; which plays a pivotal

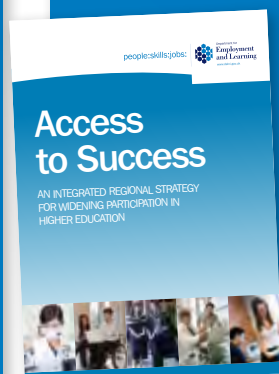
role in the development of a modern, sustainable knowledge-based economy; which supports a confident, shared society; and which recognises and values diversity



Access to Success

- The first regional strategy for widening participation in higher education
- Published in September 2012
- Complements Graduating to Success
- The strategy supports the aim that any qualified individual in Northern Ireland should be able to gain access to the Higher Education that is right for them, irrespective of their personal or social background
- The strategy's focus is on individual students with the aim of helping higher education providers to work to common definitions and

measures for widening participation, while developing their own unique approaches within a common framework



Implementing the Strategies

- 19 projects flowing from the two strategies to be delivered between 2013 and 2020
- The Department for Employment and Learning has put in place programme management structures to ensure efficient implementation
- An **Implementation Committee**, comprised of senior officials from government and stakeholders in the higher education, business and community sectors oversees the implementation of the strategies (see photo)
- A **Programme Steering Group**, comprising relevant Departmental directors and accountable to the Implementation Committee, is responsible for driving forward implementation
- Each project is led by a project manager who is responsible for forming Project Teams to take the work forward
- The Project Teams include representatives from a range of organisations who bring relevant expertise to contribute to implementation of the respective projects
- The **Project Management Board** comprises each of the project managers responsible for running the projects on a day to day basis and meets on a regular basis to report on and discuss progress and to identify risks, delays and issues



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Who's Involved?

Individuals from a wide range of organisations are represented on the project teams responsible for implementation, including:

Department for Employment and Learning	Department of Education	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Industry	Queen's University	College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise
University of Ulster	Open University	Stranmillis University College	St Mary's University College	Higher Education Funding Council for England
Colleges NI	National Union of Students-Union of Students in Ireland	Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action	Business sector representatives nominated by Institute of Directors	Business sector representatives nominated by Confederation of British Industry
Higher Education Academy	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education	Higher Education Authority	Supporting Professionalism in Admissions	Higher Education Statistics Agency
Centre for Cross Border Studies	UK HE International Unit	Quality and Qualifications Ireland	Office for Fair Access	Universities and Colleges Admission Service
Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework	Office of Qualifications and Exam Regulations	Council for the Curriculum Examinations & Assessment		

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19 Projects

Project 1. Economically Relevant Subjects

The Executive's Programme for Government emphasises the importance of ensuring the number of learners undertaking higher level courses in economically relevant subjects and commits the Department to increasing the uptake in economically relevant Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics places.

This project aims to ensure that more learners will be undertaking a higher education course in economically relevant subjects, supported by a number of Departmental initiatives, which will ultimately benefit the future economy in Northern Ireland.

Project 2. World Leading Research and Development

This project aims to increase the focus on internationally excellent and world-leading research and development at the universities in order to strengthen their research capacity and also benefit the Northern Ireland economy.

Project 3. Knowledge Transfer Activities

This project aims to help facilitate knowledge transfer activities which will benefit both the economy and the higher education sector through the Higher Education Innovation Fund and the Connected programme.

Project 4. Single Quality Assurance Framework

This project aims to ensure that the higher education sector benefits from a 'fit for purpose' quality assurance framework. In order to ensure consistency of approach in quality assurance in Northern Ireland's higher education sector, this project will aim to introduce a single review system across all higher education institutions in Northern Ireland.

19 Projects

Project 5. Supportive Learning Environment

This project is focused on making sure that learners are supported by a variety of measures throughout their higher education experience with the result that retention rates will improve as a result. The project recognises that learners must be provided with the highest quality student experience from admission to graduation and that they must be supported throughout their academic career to achieve their full potential.

Project 6. Graduate Employability Prospects

This project aims to ensure that Northern Ireland graduates will have a distinctive portfolio of skills and knowledge that will set them apart in the international graduate labour market.

It aims to ensure that all learners will be provided with opportunities to develop a portfolio of skills, attributes and experiences that will give them an advantage in this regard and also sets challenging targets for the provision of work placements for learners both here and abroad. The extracurricular skills, activities and experiences of graduates will be recorded by institutions as part of a Higher Education Achievement Report.

Project 7. International HE Activity

This project aims to take forward a range of measures to increase Northern Ireland's international activity by attracting more students from abroad, encouraging more home students to avail of international mobility opportunities, further developing its portfolio of overseas institutional partnerships and expanding its transnational education activity.

As a result, it is anticipated that Northern Ireland's market share of the international student market will increase, and that our higher education sector will become more diverse.

19 Projects

Project 8. Improving Learner Information

This project aims to make relevant higher education information accessible via a single web-based portal and to develop and implement an awareness-raising campaign about the benefits of higher education to ensure that learners will be able to access high quality, relevant and timely information on all aspects of higher education in Northern Ireland.

Project 9. Enhancing Community and Government Engagement

This project aims to encourage the institutions to review their social and community engagement strategies and adopt a systematic approach to such engagement, based on best practice throughout the UK and overseas; using their skills and expertise to benefit and engage effectively with local communities.

Project 10. University Bases at the Further Education Colleges

This project aims to develop a pilot scheme for the creation of university bases at the further education colleges which will provide the opportunity for Higher Education students to undertake distance learning at the Colleges, with access to the university materials and resources they need on a planned basis, thus further improving rural access to Higher Education across Northern Ireland.

Project 11. Cross-border Cooperation and Student Mobility

This project is focused on supporting the institutions in seeking cross-border co-operation and opportunities for collaboration in higher education, particularly in border areas, with a view to improving co-operation and links between higher education institutions and enhancing student mobility.

Project 12. Lifelong Learning System

This project aims to ensure that access to, and routes through, higher education should be easily identifiable for prospective and existing learners by creating a new credit framework for higher education in Northern Ireland with a view to modular learning being available to all learners in higher education.

19 Projects

Project 13. Funding Model Review now incorporating Project 15. Maximum Student Number review

Project 13 commits the Department to review and revise the higher education funding model by 2020 in order to ensure more flexibility in support of a modular learning environment and to take account of changes in demographics and student demand. Project 15, which will now be taken forward as an integral part of project 13, commits the Department to conducting a review of the Maximum Student Number (MaSN).

Project 14. Efficiency Savings

This project is concerned with improving efficiency across the sector as well as considering the opportunities for shared service provision.

Project 15. (see Project 13 above)

Project 16. Governance and Accountability

This project commits the Department, in co-operation with the institutions, to reviewing the governance and accountability framework for higher education. Any governance and accountability structure will acknowledge the autonomy of the higher education institutions but also ensure the need to provide value for money for taxpayers.

Project 17. Pre and Post Entry Data Gathering

This project aims to determine and agree a set of parameters to identify widening participation cohorts and individuals at each stage of the student /learner experience based on multiple disadvantages and including an assessment of individual needs.

The outputs of the project will help to ensure that accurate information about the nature and scale of under-representation within higher education is more readily available.

19 Projects

Project 18 **New Application Routes**

This project aims to encourage the development of application routes to higher education which are facilitated through admission processes that consider both academic performance and, in the case of students from targeted widening participation cohorts, relevant contextual data.

Project 19. **Philanthropic / Community Bursaries**

This project aims to develop options to encourage the establishment and expansion of philanthropic bursary programmes at community level across Northern Ireland to help to break down community barriers to participation in higher education and to improve university / community liaison.

Project 20. **Foundation degrees**

This 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.

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What's Been Achieved So Far?

The targets flowing from the strategies span from 2013-2020 and, at a minimum, Project Managers are in place and early development work has commenced on all of the projects.

Good progress has been made on those projects requiring early action with a number of targets having already been achieved and in a number of cases exceeded. Significant achievements resulting from the projects to date include:

- By academic year 2014/15, the number of additional STEM undergraduate places will increase to 1350, an increase of 11.9% using 2011/12 as the baseline.
- Extra £3 million added to the research funding pot in support of STEM and areas of wider economic relevance.
- During Academic year 2011/12 and 2012/13 through the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) the universities undertook a total of 2,437 business engagements, secured £8.699m in consultancy and secured £1,367k in income from Intellectual Property.
- 238 knowledge transfer projects completed by universities/FE colleges through the 'Connected 2' programme, exceeding the three year target to March 2014 of 155. A total of 37 sectoral projects have also been established to date substantially exceeding the target of 14 to March 2014.
- 'Student Charters' are in place across all HE providers.
- New draft Widening Access and Participation Plan and associated processes have been developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders.
- Community bursaries programmes launched in Belfast and in Omagh.
- Wide-ranging promotional and advertising campaign aimed at raising awareness of Foundation degrees commenced. Independent benchmarking and tracking of the campaign demonstrates a very positive impact in terms of increasing awareness and understanding of the qualification and its potential benefits.

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What's Next?

A number of key outputs are due to be delivered through the projects during 2014, including:

- Development and implementation of the next round of the Connected programme to build on 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.
- Consideration of the options for establishing an initiative aimed at economically inactive people.
- Consideration of the options for an initiative to support learners who study a priority economically relevant subject at a university in Northern Ireland.
- Department to continue to work with the universities on rebalancing the profile of their courses to ensure that the qualifications offered more closely reflect the needs of the economy.
- The first Research Excellence Framework (REF) assessment will take place.
- HEIs will improve their pre-entry, induction and pastoral support for all prospective and existing students.
- All universities and university colleges will have adopted the Higher Education Achievement Report.
- The institutions will have reviewed their international strategies and set challenging targets to enhance their international standing.

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Further Information

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

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E: HE.StrategyProgrammeManagementOffice@delni.gov.uk

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

[Graduating to Success](#)

[Access to Success](#)

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