



Department for the
Economy
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DEPARTMENT

FOR THE ECONOMY

Covid-19 Response Business

Plan 2020-21



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MINISTERIAL FOREWORD

When I was appointed Minister for the Economy in January 2020 I could not have imagined the extent to which a public health crisis – Covid-19 – would in a few short months completely transform the way we live and work.

In order to control the spread of the virus people have been asked to stay at home, non-essential businesses have had to close, and many sectors of the economy have been shut down.

The shock that COVID-19 delivered to the economy required an immediate and unprecedented response from both national and devolved government, including unprecedented levels of financial support helping tens of thousands of businesses across Northern Ireland.

A lot has changed in a short space of time, but my determination to make a real difference to our economy has not.

I have already established a Tourism Recovery Task Force and re-launched the Economic Advisory Group to ensure that we have expert advice on how we plot our way out of this disruptive period and are best placed to take advantage of new opportunities and future job markets.

This Business Plan outlines the main objectives, priorities and commitments for the Department for the Economy during 2020-21. This will be an exceptional year, defined by a public health crisis and our response to it. Accordingly, our work plans for the year are orientated, in the main, around how we lead the economic response to the pandemic in Northern Ireland.

We will be introducing a wide range of interventions, detailed within this Plan, to support the economy throughout the pandemic, including the distribution of some £410 million in additional grant funding to help businesses manage the immediate impact. We will also be doing important work to plan for the recovery of those sectors hardest hit such as tourism, retail and hospitality.

The Department will be delivering these interventions, alongside its Arm's Length Bodies and other delivery partners, in truly extraordinary and challenging circumstances. Since being appointed as Minister I have been deeply impressed by the work and dedication of staff, to whom I would like to extend my thanks.

Significant damage has already been dealt to the economy during this crisis, but I am convinced we can, together, recover just as swiftly and achieve our vision of globally competitive economy which works for everyone.
Thank you.

Diane Dodds MLA
Minister for the Economy

PERMANENT SECRETARY FOREWORD

We have entered the 2020-21 financial year under truly extraordinary, and unprecedented, circumstances. In a very short space of time a global pandemic – Covid-19 – has completely transformed the way we are living and working. Accordingly, our work plans for the year must also be transformed.

As a result of the pandemic, significant sections of our economy have essentially been shut down. Interventions have been required urgently to help see businesses and employees through this crisis. Our short-term objectives as a Department are no longer about growing our economy, but rather limiting the damage dealt to it in the months ahead. We must also prepare as best we can to rebuild when some semblance of normal life resumes.

This short-term Covid-19 Response Business Plan will give us strategic focus and clarify our much changed priorities in these challenging times. It will cover all of the important new work streams which will have to be taken forward as we lead the economic response to the pandemic in Northern Ireland. It will also reflect key pre-existing commitments and work streams which must continue to be delivered.

Everything we do as a Department during this period, we will do in exceptional circumstances. We start the year with our offices closed to all but a very small number of essential staff, and many of us are adjusting to the new normal that is home working. But despite these upheavals, I have been consistently and deeply impressed by the professionalism and dedication of staff at all levels, and the speed at which we have developed and implemented the economic response to this pandemic so far.

This crisis is going to last for a considerable portion of this year – perhaps all of it. The economic consequences will be felt for some time to come. But together I am convinced we can weather this storm and ensure our economy is on the best possible footing to come back fighting.

Thank you.

Mike Brennan
Permanent Secretary

1. OUR DEPARTMENT

Our Responsibilities

The Department for the Economy (DfE) was established in May 2016. Its responsibilities include:

- wider economic policy, including specific areas like Energy, Tourism and Telecoms;
- skills policy and strategy that supports economic growth and delivery of a range of skills interventions;
- oversight and funding of the further and higher education sectors;
- various aspects of employment law; and
- the management and operation of various EU funding programmes.

We are also the lead Department on Outcomes 1, 5 and 6 of the draft Programme for Government (PfG), which are:

- Outcome 1 – We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy;
- Outcome 5 – We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential; and
- Outcome 6 – We have more people working in better jobs.

Our People

The Department has over 1,000 staff at various different grades as follows:

Grade 2 / Permanent Secretary	1
Grade 3 / Deputy Secretary	5
Grade 5	25
Grade 6	13
Grade 7	120
Deputy Principal	243
Staff Officer	213
Executive Officer 1	223
Executive Officer 2	152
Administrative Officer	164
Administrative Assistant	32
Total	1191

In the current circumstances our overriding priority in terms of our people agenda is, of course, the health and wellbeing of our staff. As of 01 April 2020 our offices are closed to all but a small number of staff whose presence in the workplace is deemed essential to the continued key business functions, in addition to those involved in carrying out security and safety systems checks to maintain the operational readiness of our key buildings. A significant proportion of our workforce are now working from home and strict social distancing procedures are in place for the small number who need to attend an office. A major priority for the year will be to maximise remote working potential throughout the Department. We have set ourselves an ambitious target of having almost 100% of our staff IT enabled and working from home by the end of May. This is being delivered through the reconfiguration of in excess of 180 desktops to permit secure remote access and the provision of some 250 new laptops secured through IT Assist for staff involved in priority business areas.

Efforts now centre on ensuring that resources are focused on priority areas, both in terms of staffing and any further necessary IT provision. Regular staffing return exercises are used to identify emerging pressures and to identify staff that could potentially be redeployed into priority work areas.

As our priorities change during the year, a significant degree of staff redeployment may become necessary. A number of our people have already been reassigned on a temporary basis to help with urgent priorities in the Department. Redeployment principles have been developed following engagement with Departmental TUS. We are also working closely with our HR Business Partners and all internal redeployment will be carried out in line with the Guiding Principles for Redeployment in DfE. We are working with NICS HR to ensure that, following the initial hiatus in resourcing due to Covid-19, recruitment for business critical vacancies can be progressed to address the resourcing challenges being faced.

For the duration of this crisis, communication will be key. Teams are being creative in how they engage with each other remotely, and it has been particularly important that those remaining staff at home and unable to work remotely have been kept up-to-date and communicated with regularly. We all have a role to play in ensuring nobody feels isolated or left behind in the weeks and months ahead. To help managers and staff manage their time when working remotely, a number of hints and tips have been issued on the Intranet along with initial Health and Safety Advice for staff working from home.

A dedicated policy website has been established by NICS HR to assist staff and managers during the Coronavirus pandemic called Information and Advice for NICS Staff. This can be accessed from personal computers and smartphones, and is updated constantly to reflect changes in guidance. The website provides advice to managers on a range of matters such as recording COVID-19 related absences and special leave, resourcing, IT matters, advice on working remotely and health and wellbeing. As the main source of advice and support, staff are reminded to check the guidance and FAQs on a regular basis.

The health and wellbeing of our staff is paramount at this difficult time and all managers are encouraged to ensure their staff access the range of support mechanisms available. Health and wellbeing information has been placed on the COVID-19 Information and Advice website. NICS HR is implementing a 3 month Health and Wellbeing Communications Plan which focuses on specific themes and targeted advice and guidance.

Training and development materials and resources are still available for staff to access from their personal computer or smartphone. NICS HR has developed training bundles and 'Top Tips' resources to assist staff at this difficult time - for example Managing a Team Remotely, Effective Online Meetings and Reprioritising Your Work."

Our Budget

The Department's budget allocation for 2020/21 is a non ring-fenced Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) of £817.7 million which is an increase of £32.0 million excluding EU Exit and technical transfers, £43.6 million including these areas. A significant challenge will be to meet the Department's and Non Departmental Public Bodies' pressures arising out of COVID-19 which will be considered through in year monitoring as the situation continues to develop.

The Department also has Resource ring-fenced budgets amounting to £151.7 million for depreciation and the Notional Student Loan Subsidy. This amount when combined with the non ring-fenced allocation of £817.7 million gives the Department a total Resource DEL allocation of £969.4 million for 2020/21.

In addition, the Department's DEL Conventional Capital budget for 2020/21 is £86.1 million, £68.6 million (net of capital receipts) to be allocated across the Department and £15.0 million and £2.5 million specifically for Broadband Project Stratum and Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) respectively. This Capital position will be challenging due to COVID-19 and will be closely monitored throughout the year.

The Department has also been allocated £410m in totality (£225m in 2019/20:£185m in 2020/21) to assist, by way of grants, businesses in managing the immediate impact of COVID-19.

£270m (£225m in 2019/20:£45m in 2020/21) has been allocated for a £10,000 Small Business Support Grant Scheme. This one-off grant is available to eligible businesses that are in receipt of Small Business Rate Relief and small industrial businesses currently in receipt of Industrial Derating Relief, which have a Total Net Annual Value (NAV) of less than £15,000.

£100m has been allocated for a one-off grant of £25,000 to eligible businesses that have a Total Net Annual Value of between £15,001 and £51,000 within the retail, hospitality, tourism and leisure sectors, subject to some exclusions.

£40m has been allocated for a Northern Ireland Micro-business Hardship Fund. This Fund has been developed to respond quickly and proportionately through the provision of funding to micro-businesses and qualifying social enterprises that are facing immediate cash flow difficulties due to the impact of COVID-19. The Hardship Fund is open to all micro-businesses (1-9 employees) that have not qualified for other regional and national support measures and meet the eligibility criteria.

Appendix A sets out how this budget is allocated across our main spending areas.

Appendix B sets out how this budget is allocated to the DfE Family of Businesses.

Our Governance Arrangements

The Department operates under the direction and control of the Minister for the Economy, who is responsible and answerable to the Assembly for the exercise of the powers on which the administration of the Department depends. She has a duty to the Assembly to account and to be held to account for all the policies, decisions and actions of the Department, including its ALBs.

The Permanent Secretary, as the Departmental Accounting Officer, is responsible for the overall organisation, management and staffing of the Department. He also has responsibility for maintaining a robust governance and risk management structure and a sound system of internal control that supports the achievement of departmental policies, aims and objectives, whilst safeguarding the public funds and departmental assets for which he is personally responsible, in accordance with the responsibilities assigned to him in Managing Public Money Northern Ireland. He must also be satisfied that adequate financial systems and procedures are in place to promote the efficient and economical conduct of business and to safeguard financial propriety and regularity within the Department's Arm's Length Bodies.

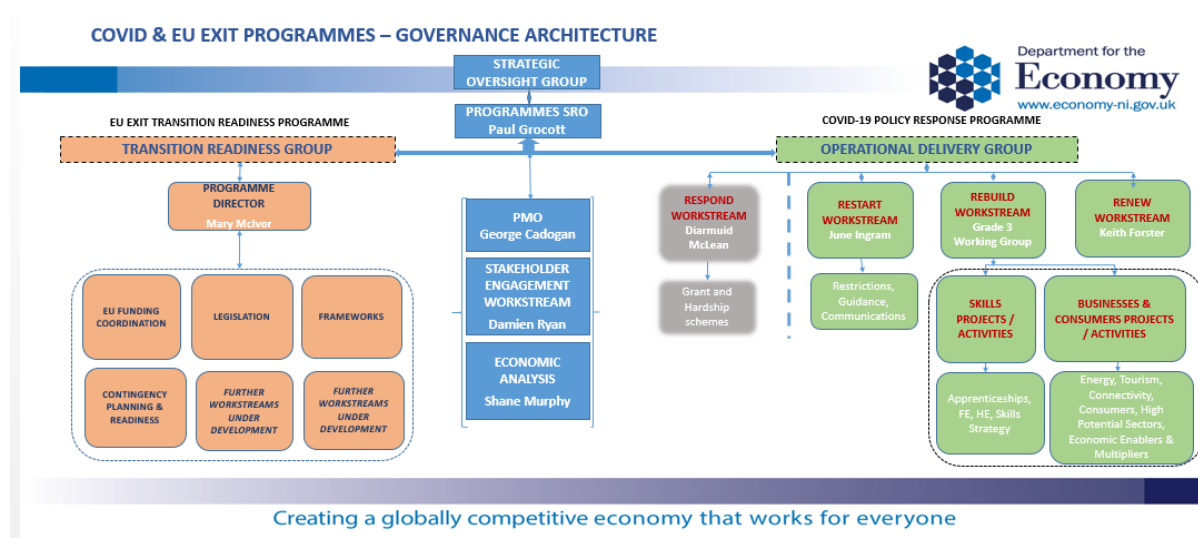
The Departmental Board assists the Permanent Secretary in meeting his responsibilities as Accounting Officer for establishing and overseeing the corporate governance arrangements of the Department. The Board, which comprises both senior Departmental officials (Executive Board members) and Independent members (Non-Executive Board members), provides corporate leadership to the organisation as a whole. It monitors performance against business plans, budgets and targets, and oversees the governance and risk management arrangements of the Department. The Board is chaired by the Permanent Secretary.

The Departmental Board is supported in its role by the following committees:

- The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee's (ARAC) role is to support the Board on issues of risk, control and governance through provision of independent advice, information and assurance to the Board and Accounting

Officer on the operation of the Department's system of internal control and the comprehensiveness, reliability and integrity of available assurance;

- The Delivery Committee supports the Board in managing performance against the Department's Strategic Work Plans, including corporate and annual business plans and any delivery plans relating to the Programme for Government. It also scrutinises the effectiveness of the management of key risks to achieving the objectives set out in those plans, as outlined in the Corporate Risk Register;
- The Casework Committee's role is to deliver better value for the taxpayer by challenging expenditure proposals on the grounds of deliverability, affordability and value for money. It is responsible for the scrutiny of DfE projects involving expenditure above £1million;
- The Resourcing and People Committee provides a strategic view of how the NICS Human Resource policies and procedures can best be applied to ensure that they contribute effectively to the delivery of the Department's business needs, in line with priorities set out in the draft Programme for Government, the draft Industrial Strategy, the DfE Corporate and annual Business Plans and the NICS People Strategy. It is responsible for making decisions and recommendations on the implementation of corporate NICS-wide people-related policies in DfE and the effective use of resources across the Department; and
- A Strategic Oversight Group has been established to provide a single point of strategic assessment and assurance on the Department's response to the phases of Covid-19 and its preparations for the end of the transition period following the UK's departure from the EU in January 2020. This recognises the strategic significance and interdependencies in Covid-19 and EU Exit. The Group and its supporting structures and reporting lines are outlined below:



For the duration of the crisis, the Departmental Board and Audit and Risk Assurance Committee will continue to meet through tele- and/or video-conferencing facilities. The Resourcing and People Committee will meet as and when required using similar facilities. The Casework Committee, which was suspended at the outset of the pandemic, will be re-started as a priority for significant cases.

In addition, a Pandemic Incident Management Team (PIMT), chaired by the Permanent Secretary, has been established to lead the response to the crisis. The Departmental Operations Centre (DOC), previously established to prepare for No Deal Brexit, has also been reconvened. Both teams hold regular teleconference meetings and will continue to do so for the duration of the crisis.

Our Partners

The Department's services are delivered in partnership with a range of other bodies. Our main delivery partners and a brief synopsis of what they do is outlined at **Appendix B**.

2. OUR PRIORITIES

2.1 Vision, Mission and Strategic Objectives

The Department's normal vision, mission and strategic objectives will not apply for the duration of the crisis. Instead, the following strategic objectives will guide our work:

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	
1.	Deliver a strong, competitive and regionally balanced economy with more people working in better jobs through all phases of Covid-19 and the subsequent recovery, within the context of EU Exit.
2.	Maintain and deliver our essential public facing services to the best of our ability in compliance with public health advice.
3.	Assist our ALBs and other Delivery Partners in their management of the crisis.
4.	Protect the safety and wellbeing of our people.

2.2 What we will Deliver

The tables below outline the Department's key planned deliverables for 2020-21.

The first set of tables show a summary of the various new work which has arisen in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. These will be updated as required during the year to reflect any new initiatives which arise.

The second set of tables detail all the Actions which were already planned for the year before the pandemic, and which must still be progressed.

While this business plan focusses on high level key deliverables for the department, there are also various other business as usual activities which have increased in volume and intensity due to the pandemic. These should be acknowledged as having placed a significant resource requirement on many business areas, whilst also adapting to new working practices during the outbreak.

1. Covid-19 Response – New Work Streams

Strategic Objective 1 – Deliver a strong, competitive and regionally balanced economy with more people working in better jobs through all phases of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent recovery, within the context of EU Exit.		
Action / Commitment	Target Date / Timescales	Lead Official / Business Area
1. Establish, run and staff the Departmental Operations Centre (DOC) and NI Hub as part of Covid-19 C3 arrangements.	By March 2021	Thomas Byrne Energy Strategy Division
2. Oversee business continuity arrangements in relation to the Pandemic – includes working in and resourcing the DOC and providing secretariat and support to Pandemic Incident Management Team (PIMT), including collation of staffing returns and reporting to PIMT and DOC.	By March 2021	Wendy Johnston Central Services Division
3. Oversee a new DfE COVID-19 Coordination Unit to coordinate, analyse and prioritise all external Covid-19 correspondence to ensure DfE responds promptly to queries and alleviate pressures on particular business areas given the current limited resources available within the Department.	By March 2021	Michael Gould Covid-19 Coordination Unit
4. Develop economic mitigations to support the NI economy to recover from the pandemic in the medium term.	By September 2020	Giulia Ni Dhulchaointigh EU Exit Trade Negotiations Division
5. Conduct business engagement to gather regular intelligence on issues businesses are facing in responding to Covid-19 and EU Exit.	By March 2021	Giulia Ni Dhulchaointigh EU Exit Trade Negotiations Division
6. Design, implement and process applications for the Microbusiness Hardship Fund	By August 2020	Shane Murphy

		Analytical Services Division
7. Undertake extensive research and develop the evidence base around the economic impact of Covid-19, including macroeconomic and sectoral impacts as well as around approaches to recovery and renewal. Continue to develop the evidence based around implementation of the NI Protocol.	By December 2020	Shane Murphy Analytical Services Division
8. Design and implement the £10,000 Small Business Grant Scheme.	By June 2020	Keith Forster Strategic Policy Division
9. Design, implement and process applications for the £25,000 Retail, Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure Grant Scheme.	By June 2020	Keith Forster Strategic Policy Division
10. Develop an Economic Recovery Strategy - based on a strategic review of current economic interventions.	By March 2021	Keith Forster Strategic Policy Division
11. Repurpose the Matrix Panel planned work programme for 2, 6 and 12 month period in 2020-21 post-Covid-19 to advise on immediate and medium term planning for reviving and renewing the high tech economy, notably in areas such as ICT-Digital, Life Sciences, and Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering.	By March 2021	Keith Forster Strategic Policy Division
12. Develop in conjunction with DoF the NI element of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF), with a focus on rebalancing the economy post Brexit and addressing the impacts of Covid-19.	By March 2021	Keith Forster Strategic Policy Division
13. Introduce a Legislative Consent Motion at Westminster to allow amendments to Northern Ireland's insolvency legislation aimed at assisting businesses in difficulty as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.	By May 2020	Richard Monds Insolvency Service
14. Support the Minister, Executive and the NI Assembly by ensuring that NI interests are fully reflected in UK consumer protection law policy and legislation which are being prepared in response to consumer issues arising from Covid-19 outbreak.	By March 2021	Colin Jack Business & Employment Regulation Division
15. Bring forward a range of statutory rules to amend employment legislation, as necessary, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.	By March 2021	Colin Jack

		Business and Employment Regulation Division
16. Develop further education interventions to minimise the impact of the economic shock of Covid-19 and support economic recovery.	By March 2021	Beverley Harrison Further Education Division
17. Work collaboratively with the Further Education sector to manage the impact of campus closures and support ongoing delivery of FE provision, whilst maintaining good governance and oversight.	By March 2021	Beverley Harrison Further Education Division
18. Develop advice and guidance to apprentices and businesses impacted by Covid-19 crisis.	By June 2020	Jim Wilkinson Apprenticeships, Careers and Vocational Education Division
19. Engage with stakeholders to understand the sector specific impact of the Covid-19 crisis with a view to developing medium term interventions to support employers, training providers and apprentices in the rebuilding of the apprenticeship system	By September 2020	Jim Wilkinson Apprenticeships, Careers and Vocational Education Division
20. Support and guide those who are unemployed or have recently been made redundant in job search, and support those who are furloughed by providing advice on online training to enhance employability for both temporary and full-time employment.	By March 2021	Jim Wilkinson Apprenticeships, Careers and Vocational Education Division
21. Develop a Tourism Recovery Action Plan including the creation and servicing of a Ministerial led Tourism Recovery Steering Group supported by a Tourism NI led Working Group. This will require on-going work with Tourism Ireland, with UKG, DAs and ROI both at official and Ministerial level as to how best we address recovery for our tourism sector including key tourism markets.	By July 2020	Geraldine Fee Tourism, Telecoms, Minerals & Petroleum Division
22. Develop short and medium term measures and mitigations to support the tourism industry, including the identification of potential interventions and undertaking economic impact analysis.	By March 2021	Geraldine Fee Tourism, Telecoms,

		Minerals & Petroleum Division
23. Oversee the monitoring round processes to ensure easements are identified for possible Covid-19 related interventions and to present Minister with suitable options for consideration.	By June\September 2020 and January 2021	Stephen McMurray Finance Division
24. Identify for Future Skills Academies the skills that will be in greatest demand in the next 2 years to support business recovery, in anticipation of the possible economic impact arising from Covid-19.	By March 2021	Graeme Wilkinson Skills Strategy Division
25. Co-ordinate the NI skills response to the economic impact of Coronavirus, collaborating on cross-departmental initiatives and liaising with DfC, UK Government other Devolved Administrations (DA) as necessary.	By March 2021	Graeme Wilkinson Skills Strategy Division
26. Continue to progress a skills strategy for the period 2021-2030, accounting for response of government to economic recovery and emerging priorities.	By March 2021	Graeme Wilkinson Skills Strategy Division
27. Provide assessment of rapid interventions to support individuals impacted by covid-19 in key areas including digital and leadership and management.	By March 2021	Graeme Wilkinson Skills Strategy Division

Strategic Objective 2 – Maintain and deliver our essential public facing services to the best of our ability in compliance with public health advice.		
Action / Commitment	Target Date / Timescales	Lead Official / Business Area
28. Work with DoF, DfI, DfT, NIO and HMT to maintain NI air connectivity with GB mainland.	By March 2021	Trevor Connolly Business Engagement Division
29. Seek to secure a UK-wide approach to the UK higher education admissions issue to protect local prospective students and the local higher education sector.	By May 2020	Trevor Cooper Higher Education Division
30. Assess the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic on higher education as an export including the loss of international students to NI Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).	By March 2021	Trevor Cooper Higher Education Division
31. Consider the impact of the changes to the way 'A' level and equivalent vocational grades are awarded and implement appropriate changes to the system of awarding Scholarships for 2020.	By September 2020	Trevor Cooper Higher Education Division
32. Identify and develop temporary changes to current further education student support policies, in light of COVID-19 and agree any revised policy approach.	By March 2021	Beverley Harrison Further Education Division
33. Review and develop support for further education students who have barriers to education in light of Covid-19.	By July 2020	Beverley Harrison Further Education Division
34. Establish a Working Group to take forward preparations for the Safe Resumption of on-site vocational provision at both the Northern Ireland Further Education Colleges and the wider Training Network.	By August 2020	Beverley Harrison Further Education Division
35. Develop guidance for delivery of digital / blended learning to take account of lessons learned for the new learning environment.	By June 2020	Beverley Harrison Further Education Division

36. Develop a monitoring system to track the revised delivery processes/learner support processes in Training Organisations in relation to Training for Success (TfS), Apprenticeships NI (AppsNI) and European Social Fund programmes, and develop an associated and revised quality monitoring model.	By July 2020	Lorna Warren Quality Improvement Division
37. Establish how a revised version of the Bridge to Employment programme could be piloted to better meet the needs of companies at this time. This may include remote/on-line training.	By March 2021	Graeme Wilkinson Skills Strategy Division
38. Manage security of energy supply risks with energy industry related to Covid-19.	By March 2021	Thomas Byrne Energy Strategy Division
39. Make interim payment in respect of HMS Caroline (HMSC) in advance of completion of Price Waterhouse Cooper (PWC) audit to assist the National Museum of the Royal Navy (NMRN) with cashflow issues arising from closure of the attraction.	By May 2020	Geraldine Fee Tourism, Telecoms, Minerals & Petroleum Division
40. Produce an options paper in relation to the future of HMS Caroline, with added urgency due to the impact of Covid-19.	By May 2020	Geraldine Fee Tourism, Telecoms, Minerals & Petroleum Division

Strategic Objective 3 – Assist our ALBs and Delivery Partners in their management of the crisis.

Action / Commitment	Target Date / Timescales	Lead Official / Business Area
41. Establish and oversee the ongoing operation of Chemicals Policy Cell to report to the DfE DOC (as part C3 structures) on issues surrounding supply of key chemicals to Critical National Infrastructure (CNI) sectors.	By March 2021	Mary McIvor EU Exit Domestic Readiness Division
42. Engage with EU Exit stakeholder network to provide information, advice and reassurance, where possible, to all DfE stakeholders throughout the phases of Covid-19.	By December 2020	Mary McIvor - EU Exit Domestic Readiness Division
43. Provide ongoing capability to monitor the impacts of Covid-19 on the economy, using daily and weekly data insofar as is possible.	By March 2021	Shane Murphy Analytical Services Division
44. Use the specialist skills of our Statisticians and Economists to support wider corporate needs, including helping support with statistical support to Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA) in its work on grading, and assist with issues relating to state aid and competition law and NI financial assistance programmes.	By July 2020	Shane Murphy Analytical Services Division
45. Work with Invest NI (INI), DoF, EU Exit Group and British Business Bank on Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS) and Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBLILS) schemes in NI.	By March 2021	Trevor Connolly Business Engagement Division
46. Announce funding for NI participation in Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) Covid-19 Rapid Response Research & Innovation Funding Call (pending approval of funding and business case).	By June 2020	Trevor Cooper Higher Education Division
47. Work closely with the Student Loans Company and Education Authority regarding relevant aspects related to the Covid-19 pandemic its potential impact on NI students and mitigating actions.	By March 2021	Trevor Cooper Higher Education Division

48. Seek additional funding from the Executive for Support Funds for University Students facing genuine financial hardship.	By March 2021	Trevor Cooper Higher Education Division
49. Assess the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the international student mobility agenda and engage with relevant stakeholders.	By July 2020	Trevor Cooper Higher Education Division
50. Provide briefing on the pandemic outbreak on Further Education Major Capital Project Business Case approvals, 19/20 and 20/21 capital funding profiles and the major capital projects respectively.	By April 2020	Beverley Harrison Further Education Division
51. Consult with Further Education major project stakeholders on site closures and implications of delay on funding, programme and operational aspects, liaising with college project teams to identify, assess, manage and where possible mitigate the main risks and extended use of existing premises.	By March 2021	Beverley Harrison Further Education Division
52. Engage on an ongoing basis with Further Education major capital works' Project Directors and Construction & Procurement Delivery to discuss impacts on contractual & financial aspects, programme, and fitout supply chains.	By March 2021	Beverley Harrison Further Education Division
53. Develop interim policy and response to need for new assessment and award arrangements for Essential Skills in summer 2020. Further work will then be required to support detailed design of agreed delivery model.	By May 2020	Beverley Harrison Further Education Division
54. Revise quality monitoring of delivery model in relation to DfC's Steps to Success provision.	By March 2021	Lorna Warren Quality Improvement Division
55. Maintain Skills Infrastructure Project (financial support for training suppliers impacted by Covid-19 restrictions)	By March 2021	Jim Wilkinson Apprenticeships, Careers and Vocational Education Division
56. Ensure the stability & continuation of the non-statutory training sector and maintain training delivery to young people by extending contracts to deliver the Department's Training for Success programme.	By March 2021	Jim Wilkinson Apprenticeships, Careers and

		Vocational Education Division
57. Identify in light of exams cancellations alternative assessment/awards measures for vocational qualifications in conjunction with DE, CCEA/Awarding Organisations and other key stakeholders (FE / schools / training organisations).	By September 2020	Jim Wilkinson Apprenticeships, Careers and Vocational Education Division
58. Ensure appropriate learner support for Training for Success participants (including support to those trainees with a disability or learning difficulty) by supporting Contractors to adapt to current circumstances.	By March 2021	Jim Wilkinson Apprenticeships, Careers and Vocational Education Division
59. Lead the reconstituted Electricity Market Confidence Monitoring Group with key stakeholders, Utility Regulator, system operator SONI, market operator SEMO and BEIS. Also lead the Energy Retail Market Forum to monitor Covid-19 impacts with key stakeholders including Utility Regulator, Consumer Council, NIE Networks, Gas Network Operators and all energy suppliers.	By March 2021	Joe Reynolds Energy Markets and European Relations Division

Strategic Objective 4 – Protect the safety and wellbeing of our people.

Action / Commitment	Target Date / Timescales	Lead Official / Business Area
60. Coordinate Services related special exercises – including priority laptop users, desktop Secure Remote Access (SRA) exercise, essential testing, and WebEx Conferencing and Collaboration Licences.	By March 2021	Wendy Johnston Central Services Division
61. Develop DfE Redeployment Principles and ongoing assessment of allocation of resources to priority areas to support Covid-19 response and address any emerging pressures.	By March 2021	Wendy Johnston Central Services Division
62. Develop and introduce pulse surveys to gather information on how staff are adapting to home working, identify lessons learnt and provide additional support where possible.	By March 2021	Wendy Johnston Central Services Division
63. Develop further Health and Safety Advice related to home working, in consultation with Departmental TUS.	By March 2021	Wendy Johnston Central Services Division
64. Work with HR Business Partner and NICS HR in relation to redeployment, provision of support and advice on health and well-being, guidance on remote working and advice on broader HR matters arising.	By March 2021	Wendy Johnston Central Services Division
65. Work with the Staff Engagement Forum to develop an appropriate approach to staff engagement in the current context of Covid-19 and home working.	By March 2021	Wendy Johnston Central Services Division
66. Develop a range of communications to keep staff updated on Departmental activities in response to Covid-19.	By March 2021	Wendy Johnston Central Services Division

2. Continuing Work – Non Covid-19 Related

Action/Commitment	Target Date	Indicative Costs		Lead Official / Business Area
		Capital Cost	Resource Cost	
1. Ensure Northern Ireland interests in terms of access to skills and labour are clearly defined and understood as UK Immigration Policy takes shape.	By March 2021		£0.382m	Victor Dukelow EU Exit International Trade & Migration Division
2. Ensure NI interests are clearly defined and understood as UK Trade Policy takes shape including in the context of UK trade negotiations with the European Union and trading partners across the globe.	By March 2021		£1.511m	Victor Dukelow EU Exit International Trade & Migration Division
3. Protect NI's place in the UK Internal Market by influencing UK Government policy on the delivery of legislation on 'unfettered access' and measures to strengthen the UK Internal Market.	By December 2020		£1.627m	Giulia Ni Dhulchaointigh EU Exit Trade Negotiations Division
4. Analyse reserved policies to implement the Ireland/NI Protocol and identify impacts on the NI economy.	By December 2020		£1.627m	Giulia Ni Dhulchaointigh EU Exit Trade Negotiations Division
5. Co-ordinate and monitor the development of UK common frameworks across the range of Departmental business areas and contribute to the development of UK internal market	By December 2020		£0.716m	Mary McIvor, EU Exit Domestic Readiness Division

6. Co-ordinate and monitor legislative preparations by the Department and its Arm's Length Bodies to deliver operable legislation in advance of the end of the EU exit transition period.	By December 2020		£0.349m	Mary McIvor, EU Exit Domestic Readiness Division
7. Manage Programme Management Office (PMO) function to provide assurance on the Department's preparations for the end of the EU Exit transition period; co-ordination of Contingency Planning & Preparedness preparations across all DfE policy areas; and planning effective Stakeholder Engagement and Communications.	By December 2020		£0.600m	Mary McIvor, EU Exit Domestic Readiness Division
8. Ensure that the aspects of City Deals which fall within DfE's remit are progressed in alignment with DfE's processes for business case approvals and payments	By March 2021		£1.800m	Keith Forster Strategic Policy Division
9. Capitalise on strategic opportunity to grow the Cyber Security sector as part of the rebuilding on the NI economy. This includes the development of a NI cyber cluster, new innovative online aptitude and training resources and the commissioning of MATRIX to undertake a foresight study to identify the most appropriate market niches to focus investment including R&D.	By December 2020	£0.200m	£0.300m	Keith Forster Strategic Policy Division
10. Manage the agreement between the Department and Social Enterprise NI to design and deliver the Social Economy Work Programme for 2020-21.	By March 2021		£0.150m	Trevor Connolly Business Engagement Division
11. Award contract for Project Stratum.	By September 2020	£15.000m	£0.385m	Geraldine Fee Tourism, Telecoms, Minerals & Petroleum Division

12. Review Petroleum Licensing and Mineral Licensing policy and legislation.	By March 2021	£175k	£0.132m	Geraldine Fee Tourism, Telecoms, Minerals & Petroleum Division
13. Continue to work closely with the National Museum of the Royal Navy and other relevant stakeholders on the controls, operation and structures of the HMS Caroline visitor attraction. Review and update internal controls and procedures accordingly.	Ongoing			Geraldine Fee Tourism, Telecoms, Minerals & Petroleum Division
14. Develop a Digital Infrastructure Action Plan to support essential fixed and mobile connectivity for NI's economy, in partnership with other Departments and key stakeholders, including Mobile Action Plan.	By March 2021		£0.057m	Geraldine Fee Tourism, Telecoms, Minerals & Petroleum Division
15. Manage year 3 delivery of the 66 live European Social Fund supported projects which aim to combat poverty and enhance social inclusion by reducing economic inactivity and to increase the skills base and employability of potential participants in the workforce.	By March 2021		£31.000m	Maeve Hamilton European Fund Management Division
16. Effectively perform the role of Managing Authority for the delivery of European Regional Development and European Social Fund Programmes, to ensure appropriate governance and compliance with European Commission rules and regulations, to safeguard financial allocations in excess of €1 billion.	By March 2021		£2.700m	Maeve Hamilton European Fund Management Division
17. Deliver effective administration and investigation of insolvent estates, take enforcement action to protect	By March 2021	£0.036m	£3.314m	Richard Monds Insolvency Service

the public in appropriate cases, and publish performance details in an Annual Report.				
18. Deliver effective front line services to support positive employment relations: in particular Industrial Tribunals and the Fair Employment Tribunal and the Redundancy Payments Service. (reduced level of delivery due to postponing of Tribunal hearings and limited availability of staff with remote working facilities)	By March 2021		£20.700m	Colin Jack Business and Employment Regulation Division
19. Maintain the business, consumer protection and health & safety legislative frameworks for which we are responsible, especially in the light of BREXIT.	By March 2021		£0.101m	Colin Jack Business and Employment Regulation Division
20. Deliver a front line public protection function for the benefit of consumers, businesses and the Northern Ireland Economy through an efficient and effective Trading Standards Service and Consumerline - ensuring that all enforcement activity undertaken is targeted at illegal and unfair trading activities and consistent with the principles of better regulation.	By March 2021		£2.287m	Colin Jack Business and Employment Regulation Division
21. In partnership with key stakeholders (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, Office for Product Safety & Standards and the Competition & Markets Authority), ensure effective arrangements are in place to support potential changes to the consumer protection regime in NI after the implementation period, in particular – the future relationship with the EU, cross border enforcement/cooperation and specific enforcement and inspection regimes outlined in the Northern Ireland Protocol.	By March 2021		£0.126m	Colin Jack Business and Employment Regulation Division
22. Introduce Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay in NI, including the drafting, consultation and finalisation of	By March 2021		£0.107m	Colin Jack, Business and

policy proposal and commencement of initial drafting of primary legislation.				Employment Regulation Division
23. Develop policy proposals in respect of references to protecting workers' rights in the New Decade New Approach document and other Ministerial priorities for employment rights – including the need for any legislative changes.	By March 2021			Colin Jack Business and Employment Regulation Division
24. Ensure that provisional non ring-fenced outturn for each of Conventional Capital and Resource is at least 99%, but does not exceed 100%, of the final Budget.	By March 2021		£0.700m	Stephen McMurray Finance Division
25. Continue to closely monitor the delivery of the Joint Supervisors Business Plan with regards to the Presbyterian Mutual Society Scheme of Arrangement, in order to maximise returns on the Executive loan by the facilities expiry date of 30 November 2020.	By November 2020		£0.120m	Stephen McMurray Finance Division
26. Progress the Review of Financial Processes for: - Dry run 20-21 Main Estimates - Dry run 20-21 Spring Supplementary Estimates	By March 2021		£0.060m	Stephen McMurray Finance Division
27. Oversee and promote good governance and accountability arrangements across all of the Department's Arm's Length Bodies and other delivery partners, including through: ensuring adherence to Framework Documents; implementing the new partnership approach to working with Arm's Length Bodies; approval of business plans; formal assurance reporting; and regular accountability meetings.	By March 2021		£1.506m	Colin Woods Corporate Governance Division, and all Senior Sponsors
28. Oversee an effective system of internal controls for the Accounting Officer, Board and Minister, including formal	By March 2021		£1.656m	Colin Woods, Corporate

assurance reporting, project and risk management arrangements, and supporting the work of internal and external audit.				Governance Division
29. Put measures in place to enable ALBs to make their respective board appointments on a timely basis and in accordance with the Commissioner for Public Appointments Northern Ireland Code of Practice. (Partially Paused due to Covid-19)	By September 2020		£0.440m	Wendy Johnston Central Services Division
30. Manage the NI Horizon 2020 Contact Point network to support local Universities to increase participation in, and maximise drawdown of funding from Horizon 2020.	By December 2020		£0.527m	Trevor Cooper Higher Education Division
31. In the context of the possibility that NI is not able to participate in the EU's next Erasmus+ programme, work with DfE(W) and the other DAs to co-design a Domestic Alternative Programme for international mobility opportunities which protects the best interest of NI's HE and FE sectors.	By December 2020		£0.120m	Trevor Cooper, Higher Education Division / Beverley Harrison, Further Education Division
32. Act as Investment Decision Maker for the delivery of six new Further Education campuses and the Further Education sector Systems Technology and Services (STS) IT project to; provide assurance, strategic oversight and to manage the annual funding allocation for projects with a combined value of circa £225m.	By March 2021	£26.568m	£0.280m	Beverley Harrison Further Education Division
33. Review and update the Further Education Essential Skills Policy	By March 2021		£0.126m	Beverley Harrison Further Education Division
34. Develop Northern Ireland policy on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).	By March 2021		£0.085m	Beverley Harrison Further

				Education Division
35. Deliver in excess of 370 InnovateUS projects across 6 Further Education colleges within the agreed expected budget and in accordance with the programme parameters.	By March 2021		£1.800m	Graeme Wilkinson Skills Strategy Division
36. Develop and deliver 16 Assured Skills Academies via Further Education/Higher Education, in response to industry demand.	By March 2021		£1.920m	Graeme Wilkinson Skills Strategy Division
37. Re-skill up to 320 people through the Assured Skills pre-employment training Academies.	By March 2021			Graeme Wilkinson Skills Strategy Division
38. Deliver a minimum of 1900 qualifications at level 2 and above through the six Further Education colleges within an agreed budget.	By March 2021		£1.500m	Graeme Wilkinson Skills Strategy Division
39. Support up to 1,500 participants who are suitable to avail of the Peace4Youth offer during 2020-21. (Subject to review in light of monitoring and reporting impact of Covid-19 restrictions on programme occupancy).	By March 2021		£8.640m	Jim Wilkinson Apprenticeships, Careers and Vocational Education Division
40. Work in partnership with stakeholders to support the effective introduction of the planned reforms to NI's vocational education and training system in September 2021 including working with FE Colleges to enable the new NI Traineeship to commence and with FE Colleges and the non-statutory training sector to allow introduction of Skills for Life and Work (the interim Entry Level / Level 1 programme).	By March 2021		£0.400m	Jim Wilkinson Apprenticeships, Careers and Vocational Education Division

41. Support the delivery of vocational training for up to 4,000 places across our youth training programmes. (subject to review in light of monitoring and reporting impact of COVID 19 restrictions on programme occupancy).	By March 2021		£35.814m	Jim Wilkinson Apprenticeships, Careers and Vocational Education Division
42. Support training delivery for circa 9,000 apprentices. (subject to review in light of monitoring and reporting impact of Covid-19 restrictions on programme occupancy).	By March 2021		£29.415m	Jim Wilkinson Apprenticeships, Careers and Vocational Education Division
43. Offer careers guidance interviews to all Year 12 pupils with the aim of accessing at least 95% of pupils in their final year of compulsory education; and deliver at least 12,000 careers guidance interventions to adults through the delivery channel which best meets their needs including interviews, webchat, telephony and email.	By March 2021		£5.830m	Jim Wilkinson Apprenticeships, Careers and Vocational Education Division
44. Review of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)	By March 2021			Michael Gould Portfolio Management Division
45. Following analysis of responses to the Call for Evidence issue a consultation on “Options for a new Energy Strategy”.	By March 2021		£0.500m	Thomas Byrne Energy Strategy Division
46. Ensure effective arrangements are in place to support the continuation of the Single Electricity Market in the context of the NI protocol	By December 2020		£0.600m	Joe Reynolds Energy Markets & European Relations Division
47. Deliver the requirements of the Clean Energy Package within the Implementation Period.	By December 2020		£0.100m	Joe Reynolds Energy Markets

				& European Relations Division
48. Consult on options for the future of non-domestic Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) Scheme	By December 2020		£0.200m	Jamie Warnock & Graham Miller Energy Group

3. OUR PROGRESS

3.1. **Key Performance Measures**

The following measures are those that are normally used to measure our performance. We will consider how best to supplement these as we move forward in our efforts to mitigate the impact of Covid-19.

Indicator	Description	Performance
Rate of Innovation Activity	% of companies engaging in innovation activity	Latest data is 2014-2016 which shows that 40% of firms engage in innovation activity.
UK Regional Innovation Ranking	NI Innovation Survey is subset of UK wide Innovation Survey based on proportion of innovative firms for the 12 UK regions.	NI Innovation ranking fell from 11 th out of the 12 UK regions in 2012-2014 to 12 th in 2014-2016.
Northern Ireland Research and Development Survey	Total expenditure on Research and Development in Northern Ireland.	Total expenditure on R&D in NI in cash terms was £794.0 million (m) in 2018. This was an increase of £38.9m (5.2%) in cash terms in NI total R&D expenditure between 2017 and 2018. Specifically, Business R&D spend rose by £10.6m (2.0%), with Higher Education and Government R&D spend increasing by £25.8m (13.2%) and £2.5m (12.3%) respectively.
Knowledge Economy Jobs	Supports direct, indirect and induced jobs locally.	In 2018, NI remained the 2 nd fastest growing knowledge economy in the UK, for the fifth consecutive year. NI knowledge economy employment has grown at an annual average of 2% from 2009 to 2017, the 3 rd fastest growth rate of the UK regions.
Business Start Up rates	The number of new businesses formed in NI.	In 2018, 5,900 new businesses were formed in NI, a decrease of 13.9% compared to the previous year.
Economic Inactivity Rate excluding students	The economic inactivity rate excluding students from NISRA's Labour Force Survey	Latest figures show that the inactivity rate excluding students has remained relatively unchanged from 2017 to 2018, standing at 20.0%.

Proportion of Workforce in Employment qualified to level 1 and above, level 2 and above, level 3 and above and level 4 above	Proportion of Workforce in Employment qualified to level 1 and above, level 2 and above, level 3 and above and level 4 above according to NISRA's Labour Force Survey	Proportions of the employed workforce qualified remain broadly unchanged in 2018 from the previous year. Level 1 & above – 90% (+2pps) Level 2 & above – 79% (+3pps) Level 3 & above – 64% (+2pps) Level 4 & above – 42% (+2pps)
Proportion of local graduates from local institutions in professional or management occupations or further study six months after graduation	Percentage of local graduates employed in professional/ management jobs or enrolled in further study 6 months after graduation.	A positive change in this indicator for 2016-17 at 75.5% relative to the previous year of 72.5%. (HESA is implementing a new Graduate Outcomes survey with the first outputs (for 2017-18 leavers) due to be published in spring 2020.)
Proportion of graduates qualifying from NI Higher Education Institutions with an economically relevant STEM qualification	The number of students graduating from Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions with Narrow STEM qualifications, as a percentage of overall qualifiers.	3,860 students in 2018/19 graduated with Narrow STEM qualifications, a decrease of 7.5% relative to the previous academic year. This accounted for 22.4% of total qualifiers in 2018/19.
Employment Rate by Council Area	Employment rates in Local Council Areas	Rates remain mostly unchanged in 2018 relative to 2017. Antrim and Newtownabbey had the highest rate (77.7%) while Derry City and Strabane had the lowest rate (61.6%), compared to an overall NI average of 70.0%.
Employment rate of 16-64 year olds by deprivation quintile	Employment rates of working age individuals by multiple deprivation quintiles.	Rates have remained relatively unchanged in 2018 compared to 2017. The employment rate varied from 55.1% in the most deprived quintile to 77.3% in the least deprived quintile.
Seasonally Adjusted Employment Rate (16-64)	Results for seasonally adjusted employment rates for NI.	Rate has not changed substantially (69.1% in 2017 compared to 70.0% in 2018).

Jobs promoted via business start programme	RSI target of jobs promoted via the business start programme.	Over the 2018-19 period, 8 of the 11 councils exceeded their RSI target. In total, 1,805 jobs were promoted against a target of 1,625.
Annual Turnover of Businesses	Total turnover of NI businesses	According to the latest Annual Business Inquiry the total turnover of NI businesses in 2018 was £68.4bn, an increase of 3.5% from 2017.
Total Early Stage Entrepreneurial Activity Rate	Northern Ireland's Total Early Stage Entrepreneurial Activity Rate according to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor.	Rate was 6.5% in 2018, unchanged from the previous year and there has been relatively little sustained change in this Indicator over time.
External Sales	External sales to markets outside Northern Ireland.	According to NI latest Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics (BESES) results, external sales to markets outside Northern Ireland fell by £241 million (1.1%) to £21.7 billion in 2018.
Total External Spend by Visitors	Expenditure by external visitors in Northern Ireland.	Expenditure stood at £669 million in 2018, a 2% increase compared to 2017 (£657m).
Nation Brand Index	Northern Ireland's score on the GfK Nation Brand Index.	On a scale of 1 to 100, Northern Ireland's score was 59.38 in 2019, an increase of 0.67 points from the previous year.
Broad Economy Exports measure	Broad Economy Exports measure for NI.	Exports from NI in 2018 were valued at £11.2 billion, an 8.1% increase from the previous year and an increase of 22% compared to 2011.
Proportion of premises with access to broadband services at speeds at or above 30 Mbps	Proportion of premises in Northern Ireland with access to superfast broadband	The proportion in Northern Ireland was 89% in 2019, the same as last year and the lowest of the four UK nations.
DfE Staff Engagement Index	The weighted average of the responses to the five employee engagement questions	2017-18 50% 2018-19 52%; 2019-20 54%

EU Drawdown Error Rates	Reducing the risk that funding is wasted and restricting the risk of error within a tolerable level.	2017-18 ESF: N/A (no claims) ERDF: 0.00% 2018-19 ESF: 0.82% ERDF: 0.22% 2019-20 ESF: 0.23% ERDF: 0.08%
Outturn as a percentage of budget	The amount the department has spent as a percentage of its budget	2017-18 Non Ring Fenced Resource DEL: 99.5% Conventional Capital: 99.7% 2018-19 Non RF RDEL: 99.9% Conventional Capital: 99.9%

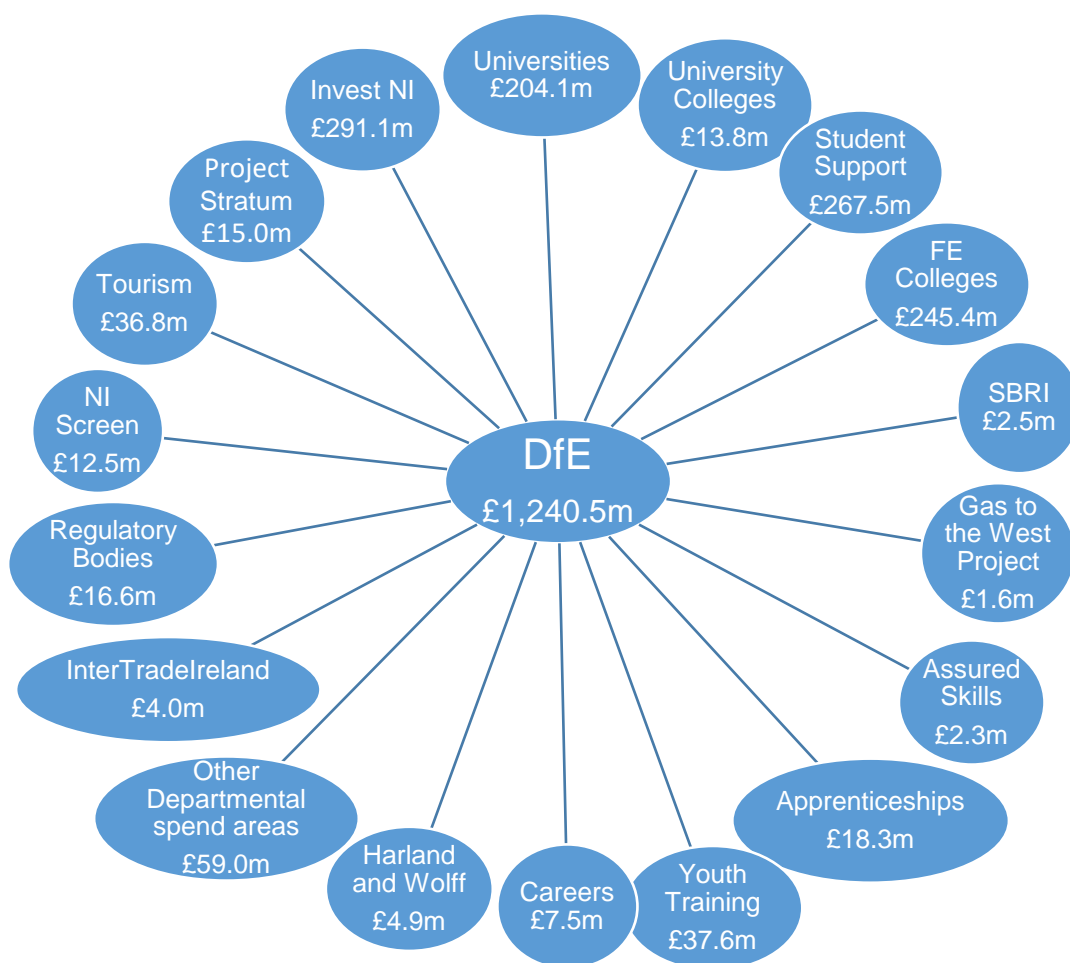
3.2. **Monitoring of the Plan**

Progress against this Plan will be formally monitored on a quarterly basis, with progress reports prepared for the Departmental Board, and in advance of that the Departmental Delivery Committee, if a decision is taken for it to resume.

The indicative reporting schedule is set out below:

Reporting Period	Indicative Timing for Progress Report
Quarter 1 (April to June 2020)	July Board meeting
Quarter 2 (July to September 2020)	October Board meeting
Quarter 3 (October to December 2020)	January Board meeting
Quarter 4 (January to March 2021)	April Board meeting
Year-End Performance Report (April 2020 to March 2021)	May Board meeting

APPENDIX A – BUDGET ALLOCATIONS ACROSS MAIN SPENDING AREAS



Summary per key policy areas	£million
Skills and Education	796.5
Economic Strategy and Development ¹	344.4
Regulation	21.5
Telecoms	15.0
SBRI	2.5
Energy	1.6
Other departmental spend areas ²	59.0
Total	1240.5

¹ Includes £185m in respect of COVID-19 interventions

² Includes Departmental Salaries

APPENDIX B - DfE FAMILY OF BUSINESSES INCLUDING BUDGET ALLOCATIONS

In 2020/21 we have allocated £824.3m of our total budget to our ALBs and other sponsored bodies³.



³ Includes £185m given to Invest NI in respect of COVID-19 Departmental interventions

Sponsored Bodies	Role of the Body
<i>Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs)</i>	
Invest Northern Ireland (Invest NI);	To grow the local economy by helping new and existing businesses to compete internationally, and by attracting new investment to Northern Ireland.
Northern Ireland Screen (NIS);	To accelerate the development of a dynamic and sustainable screen industry and culture in Northern Ireland.
Construction and Industry Training Board–Northern Ireland (CITB-NI);	Encourages the adequate training of those employed or intending to be employed in the construction industry and to improve the skills and productivity of the industry in Northern Ireland.
Tourism Northern Ireland (Tourism NI);	Responsible for the development of tourism and the marketing of Northern Ireland as a tourist destination to domestic tourists, from within Northern Ireland, and to visitors from the Republic of Ireland.
Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI)	Promotes and enforces health and safety at work standards in Northern Ireland.
Consumer Council for Northern Ireland (CCNI)	Provides free, independent support and advice for all consumers and businesses in Northern Ireland. They also have powers to investigate complaints about energy, water, transport and postal services and undertake research to understand local consumer issues.
Labour Relations Agency (LRA)	To promote the improvement of employment relations in Northern Ireland.
Stranmillis University College	To identify, educate, and place highly qualified education professionals in schools and related professional settings. It also offers pre-service and in-service courses, undergraduate and postgraduate.

<p>Further Education (FE) colleges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC); - Northern Regional College (NRC); - Southern Regional College (SRC); - South West College (SWC); - South Eastern Regional; College (SERC); - North West Regional College (NWRC); 	<p>The FE colleges are the main providers of vocational and technical education and training in NI and play a central role in raising levels of literacy and numeracy and in up-skilling and re-skilling through a broad range of courses.</p> <p>The colleges offer programmes which include foundation degrees, higher national diplomas, skills qualifications and level 3 diploma and certificates in a wide range of areas. They take a partnership approach in linking with employers and stakeholders. The six individual colleges develop their own links in their geographical area right across Northern Ireland.</p>
<i>Autonomous Higher Education Institutions</i>	
Ulster University	<p>A university with a national and international reputation for excellence, innovation and regional engagement, making a major contribution to the economic, social and cultural development of Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Their core business activities are teaching and learning, widening access to education, research and innovation and technology and knowledge transfer.</p>
Queen's University Belfast	<p>It is one of the leading universities in the UK and Ireland with a distinguished heritage and history. It conducts leading edge education and research focused on the needs of society. They are globally connected and networked with strategic partnerships across the world.</p>
St Mary's University College	<p>Provides degree programmes in teacher education – with the option to learn through Irish as well as English – and in Liberal Arts.</p>
The Open University	<p>Creates higher educational opportunities with no barriers to entry. Provides flexible, innovative teaching and understands the needs of part-time students. Their innovative, award-winning distance teaching credentials have seen over 2 million students receive an education, otherwise denied to them at campus-based universities.</p>
<i>North/South Bodies</i>	

InterTrade Ireland	Helps small businesses in Ireland and Northern Ireland explore new cross-border markets, develop new products, processes and services and become investor ready.
Tourism Ireland	Responsible for marketing the island of Ireland overseas as a holiday and business tourism destination.
<i>Other Bodies</i>	
Office of Industrial Tribunal and Fair Employment Tribunal (OITFET)	Industrial Tribunals and the Fair Employment Tribunal are independent judicial bodies in Northern Ireland. The Industrial Tribunals, hear and determine claims to do with employment matters. The Fair Employment Tribunal hears and determines complaints of discrimination on the grounds of religious belief or political opinion.