## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Strategic, Economic and Social Rationale for Apprenticeships</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Theme 1: The Components of an Apprenticeship</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Theme 2: Increasing Participation</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Theme 3: Partnership – The Role of the Key Players</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Theme 4: Ensuring Quality</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Way Forward</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annex: Implementation Plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Foreword

This Northern Ireland Strategy on Apprenticeships is central to transforming our skills landscape and to securing our economic success.

Skills are the key driver of positive economic change, and are also a powerful tool to promote individual opportunity and to achieve greater social inclusion.

My Department is based around investing in people, developing skills, and helping to deliver sustained employment. In many respects, we are the engine-room of the Northern Ireland economy, and through a strong matching of supply and demand we can maximise its efficiency. We have twin objectives of raising skill levels overall, in particular in the crucial science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) areas, and maximising economic participation.

Apprenticeships provide an excellent means by which employers can obtain the skills they require as well as being assured that across the economy there is a critical mass of people with strong technical and good employability skills.

Apprentices, in turn, know that they have the skills that are wanted by employers and relevant to the local economy, and as such, they will have enhanced prospects of good earnings and sustained employment.


This strategy now sets out the way forward through a series of new policy commitments and an implementation plan.

Many of our commitments amount to a step-change to the system of apprenticeships in Northern Ireland. We are seeking to commence apprenticeships from level 3 upwards, with a major commitment to higher level apprenticeships. Apprenticeships will be extended to a wider range of occupational areas, and also provide pathways into further and higher education.
In turn, a complementary reformed system of youth training will create fresh progression routes into apprenticeships. I am passionately committed to ensuring that we provide a full range of opportunities for our young people to achieve their full potential in terms of education, training and employment.

This new system will only be successful with a significant increase in the number of employers offering apprenticeship opportunities. A new strategic advisory forum and sectoral partnerships will be established to place employers in the lead role in ensuring the provision and content of apprenticeships meets their needs.

The establishment of these bodies will be among the key early actions I will take in implementing the policy commitments outlined in this statement. Their work in defining the awards and qualifications to be delivered through apprenticeships will be progressed in tandem with my Department’s ongoing higher level apprenticeship pilots and new public sector apprenticeships.

To support our new model for apprenticeships, we will also be establishing a new central service to engage and support both employers and potential apprentices. The central service will be complemented by a range of incentives to support participation.

We also need to encourage more young people to engage in apprenticeships. I want apprenticeships to have the same parity of esteem as other educational pathways, and the role of many key influencers and the provision of good careers advice will be critical in this regard.

I am very grateful for the advice from the Expert Panel, the invaluable contributions from those who responded to the consultation and those stakeholders who engaged with the Apprenticeship Review, and the ongoing feedback and suggestions from the Assembly’s Committee for Employment and Learning.

This strategy now provides a huge opportunity to facilitate economic and social progress. Our challenge now becomes one of delivery. These reforms will constitute a major, ongoing priority for my Department.

Dr. Stephen Farry MLA
Minister for Employment and Learning
Executive Summary
Executive Summary

This strategy provides the future direction of apprenticeships in Northern Ireland, and sets out the new policy commitments and an implementation plan to ensure their delivery.


The final policy position for apprenticeships is summarised under four themes. These themes and the proposals outlined have been consolidated into 20 policy commitments, summarised overleaf.
**Theme 1: The Components of an Apprenticeship**

The policy commitments in this theme will establish apprenticeships as a system of employment and learning that is adaptive to the particular needs of employers across a wider range of sectors and at higher levels. It includes a number of underpinning elements to support this expansion, as set out below.

**Policy Commitment 1:** There will be a new system for apprenticeships in Northern Ireland that will enable its application across the full range of occupations and at higher levels. An apprenticeship will be recognised through a series of core components, as set out in i – v (outlined below).

**Core Component i:** An apprenticeship will be for a new employee, or in the case of an existing employee, a new job role that requires a substantial amount of learning and skills development.

**Core Component ii:** An apprenticeship will be available in professional and technical occupations commencing from level 3 up to level 8.

**Core Component iii:** The completion of an apprenticeship will take at least two years.

**Core Component iv:** Apprenticeships will enable mobility within a sector and across the wider economy by including a breadth of training beyond the specific needs of a job through both on and off-the-job training.

**Core Component v:** An apprenticeship will be designed to facilitate the progression of participants to higher professional or technical training or on to a higher academic pathway.

**Policy Commitment 2:** There will be a single award/qualification for apprenticeship occupations at each level.

**Policy Commitment 3:** Apprenticeships will be open to everyone, irrespective of age, with a primary focus on young people aged 16-24.

**Policy Commitment 4:** Measures will be put in place to facilitate progression and to support individuals to make the transition to apprenticeships at level 3.

**Policy Commitment 5:** The development of apprenticeship awards/qualifications will facilitate wider international applicability. Support measures will be put in place to fully utilise opportunities for international placements and exchanges.
Theme 2: Increasing Participation

This theme focuses on ensuring that apprenticeships will play a fundamental role in meeting the future skills needs of the economy by increasing the participation of employers and apprentices.

**Policy Commitment 6:** Government will establish a central service to support apprenticeships for both employers and participants, including an online portal for the advertising and application of apprenticeship opportunities.

**Policy Commitment 7:** Apprenticeships will be facilitated in a wide range of professional and technical occupations, reflecting the needs of the Northern Ireland economy.

**Policy Commitment 8:** Apprenticeships will be expanded to include professional and technical occupations within the public sector.

**Policy Commitment 9:** Government will support employers’ participation in apprenticeships, in particular small and micro businesses, through financial incentives and other support mechanisms.

**Policy Commitment 10:** The Careers Service will provide impartial advice and guidance for young people considering the apprenticeship pathway.

**Policy Commitment 11:** Apprenticeships will include a range of measures to support the participation by both genders across occupations, and to address other equality issues, such as encouraging the participation of people with disabilities.
Theme 3: Partnership – The Roles of the Key Players

The sustained engagement of the key stakeholders is a core feature in successful apprenticeship systems. This theme sets out how this will be facilitated in the future apprenticeship model, including the roles and responsibilities of the different partners.

**Policy Commitment 12:** A strategic advisory forum, based on a partnership comprising employers, government, trade unions and providers of off-the-job training, will be established to advise government on the provision of apprenticeships.

**Policy Commitment 13:** Sectoral partnerships will be established to design and agree apprenticeship provision and inform demand at a sectoral level.

**Policy Commitment 14:** A skills barometer mechanism will be established to support the better matching of apprenticeship supply and demand.
Theme 4: Ensuring Quality

The future apprenticeship programme will have a greater focus on quality from the perspective of the employer, the apprentice and government. This theme establishes how the future model will ensure high quality apprenticeships.

**Policy Commitment 15:** Quality and achievement of the full apprenticeship award/qualification will be the barometers of success for apprenticeship provision.

**Policy Commitment 16:** The content, duration and assessment of each apprenticeship will be subject to rigorous assurance by inspectors who have up-to-date experience in the professional and technical areas, supported by industry experts, to ensure each apprenticeship meets the needs of employers and apprentices.

**Policy Commitment 17:** To support the quality of teaching and learning, criteria will be set for all teaching staff, which will establish minimum qualification requirements in the subject area and related pedagogy, as well as up-to-date experience in industry, as defined by sectoral groups.

**Policy Commitment 18:** All those involved in the delivery of the off-the-job training will undertake professional training in pedagogy.

**Policy Commitment 19:** Stringent requirements will be established for continuous professional development to ensure that those delivering training remain expert in their field.

**Policy Commitment 20:** Only those providers who meet the minimum quality standards, as determined by the Department will be funded to deliver apprenticeship training.

The next steps to be taken in terms of implementation of these policy commitments are set out in the way forward.
1

Introduction
1. Introduction

This Strategy represents the culmination of the Review of Apprenticeships in Northern Ireland, and builds on the review’s interim report published in January 2014 (http://www.delni.gov.uk/interim-report-review-of-apprenticeships.pdf). It articulates the policy for the future model for apprenticeships, setting out, at a high level, the steps to be taken to implement the new model.

The Review of Apprenticeships identified a clear economic and social imperative for providing apprenticeships, not only for the growth and realignment of the economy but also for the significant returns they offer both employers and apprentices directly. In delivering these benefits, apprenticeships will assist in rebalancing and rebuilding the economy.

The outcome of the consultation process indicated broad support for the proposals in the review’s interim report. The full summary of the consultation responses is available at: http://www.delni.gov.uk/apprenticeshipreview

It is the ambition of the Department that Northern Ireland’s system of apprenticeships will be of a gold standard and will form a key part of a new skills landscape. This system will offer a spectrum of support from entry level up to level 8 (equivalent to a Doctorate), facilitate lifelong learning and allow participants to move in and out of professional education and training at their own pace. The complementary and connected Review of Youth Training will, among other outcomes, provide opportunities for young people to progress into apprenticeships.

To contribute to this wider goal, this policy outlines the definitive way forward for apprenticeships through 20 key policy commitments that fall under the following four themes:

- The Components of an Apprenticeship
- Increasing Participation
- Partnership – The Roles of the Key Players
- Ensuring Quality
The policy commitments that sit under each theme will be delivered through a series of cross cutting projects. The relevant projects arising from each policy commitment are noted alongside each statement.

The projects are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project A</th>
<th>Components</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project B</td>
<td>Awards/Qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project C</td>
<td>Internationalisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project D</td>
<td>Central Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project E</td>
<td>Funding Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project F</td>
<td>Public Sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project G</td>
<td>Widening Access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project H</td>
<td>Higher Level Apprenticeships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project I</td>
<td>Governance and Oversight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project J</td>
<td>Developing a Northern Ireland Skills Barometer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project K</td>
<td>Quality Assurance Model</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Details for each of these projects are set out in the implementation plan in the Annex.
2
The Strategic, Economic and Social Rationale for Apprenticeships
2. The Strategic, Economic and Social Rationale for Apprenticeships

The Role of Apprenticeships in a Modern Skills Landscape

Across much of the developed world, there has been a renewed focus on apprenticeships as a mechanism to improve and encourage skills development, innovation and economic growth. Apprenticeships can help governments with efforts to improve the prospects of young people through providing better education to employment transitions, and clearer progression pathways to higher level education and training. They can also help to ensure that employers are provided with the skills needed to grow their business and improve competitiveness.

Many countries and regions are turning to the positive experience of the Germanic approach and model, where the vocational, professional and technical systems work collaboratively to inform their apprenticeship system and secure a highly skilled workforce. Well-developed apprenticeship systems in exemplar countries, such as Australia and Germany have been found to secure benefits to the local economy, through net returns on public investment in apprenticeships of between €21,000 and €43,000 per apprentice1. In addition, the potential of a well-developed apprenticeship system to alleviate youth unemployment is evidenced by the lower levels, found in Germanic states, when compared to countries with less developed vocational routes.

The Benefits of Apprenticeships

BENEFITS TO THE ECONOMY

The primary benefit to the economy from apprenticeships is a better matching of supply and demand for skills. In Northern Ireland, there is a clear need to be pro-active in interventions and approaches that develop the skill levels of our workforce. While recent evidence demonstrates that qualifications of the working age population have improved at all levels, when compared to other countries, we still have a high proportion of people with low or no qualifications. Furthermore, compared to the rest of the United Kingdom (UK), significantly fewer people hold qualifications at level 3 and above (43.5% compared to 52.0%).

The potential for apprenticeships to contribute to economic growth and alleviate youth unemployment is also particularly vital in the context of Northern Ireland. While the labour market is showing positive signs of improvement, the ratio of youth unemployment compared to total unemployment has been persistently high.

Meeting the challenges of high youth unemployment and low skills through a range of interventions, including apprenticeships, will help to re-engage young people in the labour market and also promote greater social inclusion. The Executive’s commitment to promoting social inclusion is firmly rooted in its Delivering Social Change policy framework. For individuals, improved skills provide a route to stable employment, better wages, and long-term prosperity, as well as to personal development and fulfilment. Wider benefits, including better health and greater social mobility, arise from this.

**BENEFITS TO EMPLOYERS**

Research demonstrates that there is a clear business imperative for employers to provide apprenticeships. Apprenticeships provide significant financial and non-financial benefits for employers. Where an apprentice is retained after the completion of training there are significant returns to the employer. Apprenticeships also help businesses address skills gaps by providing vital skills and workforce development aligned to specific organisational values.

Apprenticeships benefit employers of all sizes, including small and micro businesses which form the vast majority of our economy. Going forward, apprenticeships will be designed to engage with these businesses, by responding directly to their needs in terms of ease of access, relevant training, incentives and support. They will also be aligned to the needs of larger employers, including those who invest in Northern Ireland from overseas, reinforcing the gains that the region has already made in attracting foreign direct investment.

**BENEFITS TO APPRENTICES**

Apprenticeships deliver a range of benefits to participants by supporting a variety of learning preferences through both on-the-job and off-the-job training, and affording opportunities for well-paid jobs and sustainable employment. The practical nature of an apprenticeship, through learning by doing, offers an opportunity to maximise each apprentice’s potential.

 Undertaking a quality apprenticeship leads to a much stronger chance of the participant being employed. In particular, countries with well-developed
apprenticeships, including Switzerland, Austria, Denmark and Germany, are among those with low levels of unemployment and the lowest share of young people experiencing multiple spells of unemployment. Apprenticeships deliver good returns compared to other forms of professional and technical training, with high earnings for the apprentice over his/her lifetime. On average, individuals with a level 3 apprenticeship earn between £77,000 and £117,000 more over their lifetime than similar individuals with level 2 qualifications.

Apprenticeships can also be a valuable lever to promote social mobility by, for example, improving access into the professions for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. There is both an economic and social imperative for an apprenticeship, due to the ability of an apprenticeship to improve social mobility through a non-academic progression route that is well respected.

**Policy Context**

Apprenticeships will be delivered and supported within the context of a range of connected policy initiatives. The interim report of the Review of Apprenticeships highlighted the key strategic and policy drivers in Northern Ireland that will inform the delivery of apprenticeships going forward. These include:

- **Programme for Government (2011-15)**  
- **Economic Strategy**  
- **Skills Strategy**  
- **STEM Strategy**  
- **Review of Careers**  
  [http://www.delni.gov.uk/review-of-careers](http://www.delni.gov.uk/review-of-careers)
- **Review of Youth Training**  
  [http://www.delni.gov.uk/review-of-youth-training](http://www.delni.gov.uk/review-of-youth-training)

The policy for apprenticeships aligns with the priorities set out in both the Executive’s Programme for Government and Economic Strategy to pursue relentlessly economic growth and prosperity for all citizens. In particular, the focus in the Economic Strategy on investment in skills and innovation aligns closely with the goals for apprenticeships going forward, and the wider work of the Department, as expressed in the Skills Strategy *Success through Skills – Transforming Futures*[^4].

[^4]: [http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/successthroughskills.htm](http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/successthroughskills.htm)
This strategy highlights the importance of upskilling to raise productivity, increase social inclusion, and help Northern Ireland to compete in the global marketplace. Specific interventions to support up-skilling have included the cross Departmental strategy for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) Success through STEM\textsuperscript{5}, which outlined the government’s aims and key interventions to encourage more young people to study and pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

In aligning with these key strategic initiatives, apprenticeships will form a key part of a new skills landscape for Northern Ireland. This landscape will provide a spectrum of support from entry level up to level 8, which facilitates lifelong learning and allows participants to move in and out of professional education and training at their own pace. In order to ensure this outcome, the Department is currently undertaking two policy reviews which are inextricably linked to the Review of Apprenticeships, the Review of Youth Training and the Review of Careers.

The Review of Youth Training aims to provide a clear pathway of sufficient breadth and depth for young people to progress into sustained employment, apprenticeships or further education. The new youth training programme will be linked fundamentally to the needs of those employers who recruit at level 2, and closely aligned to the wider needs of the economy by using robust local labour market intelligence. It will utilise both an employed route and a non-employed route through which students can progress. This new programme and its alignment with apprenticeships and other connected policy initiatives, will be detailed in an interim report, to be published in autumn 2014.

The Review of Careers was announced on 25th November 2013 co-jointly with the Department for Education. Its aim is to ensure that provision reflects the needs of a modern vibrant and dynamic 21st century economy in which all individuals regardless of age, aspiration or ability, have access to independent, high quality advice which helps them to maximise their potential and contribute to the community and the Northern Ireland economy. An independent panel was formed in April 2014 to oversee the review. They will provide a final report on the review to both Ministers in autumn 2014. This review will inform a revised strategy for careers for Northern Ireland and will build on the work in careers undertaken by the Committee for Employment and Learning and, the Confederation of British Industry.

5 http://www.delni.gov.uk/government-stem-strategy
3

Theme 1: The Components of an Apprenticeship
3. Theme 1:
The Components of an Apprenticeship

**Policy Commitment 1:** There will be a new system for apprenticeships in Northern Ireland that will enable its application across the full range of occupations and at higher levels. An apprenticeship will be recognised through a series of core components, as set out in i – v (outlined below).

This will be delivered through Project A.

Alongside a more expansive range of apprenticeships, the components which make up each apprenticeship will set a clear benchmark for employers, apprentices and providers of education and training. The core components will re-establish apprenticeships as a route which provides high quality education and employment, with outcomes that represent significant achievement, enabling progression to higher levels and labour mobility across the wider economy. The principle aim of the components is to ensure that there is a well-defined, high quality apprenticeship offer that will meet the needs of employers and apprentices alike.

The implementation of the new system for apprenticeships, through the core components, will be secured through a project which will develop detailed guidelines and consider legislation. The strategic advisory forum will play an important role in advising government in this regard.

Where employers make the case for increased flexibility, it is envisaged that this will be considered through the medium of sectoral partnerships, which are discussed in Theme 3.

**Core Component i:** An apprenticeship will be for a new employee, or in the case of an existing employee, a new job role that requires substantial learning and skills development.

Focusing apprenticeships on a new job, or new job role for existing employees, will ensure maximum value for public investment, by reducing the risk of existing training being rebranded as an apprenticeship. In addition, to providing maximum public value, restricting apprenticeships to a new job or new job role helps to enhance the overall status of apprenticeships, in line with other prestigious educational pathways.
Up-skilling of the adult workforce is vital for the on-going development of our economy. The apprenticeship pathway is only one of a range of interventions provided by the Department to meet the needs of employers. These include; Skills Solutions Service and Customised Training, which are widely available to enable employers to up-skill and re-skill those in the existing workforce.

### Core Component ii: An apprenticeship will be available in professional and technical occupations commencing from level 3 up to level 8.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has highlighted that rising skill demands mean the completion of level 3 qualifications are the minimum requirement for successful entry into the labour market and ongoing participation in lifelong learning.

Additionally, recent research by Oxford Economics indicates that, in order to close the productivity gap, the demand for skills at levels 3 – 8 is set to increase significantly in Northern Ireland. In particular, the research forecasts that the share of the Northern Ireland workforce with higher level skills (level 3 and above) is set to increase from 55% to around 70% between 2011 and 2030. This projection is in line with longer term trends in the labour market, which are shifting the occupational structure in Northern Ireland towards higher-level skilled occupations and away from elementary occupations. Therefore going forward, apprenticeships will commence at level 3.

It is however recognised that in some instances young people especially, will not have the necessary entry requirements to commence an apprenticeship at level 3. Consequently, a new youth training programme will be put in place, enabling young people to progress seamlessly on to level 3 apprenticeships. The Department will develop a focused pre-entry programme to support young people and help them to reach the required level before joining an apprenticeship. This approach has been successfully tested in existing apprenticeship pilots through focused, bespoke initiatives to provide the necessary skills.

In addition, young people especially, may not have the specific practical skills to begin their hand skills training at level 3. Consequently, provision will be made in the programme to enable apprentices to achieve the necessary skill training at level 2.

Both apprenticeships and youth training will form part of a wider skills landscape that provides a spectrum of support from entry level up to level 8, that facilitates lifelong learning and allows participants to move in and out of professional education and training at their own pace.

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6 http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/funding-support.htm
7 http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/successthroughskills/skillssolutions/skills-solutions-programmes.htm
The demand for skills at levels 3 to 8 (A level to Doctorate) is set to increase significantly. Apprenticeships will play a major role in meeting this demand. This means that not only will the apprenticeship system commence at level 3: it will also provide opportunities for entry across the full range of higher levels. For those who already hold level 3 qualifications, apprenticeships will be available in parallel to further and higher education at levels 4 – 6 (sub-degree and degree levels). For certain occupations there will be opportunities to undertake an apprenticeship at levels 7 and 8 (Masters and Doctorate).

The Department has already begun to facilitate the provision of apprenticeships at higher levels, through a series of pilots in a number of our priority sectors. These include: ICT, engineering and professional services.

This expansion will be further extended in the coming months and years ahead, as we seek to test the new model. Demand to date has been increasing steadily and a number of further proposals are already pending in the financial and accountancy services and life science sectors.

**Core Component iii:** The completion of an apprenticeship will take at least two years.

A minimum duration for apprenticeships will be a fundamental component in the new apprenticeship system. This is designed to ensure that apprenticeships include the substantial breadth of learning and development required for the job.

An apprenticeship will encompass the specific skills training, a broader knowledge programme equivalent to two A levels, as well as other requirements as identified by a sectoral partnership. Consequently, it is highly unlikely that an apprentice could complete the programme with full accreditation in less than two years. However, if an individual is able to complete earlier, the Department will make provision to enable the individual to progress to the next level.

Recent research considering the return on investment from apprenticeships demonstrates that a minimum duration is central for employers to receive a return on their investment. Where apprentices are recruited as full time employees the return on investment from apprenticeships against the firm’s initial investment is substantial. Cost benefit calculations for Swiss firms undertaken over the past ten years show that an average firm can recoup its training investments by the end of the training period. For these firms, the apprentice’s productive contribution exceeds training costs, including wages, by €6,000 per apprentice. While the net benefit of the apprentice to the firm is negative in the first year, as the productive contribution of the apprentice improves over time the overall net benefit is positive.
Core Component iv: Apprenticeships will enable mobility within a sector and across the wider economy by including a breadth of training beyond the specific needs of a job through both on and off-the-job training.

The single award/qualification developed for each apprenticeship occupation will include a breadth of training beyond the specific needs of a job role. This will support the mobility of the apprentice across that sector and also the wider economy, assist progression and be adaptable to changes in the labour market.

In the modern economy, most people will be employed in a variety of job roles during their working life. Alongside preparing participants for specific occupations, apprenticeships need to prepare participants for the wider demands of the world of work. The OECD recently highlighted that a quality apprenticeship must have a strong training component that will support productive and durable working careers.

The sectoral partnerships (Policy Commitment 13) will play a vital role in designing apprenticeship awards/qualifications that are of sufficient breadth.

Core Component v: An apprenticeship will be designed to facilitate the progression of participants to higher professional or technical training or on to a higher academic pathway.

The outcome of an apprenticeship must be seen as a substantial achievement that will facilitate progression across educational and employment pathways. As cited earlier, the demand for skills at levels 3 to 8 has been forecast to increase significantly. If apprenticeships are to play a major role in delivering the skills the economy needs, progression must be facilitated through a variety of pathways.

It will be necessary for further and higher education to work collaboratively to help develop the new apprenticeship award/qualification, to ensure that the outcome of an apprenticeship enables portability and continued progression across a wide range of education pathways. Expanding the level at which apprenticeships are offered (levels 3 – 8) will also allow apprentices to continue to progress through a higher level apprenticeship pathway.
Policy Commitment 2: There will be a single award/qualification for apprenticeship occupations at each level.

This will be delivered through Project B.

Stakeholders, in particular small and micro businesses, report that the qualifications for apprenticeships are complicated and not easily understood. The qualifications in the current model have multiple components that are frequently revised leading to apprentices in the same occupation occasionally completing different qualifications. The proposal of a single award/qualification at each level for each occupation will help simplify this.

A single award/qualification for each occupation, at the relevant level, will also ensure that apprenticeships are more easily understood and apprentices are trained to achieve competence in a particular occupation, rather than a specific job, therefore facilitating portability and progression. Employers and other key stakeholders will inform directly these awards/qualifications through the sectoral partnerships.

This approach to award/qualification development will be piloted in 2014/15, in conjunction with the sectoral partnerships. We will ensure that locally developed awards/qualifications sit with the wider European Qualification Credit Framework and the National Occupational Standards, so apprentices can move within the UK and internationally.

Policy Commitment 3: Apprenticeships will be open to everyone irrespective of age, with a primary focus on young people aged 16-24.

This will be delivered through Projects A and G.

One of the key drivers of the review is the role that an apprenticeship can play in supporting a young person’s transition from education to the world of work.

Research demonstrates that younger apprentices are more likely than older workers to report improvements to their skills knowledge and career prospects, as a result of undertaking an apprenticeship. Consequently, the progression of young people into the apprenticeship route will remain a key priority for this Department.

While there is a strong evidence base for apprenticeships being effective as a bridge for the seamless transition of young people from education to the world of work, there is also a case for apprenticeships being open to all ages.
This view was expressed consistently by employers throughout the review, by the Expert Panel, at the stakeholder events and through the call for submissions. Many stakeholders articulated the benefits of an apprenticeship pathway for older workers wishing to enter new occupations or who required different skills sets in a new job or role.

In the modern world of employment, people will change jobs and even careers on a much more frequent basis. This is something that is recognised within the current Review of Careers sponsored by this Department and the Department of Education.

While there are a range of other interventions that are suitable for older workers, including those that are based within the workplace, subject to apprenticeship opportunities meeting all of the core components, including constituting a new job or a significantly different job role, the new system of apprenticeships will be open to all ages.

This will support the government’s overall commitment to lifelong learning and also reflect Northern Ireland’s changing working age demographic. Furthermore, the policy recognises that a greater diversity of people may benefit from the apprenticeship route; for example, experienced workers moving to new occupations, existing apprentices moving up the skills ladder, or graduates undertaking an apprenticeship at the highest level.

**Policy Commitment 4:** Measures will be put in place to facilitate progression and to support individuals to make the transition to apprenticeships at level 3.

**This will be delivered through Project G.**

While the entry requirements for the range of apprenticeships will be decided by the relevant sectors in collaboration with government, the move to commence apprenticeships at level 3 is expected to present increased challenges in terms of the necessary academic entry criteria.

The Department currently offers a wide range of support from entry level to level 2, designed to enable young people to progress to level 3, and is currently conducting a Review of Youth Training, which will report in autumn 2014. The review’s purpose is to ensure that there is a clear pathway at level 2 for young people to progress from entry level and level 1 programmes, into the new youth training programme then into apprenticeships at level 3. The new level 2 programme will be designed with the needs of young people and employers in mind, and alongside apprenticeships, will form a key component of the wider education and training landscape.
Underpinning both these routes will be additional support for those with barriers, including mentoring, ongoing careers advice and guidance, volunteering opportunities and citizenship. The achievement of a level 2 qualification, delivered through a broad programme, and the experience gained through work experience will facilitate seamless progression to a level 3 apprenticeship or further learning.

**Policy Commitment 5:** The development of apprenticeship awards/qualifications will facilitate wider international applicability. Support measures will be put in place to fully utilise opportunities for international placements and exchanges.

This will be delivered through Projects B, C and I.

The broader recognition of achievement and employability within a wider qualifications framework will facilitate international portability, and support an individual apprentice’s aspiration if he/she chooses to work outside Northern Ireland. This is seen as especially important for Northern Ireland, due to high levels of cross-border economic migration with the Republic of Ireland.

In order to have the apprenticeship programme support opportunities for international exchanges and placements there will be clearly defined awards/qualifications, which are internationally respected and recognised. This will require mapping the Northern Ireland awards/qualifications being offered to international frameworks, such as the European Qualifications Framework.

In line with providing parity with other educational pathways, international placements or exchanges will help improve the richness of an apprentice’s experience, supporting professional and personal development. This will provide the same opportunities that are open to a student in higher and further education. International placements have also the potential to benefit apprentices, employers and the wider apprenticeship system through the sharing of good practice and innovation. It will also support foreign direct investment and the export of goods and services from Northern Ireland.

The sectoral partnerships will consider the merits of including an international dimension within their sector.

Government will establish links with partner countries across Europe, and internationally, to provide opportunities for placements and exchanges through exploring the use of EU programmes, such as Erasmus+ and considering incentives for participating employers.
Theme 2: Increasing Participation
4. Theme 2: Increasing Participation

**Policy Commitment 6:** Government will establish a central service to support apprenticeships for both employers and participants, including an online portal for the advertising and application of apprenticeship opportunities.

This will be delivered through Project D.

Increasing the participation of employers is crucial if apprenticeships are to play a major role in meeting the future needs of the economy. When considering the strongest apprenticeship systems, it is clear that the operation of a central service to support the promotion and management of the apprenticeship model can have a positive impact on participation levels.

Direct engagement with employers and potential participants, through such a service, will have two key aims:

- **Promotion:** The central service will work with the strategic advisory forum and sectoral partnerships to lead focused campaigns to demonstrate the value of apprenticeships to employers, young people and their parents. This will include support in key areas, especially in STEM areas.

- **Removing barriers:** One of the major reasons reported by Northern Ireland employers for not offering apprenticeships are administrative and financial barriers. The central service will reduce the administrative burden for employers participating in apprenticeships by offering a full end-to-end service. This will include advice and guidance on how to participate in apprenticeships, outlining the range of support available, including incentives, advertising vacancies and offering on-going support, where required.

One of the key features will be the introduction of an online portal to support advertising and the processing of applications, this will be designed to be well regarded and understood by parents, young people and employers alike. This portal will also provide employers with access to a wider range of candidates for their vacancies.
The range of functions provided by the central service for both employers and apprentices is set out below.

For employers the central service will:

- administer subsidies and other support;
- advertise centrally employer apprenticeship vacancies, through an online portal;
- provide a matching service between employers and prospective apprentices;
- sign post employers to approved providers of off-the-job training; and
- provide a small business service to help small and micro businesses access the benefits.

For apprentices the central service will:

- administer subsidies and relevant support;
- centrally advertise apprenticeship vacancies, through an online portal; and
- source independent careers support and advice through interaction with young people, particularly at key transition points.

Government will pilot the provision of a central service for apprenticeships in 2014/15 to inform the delivery of an apprenticeship central service in 2016.

**Policy Commitment 7:** Apprenticeships will be facilitated in a wide range of professional and technical occupations, reflecting the needs of the Northern Ireland economy.

*This will be delivered through Projects H and I.*

**Policy Commitment 8:** Apprenticeships will be expanded to include professional and technical occupations within the public sector.

*This will be delivered through Project F.*

An expansive model of apprenticeships in line with our economic needs is central in supporting our aim for apprenticeships to have a transformative effect on the Northern Ireland economy.

In parallel with the development of the new apprenticeship model, the Department has actively engaged in the promotion of apprenticeships across a range of new sectors and occupations, including professional and technical occupations within the public sector. The Department is encouraged by the results so far, but wants to do more.
This work has resulted in the development of a number of pilots, including within the professional services, ICT and engineering sectors. Significant interest has also been expressed in piloting further higher level apprenticeships in finance and accounting and life science sectors.

Government will work with the strategic advisory forum and sectoral partnerships to determine how apprenticeships can best meet employers’ higher-level skill needs, support business growth, meet the career aspirations of individuals and enhance opportunities for social mobility. The evaluation of existing higher level pilots will inform this work moving forward.

The public sector is a leading employer in Northern Ireland with over 27% of the total workforce. In addition to the role the public sector can play indirectly through social clauses in procurement contracts that stipulate requirements to recruit apprentices, a number of the professional and technical roles in the public sector can be filled through an apprenticeship.

Government will, where appropriate, introduce public sector apprenticeships across its full range of professional and technical occupations. Engagement with government Departments, including their Non Departmental Public Bodies is currently underway and there is broad support for apprenticeships, as an effective talent management tool for these occupational areas.

**Policy Commitment 9:** Government will support employers’ participation in apprenticeships, in particular small and micro businesses, through financial incentives and other support mechanisms.

**This will be delivered through Projects D and E.**

Apprenticeships offer substantial monetary and non-monetary benefits to the key partners involved: employers, apprentices and the wider economy. These partners share the benefits and the costs of the apprenticeship provision. However, for some employers there are barriers to participation and, consequently, there remains a strong case for government to support employers’ participation in apprenticeships beyond funding the off-the-job training.

Cost benefit calculations for Swiss firms show that an average firm can recoup its training investment before the end of the training period. For these firms, the apprentice’s productive contribution exceeds training costs, including wages, by €6,000 per apprentice over a three-year period. However, in the first year the net benefit to the employer is negative. This represents a risk for the employer, especially a small or micro employer.
There is a strong rationale for government to incentivise greater levels of employer participation, given the challenges faced. There are good returns for public investment in apprenticeships, as evidenced by recent research by the National Audit Office in England, which estimates the return on public investment to be in the region of £18 per £1 spent.

There is a particular challenge for Northern Ireland employers to participate in apprenticeships given the high concentration of small and micro employers. Countries use many different types of support to encourage greater employer participation in apprenticeship systems. There is a need to consider how best to support our employers as participation lags behind other countries, such as Australia, where over a third of employers offer apprenticeship opportunities.

In addition to the introduction of a central service, the Department will test a number of measures to incentivise and support small and micro businesses, including:

- **Up-front incentives:** due to the nature of an apprenticeship, it takes time for the apprentice to build competence and make a productive contribution for the employer. This represents a short-term risk for employers. Government can support employers in this regard, with financial incentives provided during the first year of the apprenticeship, when the return on investment is minimal.

- **Over-training subsidies:** where a sectoral partnership identifies a specific shortfall in the provision of skills that cannot be met directly by the employers, for example due to micro businesses being unable to provide the breadth of training, government will fund larger employers in the sector to meet skills needs through funding over-training for the supply chain.

- **Apprenticeship Training Agencies and Group Training Agencies:** government will consider proposals from sectoral partnerships if they identify a specific need for these types of support vehicle; for example, to support micro businesses or occupations where freelance contract work is typical.

- **Public-private partnerships:** government will consider joint proposals from the public and private sectors for apprenticeship programmes, where this meets the specific needs of the employers, such as the successful public/private sector ICT Apprenticeship programme. This scheme recruits and trains individuals for software and infrastructure roles. As part of this pilot scheme, the Department funds the cost of recruitment, including advertising and aptitude testing, as well as critical intensive training for the apprentices to ensure they are well prepared for entry to the workplace. To date, 76 apprentices have been recruited, with a further cohort planned for this year.
In addition, to testing a range of interventions over the implementation period, the Department will continue to engage with employers to identify the range of incentives and support that would be beneficial to them in order to encourage their participation.

These incentives and support will be financed through a new financial model to underpin future apprenticeship provision. This will include consideration of the mechanism of providing the financial incentives to businesses, including tax incentives that may enable employers to be more pro-active in terms of the purchasing of training.

**Policy Commitment 10:** The Careers Service will provide impartial advice and guidance for young people considering the apprenticeship pathway.

**This will be delivered through Project D.**

In countries with the strongest apprenticeship provision, apprenticeships are embedded within the delivery of the relevant careers service.

The ongoing Review of Careers, which the Department together with the Department of Education has commissioned, will explore how young people could be better informed about the opportunities available through the apprenticeship pathway. This will include close involvement with the new central service to market, promote and support apprenticeship provision.

The Careers Service will utilise the online portal pilot, outlined with Policy Commitment 6 to encourage and support young people to consider a range of opportunities and pathways. In addition, the careers review is considering how work experience could be used to highlight to young people, not only the opportunities in growth sectors but also the pathways into those sectors most favoured by employers.

The Careers Service advice on apprenticeships should be impartial and independent, making use of high quality marketing materials and case studies to present the full range of opportunities available to young people and those wishing to upskill. Careers Advisers will continue work with clients to help them access and analyse relevant labour market information about current and future employment opportunities, determine the occupations that best suit their personal aptitudes, interests and skills, identify relevant training, and support these clients to follow career plans that lead to meaningful and sustained employment.
The terms of reference for the review can be accessed at: http://www.delni.gov.uk/review-of-careers

**Policy Commitment 11:** Apprenticeships will include a range of measures to support the participation by both genders across occupations, and to address other equality issues, such as encouraging the participation of people with disabilities.

This will be delivered through Project G.

Countries that offer apprenticeships across a wider range of sectors have the most balanced gender occupancy in their apprenticeship programmes. Expanding apprenticeships to a wider range of sectors and occupations will ensure that we continue our strong performance on gender participation.

Although the proportion of female starts on ApprenticeshipsNI, Northern Ireland’s current apprenticeship brand, has increased from 35% in 2007/08 to 49% in 2012/13, males still represent the majority of participants in those sectors which have been designated as economically important (85%).

The Department will take the twin track approach of addressing the gender imbalances that exist within traditional sectors, whilst also aiming to ensure that a gender balance is instilled in the new apprenticeship areas, from their commencement.

The Department is currently developing a gender action plan, which sets out the specific actions to be taken to support a better gender balance across all of the Department’s areas of responsibility.

Apprenticeships will continue to form a part of the Department’s ongoing interventions to foster greater gender balance, particularly in STEM sectors. This will include the work of the Business Co-ordinator for STEM who has been appointed to work on behalf of businesses to examine the issue of gender bias, share best practice and identify steps to make careers in STEM industries more attractive to females.
Careers advice also has a prominent role to play in schools to ensure that females are fully aware of the benefits of apprenticeships and the potential for career progression. During the stakeholder engagement, female students recommended using female role models who have undertaken an apprenticeship in a male dominated sector, in a wider communications plan, in order to raise awareness and challenge gender stereotypes. The ongoing Review of Careers will work in tandem with the new central service to provide impartial advice and guidance for young people considering the apprenticeship pathway.

Barriers to participation in apprenticeships will also be addressed through the Department’s forthcoming Disability Employment Strategy.
Theme 3: Partnership – The Roles of the Key Players
5. Theme 3: Partnership – The Roles of the Key Players

Policy Commitment 12: A strategic advisory forum, based on a partnership comprising employers, government, trade unions and providers of off-the-job training, will be established to advise government on the provision of apprenticeships.

This will be delivered through Projects I and J.

Policy Commitment 13: Sectoral partnerships will be established to design and agree apprenticeship provision and inform demand at a sectoral level.

This will be delivered through Projects I and J.

The sustained engagement of stakeholders, especially employers, at every level is a core feature in successful apprenticeship systems. It will therefore be important to put an effective arrangement in place in order to secure the active participation of key stakeholders in the new apprenticeship model, to ensure it meets their needs, both now and in the future. There is a clear case for an overarching body to advise government at a strategic level on apprenticeships. This will ensure that there is a strong oversight for the apprenticeship system, that delivery adequately reflects the balance of costs and benefits and that the competing interests of the main stakeholders are reconciled.

The international case studies considered during the Review of Apprenticeships demonstrated the need for formal engagement with industry groups, with government licensing each group to develop the standards of competence, training packages and qualifications for each apprenticeship.

There are a number of issues that these partnership arrangements will be asked to consider, including:

• Economic Relevance: Delivering the skills model employers need is a fundamental driver in apprenticeships. In many countries with highly valued apprenticeships, employers working with partners are involved in the decision making at every level. In our current model, an employer is all too often the passive partner who employs an apprentice, but is not sufficiently involved in the design and content of the programme. This limits government’s ability to adapt to the skills needed by employers through apprenticeships.
5. Theme 3: Partnership  The Roles of the Key Players

• **Portability:** The OECD recently reported that, despite the complexity involved, a strategic approach to skills acquisition and utilisation, with occupation awards/qualifications as building blocks, is central to a country’s economic prosperity. A sectoral approach, involving a range of partners, will ensure that apprenticeships deliver the skills employers need, while, at the same time, ensuring that apprentices are well served.

• **Quality and Assessment:** Ensuring the participation of key stakeholders will ensure apprenticeships are of high quality and assessment is robust, meeting the needs of employers.

**Strategic Advisory Forum**

A new strategic advisory forum comprising of employers, government, trade unions and providers of off-the-job training will be established.

The forum will provide oversight of the new model, and will advise on issues concerning legislation, supply and demand factors, support measures and lessons from international best practice. The forum will also play a key role in ensuring that, across different sectors, the common core components of apprenticeships remain in place. It will ensure that apprenticeships remain relevant to the needs of employers and the wider economy, are demand-led and informed by up-to-date labour market information, are portable at a national and international level, and are assessed according to the highest standards of quality.

The forum’s role will be to advise government across all aspects of apprenticeship provision. This will include:

- providing strategic oversight of apprenticeship provision;
- advising on legislation for apprenticeships;
- advising on supply and demand issues;
- advising on appropriate support vehicles for particular sectors or types of employer;
- commissioning research to continually be aware of best practise in skills training across the world; and
- advising on the balance between the specific training needed for a role against the broader transferable skills required for an apprenticeship.
Sectoral Partnerships

To ensure different sectors’ needs are met, new sectoral partnerships will also be put in place. These partnerships will be key players in the new system, through defining the new awards/qualifications that will be delivered, and informing the approach for ongoing assessment and end testing for apprentices. They will have responsibility for striking an appropriate balance between the needs of particular employers and those of the wider sector, and will play a lead role in developing interventions within sectors to increase participation. These partnerships will advise and shape content of promotional campaigns, in order to enhance the image of apprenticeships in their sector, promote apprenticeships and increase awareness in their sectors.

A sectoral partnership’s main role will be to design and agree the provision of apprenticeships for specific occupations. The responsibilities of a sectoral partnership will include:

- informing the provision of an annual report on the places required each year;
- building capacity within their sector for the increased provision of apprenticeships;
- developing interventions within sectors to increase, where appropriate, participation numbers;
- securing the views of employers to influence standards of delivery and assessment processes;
- informing the ongoing assessment and end testing of each apprenticeship, in partnership with employers and industry specialists;
- developing the award/qualification for each occupation within their sector including informing the content, the qualifications delivered, and duration of each apprenticeship; and
- achieving the necessary balance between meeting the needs of particular employers and those of the wider sector.
The strategic forum will be established in late 2014, alongside the development of the sectoral partnerships.

**Policy Commitment 14:** A skills barometer mechanism will be established to support the better matching of apprenticeship supply and demand.

This will be delivered through Project J.

There is a need to establish a mechanism to pinpoint skills shortages within our economy. A skills barometer will identify where further skills development will be required (by level and skill type).

The barometer will be relevant not only to informing the apprenticeship model but also in shaping all other areas of skills provision including higher education, further education and youth training. It will act as a driver for the further development of careers education, information, advice and guidance. Ultimately, a regular high quality skills barometer will act in strong support of the delivery of Northern Ireland’s Economic Strategy.

The Department will produce the skills barometer on an annual basis and it will be used to underpin the work of the apprenticeship advisory forum and associated sectoral partnerships.

The barometer will be commissioned by August 2014, with further annual publications from 2015 onwards.
6

Theme 4: Ensuring Quality
6. Theme 4: Ensuring Quality

**Policy Commitment 15:** Quality and achievement of the full apprenticeship award/qualification will be the barometers of success for apprenticeship provision.

**Policy Commitment 16:** The content, duration and assessment of each apprenticeship will be subject to rigorous quality assurance by inspectors who have up-to-date experience in the professional and technical areas, supported by industry experts, to ensure each apprenticeship meets the needs of employers and apprentices.

**Policy Commitment 17:** To support the quality of teaching and learning criteria will be set for all teaching staff, which will establish minimum qualification requirements in the subject area and related pedagogy, as well as up-to-date experience in industry, as defined by the sectoral partnerships.

**Policy Commitment 18:** All those involved in the delivery of the off-the-job training will undertake professional training in pedagogy.

**Policy Commitment 19:** Stringent requirements will be established for continuous professional development to ensure that those delivering training remain expert in their field.

**Policy Commitment 20:** Only those providers who meet the minimum quality standards as determined by the Department will be funded to deliver apprenticeship training.

*These will be delivered through Project K.*
Apprenticeships will only be successful if they are recognised as being of high quality and high value. In the new model there will be:

- a focus on quality and achievement rather than numbers, as the criteria of success;
- greater engagement of stakeholders, in particular employers, in the design, assessment and end testing of apprentices; and
- steps to ensure that providers of off-the-job training have the relevant industrial experience and pedagogic expertise and engage in continuous professional development.

A major challenge in expanding apprenticeship systems is maintaining a high quality offer to employers and apprentices across a wide range of occupations and levels. A robust quality assurance model will be developed to ensure high quality provision throughout all components of the apprenticeship model.

The content, duration and qualifications will be appropriate to the needs of employers as determined by the working of the sectoral partnerships. Technical skills and knowledge will be developed on-the-job, complemented by high quality directed training provided by off-the-job by trainers who meet the required quality standards.

The quality of both on-the-job and off-the-job training will be subject to inspection. Inspection activities will be carried out at appropriate intervals by highly qualified inspectors with relevant industrial experience. They will be supported by experts from industry who will advise on how well the curriculum aligns with the specifications set by the sectoral partnerships, such as the skills levels of the trainers, the quality of the resources, and the nature of facilities. A key focus for inspectors will be the quality of the teaching and learning both on and off-the-job and how well they complement each other.

They will evaluate the standards demonstrated by the apprentices both in their on-the-job and off-the-job training, including how well they are developing skills that ensure they are highly employable across the wider sector and not just employer specific. They will also evaluate how well apprentices are being developed to ensure progression to higher learning.

Assessment to confirm learning will be robust, rigorous and regular. Formative assessment will inform the apprentice and his employer of ongoing progress in learning. End testing will be particularly robust, involve practical skills testing as well as examination of knowledge and will involve employers and/or experts in relevant fields. The achievement of an award/qualification will confirm that the
apprentice has acquired an appropriately high level of skill underpinned by in-depth theoretical knowledge. It will confirm that he/she holds an apprenticeship award/qualification equal to the best on the international stage.

The current quality indicators ‘Improving Quality: Raising Standards’ will be strengthened to align both the requirements of the Quality Assurance Agency and inspection, and to promote high quality apprenticeship provision. They will be the quality standards used by the inspection team and also by providers themselves for self-evaluation. All providers will submit an annual self-evaluation report and quality improvement plan in order to build their capacity for improvement. They will demonstrate through their self-evaluation processes how well they make use of the views of key stakeholders to inform the quality of their provision and to plan for improvement.

Good practice identified across the sector will be shared, and master classes will be held, to ensure that all providers are informed of innovative and effective practice at national and international level.

A key driver for improvement throughout the apprenticeship provision will be the setting of rigorous standards for subject specialist and pedagogical qualifications. All those involved in delivering off-the-job training will be expected to hold high level qualifications in their field and have undertaken prescribed teacher training. In addition, requirements will be set for ongoing continuous professional development to ensure that providers’ specialist knowledge and pedagogical development remains up-to-date.

Detailed data on enrolments, retention and achievements will be scrutinised to analyse performance and will be published to inform employers about the quality of provision.

Work will be undertaken to develop and implement a quality assurance model to ensure high quality apprenticeship provision, through inspection, rigorous assessment, established criteria for teaching, and for continuous professional development and ongoing performance monitoring. This will be taken forward, in conjunction with the strategic advisory forum and the sectoral partnerships.
7. Way Forward

PROJECTS

Delivering a new apprenticeship system is a significant task that will require specialist areas across government and the private sector to work together. The Department will establish 11 key projects to pilot and test the new apprenticeship model, for the purpose of securing implementation by 2016.

The 11 project areas are set out in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Area</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project A</td>
<td>Components</td>
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<td>Project B</td>
<td>Awards/Qualifications</td>
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<td>Project C</td>
<td>Internationalisation</td>
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<td>Project D</td>
<td>Central Service</td>
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<td>Project E</td>
<td>Funding Model</td>
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<td>Project F</td>
<td>Public Sector</td>
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<td>Project G</td>
<td>Widening Access</td>
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<td>Project H</td>
<td>Higher Level Apprenticeships</td>
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<td>Project I</td>
<td>Governance and Oversight</td>
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<td>Project J</td>
<td>Developing a Northern Ireland Skills Barometer</td>
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<td>Project K</td>
<td>Quality Assurance Model</td>
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These projects are summarised in the implementation plan contained in the Annex.
FUNDING

The Department’s 2014/15 budget allocation for its existing apprenticeship programme, ApprenticeshipsNI, is £18.8 million. The Department will seek to maintain this level of funding moving forward.

The Department will also continue to fund apprenticeships from its programme funds and is proposing to allocate 40% of its expected European Social Fund allocation for 2014-2020 to the thematic objective 10 – Investing in Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning (approximately €82 million), for apprenticeships and youth training. Total funding of apprenticeship and youth training is projected to be in the region of €205 million for the period, with the Department providing the remaining 60% funding.

The Department will develop a new financial model to underpin future apprenticeship provision, to move forward with implementation of a new apprenticeship model in 2016. This will include engagement with HMRC around consideration of UK-wide tax incentives or other forms of financial support that may enable employers to be more pro-active in terms of the purchasing of training.

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

All projects will factor in a Preliminary Equality Impact Assessment, with a full Equality Impact Assessment and consultation being carried out where appropriate. Policy proofing (for example, in respect of rural proofing and shared future proofing) will also be conducted on projects, where appropriate.
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<tr>
<td>Theme 1: The components of an apprenticeship</td>
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<tr>
<td>A. Components</td>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>This project will explore the potential policy levers, including legislation, to ensure that the core components of an apprenticeship that have been defined in the review are delivered in practice.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Commitment 1 and 3</td>
<td>Consider the potential to underpin the new model through legislation.</td>
<td>Formulate guidelines and underpinning legislation, as appropriate.</td>
<td>Guidelines and legislation as appropriate in place.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme 1: The components of an apprenticeship</td>
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<tr>
<td>B. Awards/Qualifications</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Objective</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>This project will explore options for providing a single award/qualification for each occupation at each level, ensuring progression to higher level education and training options, portability within a sector and mobility within the wider economy. This project is closely linked with Project I.</td>
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<td><strong>Policy Commitment 2 and 5</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>New awards/qualifications developed with the strategic advisory forum and sectoral partnership groups, informed by demand.</td>
<td>New apprenticeships awards/qualifications piloted and developed for wider sectors.</td>
<td>New awards/qualifications operating model for apprenticeships in place across key sectors, informed by demand.</td>
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<td>Theme 1: The components of an apprenticeship</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Internationalisation</td>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>This project will provide opportunities for placements and exchanges by ensuring that international dimensions are considered as apprenticeship awards/qualifications are developed, and that links with partner countries across Europe and further afield are established.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Commitment 5</td>
<td>Links with partner countries/regions established.</td>
<td>International exchanges piloted.</td>
<td>Established links with partner countries/regions integrated into new model.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>International dimensions incorporated into the design process for new awards/qualifications.</td>
<td>International portability of awards/qualifications established.</td>
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<td>Project</td>
<td>Theme 2: Increasing participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>D. Central Service</td>
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**Objective**

This project will establish a central service to market, promote and support apprenticeship provision, including an online service to advertise apprenticeship vacancies and a pilot online portal to inform young people about the range of opportunities available. Building on the ongoing Review of Careers, the careers service will work in tandem with the new central service to provide impartial advice and guidance for young people considering the apprenticeship pathway.

**Policy Commitments**

6, 9 and 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service upscaled to deliver new model,</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New apprenticeships,</td>
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<td>central service piloted.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Central service established in tandem with strategic advisory forum and sectoral partnership groups for new awards/qualifications.</td>
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</table>
### E. Funding Model

**Objective**
This project will develop the funding model for apprenticeships, including the testing of incentives and support for small and micro businesses, and the wider development of the financial model for the full implementation and launch of the new apprenticeships model.

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<tr>
<td><strong>Policy Commitment 9</strong></td>
<td>Financial model developed, including consideration of tax incentives and HMRC model.</td>
<td>Further development of financial model.</td>
<td>New financial model in place for apprenticeships across all sectors.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Incentives for small and micro businesses developed.</td>
<td>Incentives for small and micro businesses piloted and evaluated.</td>
<td>Incentive package for small and micro businesses established.</td>
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The Northern Ireland Strategy on Apprenticeships
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<tr>
<td><strong>F. Public Sector</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Objective</strong></td>
<td>This project will actively seek to open up professional and technical occupations to apprenticeships in the public sector.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Policy Commitment 8</strong></td>
<td>Public sector apprenticeships piloted in professional and technical areas, informed by demand.</td>
<td>Further development of pilots and delivery arrangements.</td>
<td>Full range of public sector apprenticeships in place.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Theme 2: Increasing participation

**G. Widening Access**

**Objective**
This project will develop a new youth training offer to support individuals to make the transition into apprenticeships at level 3, examine the potential mechanisms to widen access to apprenticeships for individuals with disabilities or additional needs, and consider a series of further interventions to secure greater gender balance across apprenticeships.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Commitments 3, 4 and 11</th>
<th>Potential options for widening participation, including new youth training offer developed.</th>
<th>Support arrangements piloted.</th>
<th>Full range of support, including new youth training offer in place for new model.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 2: Increasing participation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>H. Higher level apprenticeships</td>
<td><strong>Objective</strong>&lt;br&gt;This project will expand the level at which apprenticeships are offered (levels 3-8) in order to meet the specific needs of employers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Commitment 7</td>
<td>Further develop higher level apprenticeship pilots, through engagement with the sectoral partnership groups.</td>
<td>Ongoing development and piloting of higher level apprenticeships.</td>
<td>Ongoing piloting and evaluation of higher level apprenticeships.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Theme 3: Partnership – the roles of key players

#### I. Governance and Oversight

**Objective**
This project will establish the strategic advisory forum and sectoral partnerships.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy Commitments 5, 7, 12 and 13</strong></td>
<td>Establish, in conjunction with the Minister, the strategic advisory forum.</td>
<td>Continued pilot operation of the forum.</td>
<td>Final arrangements for strategic advisory forum.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Develop guidelines and invite proposals to form sectoral partnerships.</td>
<td>Pilot sectoral partnerships</td>
<td>Full model in place including new awards/qualifications operating model in place across key sectors, informed by demand.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 3: Partnership – the roles of key players</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>J. Developing a Northern Ireland skills barometer</td>
<td><strong>Objective</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>This project will develop a skills barometer which will support better matching of apprenticeship supply and demand, by providing a clear indication of current, emerging and long term skills shortages.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Commitments 12, 13 and 14</td>
<td>Output specification and first Northern Ireland skills barometer established.</td>
<td>Updated barometer published annually from 2015 onwards.</td>
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<td>Theme 4: Ensuring quality</td>
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<tr>
<td>K. Quality Assurance Model</td>
<td><strong>Objective</strong>&lt;br&gt;This project will develop and implement a quality assurance model to ensure high quality apprenticeship provision through inspection, rigorous assessment, established criteria for teaching, and for continuous professional development and ongoing performance monitoring.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Commitments 15 - 20</td>
<td>Terms of reference established and project initiated.</td>
<td>Quality assurance model established and piloted.</td>
<td>Quality assurance model in place.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE DEPARTMENT:
Our aim is to promote learning and skills, to prepare people for work and to support the economy.

Further information:
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