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Further Education Means Business

The Consultation Responses
Main Findings



FURTHER EDUCATION MEANS BUSINESS
THE CONSULTATION RESPONSES
MAIN FINDINGS

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION	2
2 THE CONSULTATION	2
3 MAIN CONSULTATION FINDINGS	4
4 RESPONSES FROM THE FURTHER EDUCATION SECTOR	6
5 RESPONSES FROM THE EMPLOYMENT SECTOR	14
6 RESPONSES FROM THE VOLUNTARY & COMMUNITY SECTOR	17
7 RESPONSES FROM THE EDUCATION SECTOR	20
8 RESPONSES FROM LOCAL AREA DEVELOPMENT BODIES	23
ANNEX A List of consultation respondees both main authors and contributors by sector	27
ANNEX B Additional points and comments made in responses from the further education sector	31
ANNEX C Additional points and comments made by respondents from the employment sector	38
ANNEX D Additional points and comments from community representatives, charities and the voluntary sector	44
ANNEX E Additional points and comments made by respondents from the education sector	48
ANNEX F Additional points and comments from respondents belonging to local area development groups	51
ANNEX G Abbreviations	54

“FURTHER EDUCATION MEANS BUSINESS”: THE CONSULTATION RESPONSES

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of the Department for Employment and Learning’s document “Further Education Means Business” was to put forward for public consultation policy proposals for the future development of a strategy for the statutory further education sector in N. Ireland.
- 1.2 These proposals emerged from an extensive review undertaken by the Department, in response to the N. Ireland Assembly Committee for Employment and Learning’s study of “Education and Training for Industry”.
- 1.3 The Department is grateful to all those who responded to the review. The consultation attracted responses from individuals, companies, community groups, local development agencies, trade unions and charities as well as those directly involved in the education of both young people and adults. The range and diversity of the interest shown in the consultation is not surprising given the major impact further education has on learning and skills provision in N. Ireland. Each year further education colleges provide thousands of students with opportunities to acquire new skills and qualifications irrespective of their age or educational background.
- 1.4 In planning the way forward for the sector, the Department has taken note of the issues raised in the responses to this consultation. It is expected that full implementation of the strategy will require up to three years to complete.

2.0 THE CONSULTATION

- 2.1 Around 4000 copies of the consultation document “Further Education Means Business” have been issued since its publication on 3 March 2004. In addition, in March the Department’s website had 4600 viewings of the full strategy document with 387 downloads and 2637 viewings of the executive summary with 327 downloads.
- 2.2 Closing date for responses to the consultation was 30 June 2004 but a large number of responses (30%) were received throughout July. These have been included in this analysis. The last response for inclusion was received on 3 August 2004.

2.3 A total of 215 individuals or organisations working either singly or in consortia responded to the consultation providing 127 responses for consideration by the Department. These responses were grouped as follows:

Further Education **35 responses**
Colleges (+ the Association of N. Ireland Colleges)
Staff (+ their Trade Unions)
Students (+ their Union)

Employment **27 responses**
Employers
Employer Representative Bodies
Trade Unions
Training Organisations

Voluntary & Community Sector **27 responses**
Voluntary organisations and charities
Political parties
Political representatives
Individuals

Education **16 responses**
Higher Education
Schools
Education & Library Boards
Education Partnerships

Local Area Development Agencies **22 responses**
Town & Borough Councils
Local Economic Development Groups
Local Learning Partnerships

ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONSES

2.4 Given the complexity of the strategy document and the varied interests of the stakeholders in further education, no proforma of questions on the strategy was issued with the consultation documents. Respondee were therefore free to discuss all aspects of the proposals.

2.5 Analysis of the responses fell into three parts.

- i. Each response was analysed against the proposals raised throughout the strategy document to identify key areas of agreement and disagreement. The responses were then allocated to one of five different stakeholder groups: further education, employment, voluntary and community sector, education, and local development. The specific concerns of each group were assessed in relation to:

- The proposed aim and objectives;
 - Management models;
 - Creating new strategic partnerships
 - 14-19 year old age group
 - economic development
 - voluntary and community sectors
 - higher education;
 - Funding.
- ii. These analyses were then merged to produce an overview of the consultation findings. This summary is presented in chapter three and the contributing viewpoints of the five stakeholder groups are presented in chapters four to eight.
- iii. Finally, each of the responses was revisited and any additional points which could inform those working on the development of the various different strands of the strategy and implementation plan noted (Annexes B-F).

3.0 MAIN CONSULTATION FINDINGS

The proposed new aim and objectives

- 3.1 The Department's earlier consultation on the role of the further education sector had identified the need to define more clearly the aim and objectives of the sector. In "Further Education Means Business" the Department sought to address this issue by proposing a new aim and three new objectives.
- 3.2 The majority of the respondents were supportive of all three of the proposed new objectives strengthening economic development, social cohesion and promoting lifelong learning.
- 3.3 There was significant and widespread support for an enhanced economic development role for the colleges but this fell short of unanimous support for making this the primary objective of the sector. Many respondents across all five of the stakeholder groups contended that there was a need for balance between the three objectives and that equal weight should be given to social cohesion, and promoting lifelong learning. The unique role played by the colleges in providing a route to advancement was considered to be a major instrument in addressing the needs of disadvantaged individuals and communities throughout N. Ireland.

Management Models

- 3.4 The majority of respondents supported the proposal that further education should operate at both a regional and local level. There was also considerable support for a change to the existing size and structure of the colleges in order to take advantage of economies of scale, and to have sufficient critical mass to support greater specialisation, expertise and excellence.
- 3.5 Of the alternatives presented in the review, the concept of area colleges received the greatest support. Some respondents wished to see this achieved by creating federations between existing colleges, others by mergers. Whichever mechanism was to be employed, a significant number of respondents were emphatic about the need to maintain ease of student access to the colleges. Of particular concern here were the needs of people with disabilities, areas of deprivation, rural areas and our increasingly ageing population.

Creating new strategic partnerships: 14-19 age group

- 3.6 Greater coherence and planning of provision for 14-19 year olds was strongly supported. As was the need for greater co-operation and collaboration between schools and further education.
- 3.7 The majority of respondents on this topic wished to see a curriculum which extends choice and increases access to vocational provision but there was less support for focusing all educational provision for young people on economic requirements.

Creating new strategic partnerships: economic development

- 3.8 There was strong support for a further education curriculum that meets economic requirements and offers progression to higher skills. The majority of respondees on this issue also favoured a more employer led approach to skills provision. There was also support for developing enterprise as a central element of further education and for education to work with other agencies and employers to provide business support services.
- 3.9 The concepts of identifying local skills and increasing the accessibility of colleges to employers were widely supported. There was generally considerably less interest in the actual mechanisms proposed to make this possible.

Creating new strategic partnerships: voluntary and community sectors

- 3.10 There was support for the concept of greater collaboration and planning between the colleges and the voluntary and community sector. However, respondents indicated there was a need for more detail regarding these proposals before they could respond properly. They also emphasised the need to carefully address and assess the impact of changes affecting people who are already disadvantaged.

Creating new strategic partnerships: higher education

- 3.11 There was strong support for the provision of higher education within further education colleges. Foundation Degrees were also well supported although some concerns were expressed regarding whether these should substitute over time for Higher National Diplomas and Certificates.

Funding

- 3.12 There was strong support for a new funding methodology which addresses previous shortcomings and is also capable of meeting the requirements of the new collaborative approach. Some concern was expressed that if funding was solely based on the achievement of qualifications this would cause colleges to reject less able students.
- 3.13 Quality of provision was also important to the respondents and there was general support for the use of performance data, provided it did not deter a balanced approach to all three of the proposed objectives.
- 3.14 A significant number of respondents also felt that the colleges non-vocational hobby and leisure courses were under threat and concerns were expressed that the Department had not fully recognised the valuable contribution which the colleges make to the cultural and creative dimension of communities and N. Ireland as a whole.

4.0 RESPONSES FROM THE FURTHER EDUCATION SECTOR

This section covers the views expressed on the strategy by those directly involved with the further education colleges, including the colleges, their staff and their students. These are all addressed in turn.

Further Education	35 responses
Colleges (+ ANIC)	17
Staff (including their 3 Trade Unions)	8
Students (including their Trade Union)	10

RESPONSES FROM THE FURTHER EDUCATION SECTOR: The Colleges

- 4.1 All 16 colleges of further and higher education in N. Ireland responded to the consultation, a joint response from the colleges was also submitted by the Association of Northern Ireland Colleges (ANIC).

The proposed aim

- 4.2 Nine of the 16 colleges agreed with the proposed new aim, a further four agreed with the aim but with reservations. The responses from ANIC and three of the colleges put forward alternative wordings. One college disagreed with the aim but made no suggestions regarding what it should be.

The Objectives

- 4.3 The response from ANIC and all the colleges supported the individual objectives of economic development, social cohesion and promoting lifelong learning.
- 4.4 None of the responses supported economic development as the primary objective. The main concern here was that placing so much emphasis on economic development would cause an imbalance with the other key objectives, which would in turn be to the detriment of the social inclusion and the development of an ethos of lifelong learning in N. Ireland. The colleges see themselves as having a key social role in their local communities, with non-vocational and the lower level vocational courses being important instruments in reaching those who have disengaged from formal learning.

Management Models

- 4.5 The colleges clearly see themselves as having a role at both regional and local levels. (The idea of a Regional Development Plan was supported by seven of the colleges and in the ANIC response, eight of the colleges did not specifically address this point and only one disliked the idea). To this end they also appreciate the need to work together to provide a sectoral voice on policy. Seven of the colleges agreed that ANIC should be that voice and three others agreed but with reservations.

- 4.6 The responses did indicate some confusion and disagreement among the individual colleges regarding the nature of the proposed enhanced role for ANIC. Some colleges had ANIC positioned as the Central Support Unit, others as a policy intermediary. Five of the colleges were opposed to the enhancement of ANIC's role to include working with the colleges and the Department on planning and playing a key role at regional level. Four colleges were supportive of ANIC in this role (one with reservations) and seven colleges did not address the issue in their responses.
- 4.7 With regard to enhancing the role of ANIC, a number of the colleges questioned the need for an intermediary if the number of college management units were going to drop significantly, with the formation of area colleges. They thought it would be better if the managers of the area colleges met directly with each other and the Department to formulate policy, thrash out regional issues and implementation procedures.
- 4.8 The ANIC response supported the creation of a Central Support Unit while only three of the colleges did. Seven of the colleges agreed but with strong reservations regarding its responsibilities (they were particularly protective of their college marketing and financial auditing roles). The issue of the need for such a unit in the face of a reduction in the number of further education college management units was again raised. Three colleges were opposed to establishing such a unit for the same reasons.
- 4.9 With regard to the future size and structure of the sector only three colleges wished to see things remain the same, eight colleges and the ANIC response supported change, and, five colleges did not address this issue at all. The minimal change options received the least support from the colleges (particularly the option which included an intermediary regional planning body). The establishment of larger units of management by mergers of existing colleges actually generated more support although five of the sixteen colleges were opposed to this.
- 4.10 The preferred option in the face of change was for the establishment of area based colleges whether by merger or formation of federations of existing colleges. This was supported in the responses from ANIC and 13 of the 16 colleges (although six of these colleges had some reservations), two colleges did not address this option in their response and only one college opposed it. The review of public administration and the need to line up with other public administration boundaries was mentioned by a number of the colleges, as was the need for a serious analysis of the cost and impact of any changes. Access for students was of major concern to the colleges.

Creating new strategic partnerships:**14-19 age group**

- 4.11 The colleges expressed a strong desire to work with schools to increase the vocational experience of 14-19 year olds (however there was some concern that schools were unlikely to comply with this). A closer working relationship between DE and DEL was advocated, as was the removal of duplication and waste from provision by better planning at both regional and local levels.
- 4.12 The responses from ANIC and nine of the colleges also advocated clearer progression routes for students and a need for a higher profile for information and guidance was identified by ANIC and six of the colleges.

Creating new strategic partnerships:**economic development**

- 4.13 The colleges and ANIC were strongly supportive of a curriculum which meets economic requirements and offers progression to higher skills. Only two of the colleges supported the proposal that their direct provision should be focused at vocational training at level 2 or above, three colleges (and ANIC) were opposed to this suggestion, and the remaining 11 colleges expressed no opinion on this issue.
- 4.14 The responses from ANIC and eight of the colleges thought that further education should accept a more employer demand led approach to skills provision. The colleges also supported the idea of developing enterprise as a central element of further education both for students and providing support services for local businesses. The idea of development advisors was supported by two of the colleges and not commented on by the rest.
- 4.15 Ten of the colleges were supportive of the need to establish a mechanism to identify local skills needs but only seven mentioned and supported the creation of Workforce Development Fora. The responses from ANIC and nine of the colleges were very supportive of the concept of improving effectiveness and efficiency by working with local and regional partners. Six of the colleges did not address this issue at all and one college did not think this was a role for further education colleges. The problems of identifying skills requirements in an economy based on small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) were cited although many of the colleges already liaise with local employers.
- 4.16 Twelve out of the sixteen colleges were supportive of the Centres of Excellence model though some drew attention to the difficulties regarding access and the distribution of these centres across N. Ireland.

Creating new strategic partnerships: voluntary and community sectors

- 4.17 Collaboration and provision planning between the colleges and the voluntary and community sectors was strongly supported by both ANIC and the colleges. There was some disagreement however regarding the extent of this. Two of the colleges did not wish involvement in the funding, and at least four of the colleges had reservations regarding the quality assurance of partners in the voluntary and community sectors. Only two of the colleges were supportive of the proposed initial roll out of this initiative at essential skills and level 1, the rest did not address this issue and the ANIC response did not support this.

Creating new strategic partnerships: higher education

- 4.18 The responses from ANIC and the colleges strongly supported the provision of higher education within further education colleges. There was support for increased provision of Foundation Degrees and a number of the colleges wished to pursue partnerships with mainland universities in this respect. ANIC and seven of the colleges however registered concern regarding the substitution of Foundation Degrees for the well understood and widely accepted HND/HNC qualifications. There was also some concern expressed in the responses from ANIC and 5 of the colleges regarding the proposed 2 + 2 model.

Funding

- 4.19 ANIC and the colleges were in strong support of the development of a new funding methodology capable of meeting the requirements of this new collaborative approach both between the colleges themselves and between the colleges and their new partners.

RESPONSES FROM THE FURTHER EDUCATION SECTOR: The College Staff

- 4.20 Responses were received from the three trade unions representing the staff members of the further education colleges, and five individual members of staff (including one governor).

The proposed aim

- 4.21 50% of the staff responses (including two submitted by the trade unions) supported the new aim. The remainder made no comment.

The objectives

- 4.22 There was strong support from the respondees for the individual objectives of economic development, social cohesion and promoting lifelong learning.

- 4.23 Opinion regarding economic development becoming the primary objective was split – three responses in favour, four against and one expressed no opinion. Respondee thought further education should provide vocational training from essential skills through to higher education.

Management Models

- 4.24 Two of the trade unions saw further education as having a role at both regional and local level. They saw the need for colleges to work together to provide a sectoral voice on policy and saw ANIC doing some of this work. However, what they perceived ANIC's role to be was unclear.
- 4.25 The trade unions were very cautious regarding the future of the sector strongly advocating major study and analysis prior to implementing any change. The option of maintaining the *status quo* was supported by two respondees, not addressed by four and opposed by the remaining two. The minimal change options got no support at all. The area colleges were cautiously supported by one of the unions, not quite dismissed by another, dismissed by a staff member wanting no changes and not commented on at all by the remaining five respondees.
- 4.26 The overall message with regard to the future shape of the sector is that this group want to have more information, including costings and impact assessment findings before expressing an opinion. The trade unions would then like to discuss the Department's plans. Geographical access is a major issue and was mentioned in seven out of the eight responses.

Creating new strategic partnerships:

14-19 age group

- 4.27 There was support for greater collaboration and co-operation between schools and further education. Two of the unions were also in support of greater coherence and planning of provision at regional and local levels. They also recognized a need to extend choice and enhance access to vocational provision.

Creating new strategic partnerships:

economic development

- 4.28 There was strong support for a further education curriculum which meets economic requirements and offers progression to higher skills. Three of the respondees (including two of the unions) also favoured a more employer led approach to skills provision. Four of the respondees supported an increased focus and planning to meet economic development priorities (regional and sub-regional).

Creating new strategic partnerships: voluntary and community sectors

- 4.29 There was support for the Department to promote collaboration and provision between colleges and the voluntary/community sector.

Creating new strategic partnerships: higher education

- 4.30 Two of the responses supported higher education provision within colleges the rest made no comment on this issue.

Funding

- 4.31 Improving the funding methodology was an issue in three of the responses (including two of the trade unions).

RESPONSES FROM THE FURTHER EDUCATION SECTOR: The Students

- 4.32 Ten responses were received from past and present further education students including one from the N. Ireland Office of the National Union of Students (UK) and the Union of Students in Ireland and two on behalf of consortia of students. In total eight of the responses received were solely with regard to the preservation of non-vocational courses.

The proposed aim

- 4.33 This was supported by the students' union. None of the other respondents addressed this.

The objectives

- 4.34 The students' union supported the individual objectives. All the student respondents were strong advocates of lifelong learning.
- 4.35 None of these respondees supported economic development as the primary objective of further education. They all cited lifelong learning as the primary role of the sector. All wished to see non-vocational courses retained. There were multiple pleas that the significance of the non vocational courses in terms of social inclusion for students of all ages, and the health and well being of the increasing numbers of older members of the population should not be underestimated.

Management Models (Union response only).

- 4.36 The students' union was supportive of planning on both a regional and college basis. It was also supportive of the development of an intermediary regional planning and funding council, the establishment of a central support unit and the retention of the current structure of 16 colleges.

Creating new strategic partnerships: 14-19 age group

- 4.37 Although the students' union welcomes closer working relationships with schools it has concerns regarding provision for the 14-16 year old group within colleges in terms of child protection issues and the "freedom from harm" principle. It envisages that rigorous risk assessments will have to be carried out across colleges. It also seeks commitments that older students will not face restrictions in their academic or personal growth as a result of the presence of children on the campus. (The needs of older students regarding issues such as sexual health, drugs campaigns and the continuing existence of lesbian and gay societies were specifically cited).

Creating new strategic partnerships: economic development

- 4.38 The students' union agreed that the colleges have an important role in assisting and promoting economic development however it views further education colleges as institutes of learning not enterprise agencies.
- 4.39 The students' union is in general agreement with the need for the colleges to support local employers and industry but have concerns that in a SME economy employers do not fully identify or articulate the skills needs of their employees. It supports the idea of Workforce Development Fora at local levels but believe local authorities should have the lead role in determining demand and co-ordinating activities.

Creating new strategic partnerships: voluntary and community sectors

- 4.40 The union welcomes partnerships with other sectors but wishes the Department to ensure that any new providers have accessible complaint procedures. They also wish to see active equal opportunities and health and safety procedures and practices.

Creating new strategic partnerships: higher education

- 4.41 The union believes that the relationship between universities and further education colleges in the delivery of higher education in the further education sector requires attention in funding and support arrangements. It is generally supportive of Foundation Degrees but still

values HNDs. Again, HNDs are viewed as being valued by employers while Foundation Degrees do not yet enjoy this esteem.

Creating new strategic partnerships: funding

- 4.42 The union raises a considerable number of detailed funding issues and current anomalies.

5.0 RESPONSES FROM THE EMPLOYMENT SECTOR

This section covers the views expressed by those in the employment sector including employers, trade unions and training organisations.

Employment	27 responses
Employers	6
Training Councils & Professional Bodies	15
Trade Unions	2
Training Organisations/Careers	3
Economic Research Institute	1

THE EMPLOYMENT SECTOR

- 5.1 Only six employers responded to the consultation, these were primarily large companies or those with a business connection to the education sector (providing computer services, insurance services etc.). On the positive side, substantive responses were received from the training councils, training organisations, the professional bodies and the N. Ireland Economic Research Institute.

The proposed aim and objectives

- 5.2 Generally respondees were more supportive of the individual objectives than they were of the overall aim. A third of respondees expressed support for the new aim, while the objectives of economic development, social cohesion and promoting lifelong learning were supported by 66%, 44% and 48% of the respondees respectively.
- 5.3 Surprisingly, support for economic development as the primary role for further education was not as universal within the responses from this sector as might have been expected. Only 37% clearly supported this idea, 52% expressed no clear opinion and 15% were opposed or had reservations. A total of four respondees in opposition, two were employers. There was a lot of concern here regarding the need to develop a greater interest in learning and updating skills throughout the N. Ireland community. In this respect the Department was criticised for its continuing focus on one time “single shot” skilling of young adults into vocations. Against a backdrop of technological change and demographic shift there would appear to be a greater need for the

Department to take a lead in encouraging individuals and the community to regard learning as an ongoing process and to constantly retrain and upskill throughout their lives.

- 5.4 Overall the employers who responded seemed prepared to take responsibility for training the people in their employ, but they had concerns about the generic skills of their employees and the practical difficulties in accessing any required training (from either the further education or private sectors).

Management Models

- 5.5 The majority of respondees saw the further education colleges contributing at both regional and local levels however there were considerably fewer opinions regarding how this should be managed. Around 75% of the responses from this sector made no suggestions regarding the future size and structure of the colleges. Those who did make suggestions opposed maintaining the *status quo*, minimal change, and larger units of management options and supported area colleges.
- 5.6 Easy geographical access, critical mass and developing specialisms in line with the Centres of Excellence policy raised some support (26%, 19% and 22% of the responses respectively).

Creating new strategic partnerships: 14–19 age group

- 5.7 Greater coherence and planning of provision for 14–19 year olds at regional and local levels was supported in 74% of the responses, many of these respondees saw an opportunity to improve value for money by removing duplication.
- 5.8 Over 70% of respondees wished to see a curriculum which extends choice and increases access to vocational provision, and focuses on provision to meet economic needs. There was support (37% of the responses) for further education to work with schools to increase the numbers of 14–19 year olds with vocational experience.
- 5.9 There was also strong support for clearer progression routes and a higher profile for information and guidance. About a third of the respondees also thought further education had a key role to play in improving community relations particularly amongst the young.

Creating new strategic partnerships: economic development

- 5.10 Over 70% of the responses from this sector supported a further education curriculum which meets economic requirements, adopts a more employer demand led approach and offers progression routes to higher skills. There was also strong support for developing enterprise

as a central element of further education and for education to work with other agencies and employers to provide business support services.

- 5.11 Mechanisms to identify local skills needs and the establishment of central contact points within colleges for employers were also supported although the concept of workforce development fora and development advisers received a more lukewarm reception. Overall the sector seemed to look to the Department to take the lead in many aspects e.g. to work with employer representative bodies to define curriculum requirements, skills forecasting, the Regional Development Plan and promoting collaboration between further education and other sectors, institutions and government bodies.
- 5.12 Focusing on the achievement of qualifications did not seem to get much support from this sector with 15% of respondees disagreeing with this approach and only one respondee in support (with reservations).

Creating new strategic partnerships: voluntary and community sectors

- 5.13 Not a big issue to this sector though there was some support for improved collaboration and planning between colleges and voluntary and community providers.

Creating new strategic partnerships: higher education

- 5.14 Only 30% of the responses addressed higher education in the further education sector of these 26% were in support and 4% were against. The majority of those in support of higher education in the colleges were also in support of Foundation Degrees as a work based route to a degree. Only two responses however supported that Foundation Degrees should substitute over time for HND/HNC provision (and one of these had reservations).

Funding

- 5.15 This sector was extremely supportive of collaboration between colleges and the promotion of partnerships with universities, schools, training organisations and the voluntary and community sectors.
- 5.16 Quality of provision was also a big issue. Promoting best practice, regional and local planning and the use of performance data to drive improvement were all important to this sector.

6.0 RESPONSES FROM THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

This section addresses the views of those in the voluntary and community sector including voluntary organisations, charities, political parties, political representatives and private individuals.

Voluntary and Community Sector	27 responses
Voluntary organisations (including charities)	20
Political parties	3
Political representatives	1
Individuals	3

THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

The proposed aim and objectives

- 6.1 As with previous sectors the respondees were more supportive of the individual objectives than they were of the overall aim. Just under 50% of the respondees supported the aim while 68%, 79% and 86% supported the objectives of economic development, social inclusion and promoting lifelong learning.
- 6.2 Only one response out of the 27 in this group supported economic development as the primary role for further education. All the voluntary organisations expressing an opinion on this were opposed. Two of the political parties accepted the proposal with reservations and one political party was opposed. Overall these respondees considered that focusing on economic development would create an imbalance and adversely affect further education's significant role in enhancing lifelong learning and increasing social inclusion in N. Ireland. It was felt that the Department had not been clear with the proposals in regard to these objectives and that care should be taken to ensure that any changes implemented were not detrimental to those who were already disadvantaged and felt excluded within N. Ireland society. The general opinion was that each of the three proposed new objectives should carry equal weight.
- 6.3 There was also a general concern that the strategy document was very weak in researching of the current contribution and the future of further education with respect to enhancing lifelong learning and social inclusion. In contrast the document had a lot of emphasis on economic development. A fuller understanding of the contribution made by further education to lifelong learning and social cohesion was called for, together with full impact assessments on the implications of any proposed changes.

Management Models

- 6.4 The majority of the voluntary organisations were non-committal in their responses regarding management models. Area colleges had support (but with reservations) from two of the political parties and the third was non-committal. Where opinions were expressed there was some support for collaboration between the colleges and the operation of the colleges at both regional and local levels.
- 6.5 Maintaining geographical access was seen as a significant issue. Particularly in the context of people with disabilities, tackling areas of deprivation, rural areas and the needs of an ageing population.

Creating new strategic partners: 14-19 age group

- 6.6 Greater coherence and planning of provision for 14-19 year olds and enhanced collaboration between further education and schools were issues for only 40% of the voluntary organisations responding (but were totally supported by the political parties). Particular issues of concern with regard to coherence and planning were: the effectiveness of the working relationship between DEL and DE; and, the problems encountered by people with disabilities when moving from the sheltered environment of schools (particularly special schools) into further education colleges.
- 6.7 Many of the voluntary organisations who responded raised the issue of ageism in the strategy pointing out that further education is the only part of the statutory education system open to all and that mature students make up the majority of the enrolments. They felt the needs of the 14-19 year old group had been over represented and that the Department was still not addressing the issue of lifelong learning and the creation of a learning society in N. Ireland.
- 6.8 Around half the respondees wished to see a curriculum which extended choice and increased access to vocational provision. While only 18% of respondees agreed with a focus on provision for young people to meet economic needs.
- 6.9 A third of the respondees made specific mention of the role played by the further education colleges in improving community relations particularly amongst the young.

Creating new strategic partners: economic development

- 6.10 A curriculum which meets economic requirements and offers progression routes to higher skills gained reasonable support, however, identifying the needs of employers generated less interest.
- 6.11 Lifelong learning and the increasing needs of mature students were again emphasised particularly in the context of demographic shift and

fast moving technology which increases the need for people to constantly update their skills and when necessary retrain for a new career.

- 6.12 Social inclusion was also a key issue. The importance of the role played by further education in giving those failed by the school system a chance to gain the skills to enter employment was emphasised.

Creating new strategic partners: voluntary and community sectors

- 6.13 Almost 90% of respondees were in support of the Department promoting collaboration between further education colleges and the voluntary and community sector. The remaining 10% expressed no opinion.

- 6.14 The proposal to use further education colleges to work with and fund relevant providers at certain levels and in certain areas was received with positive interest but also with considerable reservations by the voluntary organisations. Many of the responses expressed anxiety regarding how far along the Department was in implementing such proposals. Some of the respondees were also upset that their work should be limited to entry level and level 1 as they are delivering at higher levels.

- 6.15 Overall the message from these respondees was that they wished to know more about what the Department is proposing in order to respond properly. They were also concerned that the impact of any of these new proposals on the disadvantaged in society should be assessed. Legislative implications at regional, national and international levels were also cited as needing serious consideration.

Creating new strategic partners: higher education

- 6.16 Not an issue for these respondees.

Funding

- 6.17 The proposal for further education to focus on the achievement of qualifications gave considerable concern to 55% of the voluntary organisations and two out of the three political parties. They could see this driving the further education colleges to reject less able students in order to improve their performance statistics and increase their funding. This would impact on the most in need of help. Producing a simplified funding method that can equally support the objectives of economic development, lifelong learning and social inclusion was seen as difficult particularly so if economic development is seen as the primary role.

- 6.18 Funding of non-vocational courses was also a big issue. The respondees felt that the Department had not researched and

addressed this area sufficiently in the strategy given that they account for 38% of the total enrolments at the colleges. The respondents considered the role of these courses in attracting people (particularly the disadvantaged and socially excluded) back to learning and generally promoting the concept of a learning society to be significant. The role of such courses in terms of health and social inclusion amongst the increasing numbers of senior citizens in N. Ireland also received particular support. The Department was accused of ageism in this respect as a greater proportion of this age group is cited as being productive and economically active for longer than in previous generations.

7.0 RESPONSES FROM THE EDUCATION SECTOR

This section summarises the views expressed by respondents from the education sector.

Education Sector	16 responses
Higher education	3
Schools	2
Education & Library Boards	3
Library services	2
Awarding bodies	2
Education partnerships	4

THE EDUCATION SECTOR

- 7.1 In light of the Costello Report, and despite wide circulation of the strategy document to all secondary and grammar schools, there were only two responses from the schools element of the education sector. These were from the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and the Church of Ireland Board of Education N. Ireland (CIBENI).

The proposed aim and objectives

- 7.2 As with other sectors there was more support for the objectives (69%) than for the aim (44%). Only 19% of the respondents agreed that the primary role of further education is to support economic development, another 19% agreed with reservations, while 38% disagreed and the remaining 25% did not address the issue. Main objections were with regard to focusing on economic development hinged on the significance of the college's role with regard to promoting lifelong learning and social cohesion. The significant role played by the colleges in supporting those who are disadvantaged or who have been unmotivated by the school system was a key issue.

Management Models

- 7.3 Three quarters of the responses from the education sector were non-committal regarding management models. Of those who did address the issue, all were in favour of area colleges or mergers of existing colleges to create larger units of management. Many of these respondees had reservations however, and would like to see impact assessments carried out before any changes are implemented. There was strong support for collaboration between the colleges, better college planning and production of a Regional Development Plan. The idea of a Central Support Unit had as many for as against. Fewer colleges working directly together seemed to be a favoured model. ANIC had no support as the central policy body.
- 7.4 Maintaining geographical access was also an issue but this sector was also more aware of the need to have a critical mass in order to deliver higher qualifications. It was also supportive of the Centres of Excellence policy.

Creating new strategic partners:

14-19 age group

- 7.5 There was strong support (just under 70%) in these responses for all the main strands of the proposed strategy with regard to young people i.e. support for:
- greater collaboration and co-operation between schools and further education;
 - greater coherence and planning of provision at regional and local levels;
 - a curriculum to extend choice and enhance access to vocational provision; and,
 - the role of further education in improving community relations.
- 7.6 Over half the respondees also gave support for:
- a higher profile for information and guidance; and,
 - clearer progression routes.
- 7.7 The only issue to which there was any disagreement (25% of respondees disagreed while 50% of respondees agreed) was whether further education for young people should focus on provision to meet economic needs. The issue for the respondees disagreeing with this was primarily that a wider focus was needed in order to attract reluctant learners back into education and address social inclusion issues.
- 7.8 The issue of responsibility for this age group falling to two separate government departments was also raised.

Creating new strategic partnerships: economic development

- 7.9 Despite the strong reservations about economic development taking a primary strategic role, over 80% of the responses supported a further education curriculum to meet economic requirements and offer progression routes to higher skills. Half of the respondees also supported the proposal that the further education curriculum should adopt a more employer focus to curriculum development and skills provision. Nevertheless many of these supporters had some reservations about this particularly with regard to the practicalities of getting engagement with employers in a SME economy. There was also a call to include workforce development in the parts of the public sector.
- 7.10 The respondees also made note of the significance of the role of further education in lifelong learning particularly with regard to its uniqueness in addressing the needs of mature students. These students are undertaking courses to improve their employment prospects by retraining or improving their existing skills and make up the majority of college enrolments. Against a backdrop of demographic and technological change there was some concern that the review did not look at improving the provision for these mature students e.g. through research into the marketing, quality, appropriateness and delivery of such courses.
- 7.11 There was some support for the Centres of Excellence policy however there were some reservations. Not just in terms of the usual arguments regarding distribution but also that there was a danger of creating a two tier further education system.

Creating new strategic partnerships: voluntary and community sectors

- 7.12 There was some support (43%) for the Department to promote collaboration and provision planning between colleges and the voluntary and community sector as this fitted with the college's social inclusion role. However delivery of this proposal was considered difficult.

Creating new strategic partnerships: higher education

- 7.13 Half the responses from the education sector, including those from Queen's University, the University of Ulster and Stranmillis University College all strongly supported higher education provision within the colleges.
- 7.14 The higher education establishments also supported the proposal that Foundation Degrees should become the dominant work based route to a degree and substitute over time for HND/HNC provision. Both the universities supporting the 2+2 model of progression to related honours

degrees. However one of the universities had issues with the compulsory work-based element of these degrees in terms of finding suitable placements and also the difficulties faced by students already in full-time employment in a different sector or with full-time family commitments.

Funding

- 7.15 Collaboration with schools and the community and voluntary sectors raised a number of issues regarding funding.
- 7.16 The proposal to focus on the achievement of qualifications was not supported due to its potential to have a negative impact on the social inclusion and lifelong learning objectives.

8.0 RESPONSES FROM LOCAL AREA DEVELOPMENT BODIES

This section summarises the views expressed by those organisations involved in local area development.

Local Area Development Bodies	22 responses
Town and Borough Councils	12
Local Economic Development Groups	7
Local Learning Partnerships	3

LOCAL AREA DEVELOPMENT BODIES

- 8.1 There was considerable interest in the strategy from the town and borough councils and locally based organisations involved in economic development throughout N. Ireland.

The proposed aim and objectives

- 8.2 There was support for the new aim for the sector and over 80% of these respondees were in support of each of the individual objectives. None of the responses were against these proposals.
- 8.3 Just under half the responses were supportive of economic development being the primary role for further education while 23% disagreed and a further 9% agreed but with reservations. The councils and other bodies responding negatively to this proposal were generally those with areas of serious deprivation within their local boundaries. They were concerned that such a strong focus on economic development would have an adverse impact on further education's key role in social inclusion.

- 8.4 The majority of the respondees (73%) would however support increased focus and planning to meet economic development priorities at regional and sub-regional levels.

Management Models

- 8.5 Two thirds of these respondees saw the further education colleges contributing at both regional and local levels, however, only a third of the responses included any opinion on the future size and structure of the sector. Of these all but one wished to see change with the majority in support of area based colleges.
- 8.6 Areas of contention were a lack of analysis on the size and structure issue, access issues (particularly in rural areas and with regard to the social inclusion role) and basically no one wished to see their local college closed. At the same time the majority of responses supported collaboration between colleges in order that they might work at regional and sub-regional levels. Over 40% of respondees were also appreciative of the need to have critical mass to maximise resources for some qualifications and were supportive of the Centres of Excellence policy. Many were also keen to have a Centre of Excellence within their local development area.

Creating new strategic partnerships: 14-19 age group

- 8.7 There was support for greater collaboration and co-operation between schools and further education (46% of the responses), and a lot of support for greater coherence and planning of provision at regional and local levels and a focus on provision to meet economic needs.
- 8.8 Over a third of the responses placed a value on the role of further education with regard to community relations and about a quarter supported clearer progression routes and improving value for money by removing duplication.

Creating new strategic partnerships: economic development

- 8.9 Over 60% of the responses supported a further education curriculum, which meets economic requirements, adopts a more employer demand led approach and offers progression routes to higher skills. Over a third of the respondees were also in support of providing full-time students with essential skills, developing enterprise as a central element of further education and colleges working with other agencies and employers to provide business support services.
- 8.10 Over 70% of the responses agreed there was a need for the colleges to establish a mechanism to identify local skills issues, though only 41% supported Workforce Development Fora. Of those mentioning the Workforce Development Fora there was some debate about who should participate (even across the other sectors many thought the

town and borough councils had a role here). There were also many offers regarding already functioning examples of how such bodies could function which could be studied as pilots.

Creating new strategic partnerships: voluntary and community sectors

- 8.11 Over half the responses supported greater collaboration and planning between the colleges and the voluntary and community sector but few commented on the detail of this proposal.

Creating new strategic partnerships: higher education

- 8.12 Not a big issue with this sector, those addressing the issue (only 18% of this sector's responses) were supportive - except with regard to the replacement of HND/HNC provision with Foundation Degrees.

Funding

- 8.13 This sector was extremely supportive of collaboration between the colleges and the promotion of partnerships with universities, schools, training organisations, the business community and the voluntary and community sectors. They clearly saw their local college as a major resource, which could be enhanced in terms of efficiency and effectiveness by improved planning and working with local and regional partners.
- 8.14 Maintaining geographical access was an issue, as was producing a funding model capable of addressing all three objectives of further education.

ANNEXES

- ANNEX A A list of Consultation Respondees.
- ANNEX B Additional points and comments: Further Education.
- ANNEX C Additional points and comments: Employment.
- ANNEX D Additional points and comments: Community and Voluntary sector.
- ANNEX E Additional points and comments: Education.
- ANNEX F Additional points and comments: Local Area Development Groups
- ANNEX G A list of abbreviations.

ANNEX A

A list of Consultation Respondees both main authors and contributors by sector

Community and Voluntary Sector

Age Concern
Ballymena Community Forum
Committee on the Administration of Justice
Community Work Education and Training Network
Consortia of 3 Housing Associations: Clanmill Housing Association; Fold Housing Association; and Oaklee Housing Association
Cullyhanna Women's Group
Democratic Unionist Party
Dr William McCrea MLA DUP
S McCaffrey
Edward McCartney
Roy Downey
East Belfast Community Education Centre
Flowerfield Branch Workers' Education Association (WEA)
Foyer Federation
Lifestart Foundation
Mencap in N. Ireland
Mencap, Northern District Committee
Parents and Professionals and Autism (NI) PAPA
Rural Community Network (NI)
Rural Health Partnership
Sinn Fein
Skill National Bureau for Students with Disabilities
Ulster People's College
Ulster Unionist Party
University of the 3rd Age Foyle
Women's Resource and Development Agency
WorkTrack Providers Forum
Women's Support Network

Education Sector

Belfast Education & Library Board
Church of Ireland Board of Education NI
City & Guilds
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA)
Learning & Skills Development Agency (LSDA)
Library & Information Services Council Northern Ireland
North Eastern Education & Library Board
N. Ireland Business Education Partnership
N. Ireland Lifelong Learning Forum

N. Ireland Open College Network
Open University
Queen's University Belfast (QUB)
Queen's University Belfast, Institute of Lifelong Learning
Southern Education & Library Board
Stranmillis University College
University for Industry
University of Ulster
Western Education & Library Board

Employment Sector

B.I.C. Systems Ltd
Business in the Community
Confederation of British Industry (CBI)
Construction Industry Training Board (CITB)
Dalzell Landscape Company
Department of Enterprise, Trade & Investment (DETI)
Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland
Engineering Training Council
Equality Commission for N. Ireland
Institute of Directors (IoD)
Institute of Electrical Engineers (IEE)
Invest NI
Jobskills Provider Forum
Lantra
Management & Leadership Network (MLN)
Marsh UK Limited
Montupet UK Ltd
Moy Park Ltd
Northern Ireland Committee Irish Congress Trade Unions (NIC/ICTU)
N. Ireland Food & Drink Training Council
N. Ireland Music Therapy Trust
N. Ireland Training Councils Association (Mr William Brown)
Tourism Training Trust
Training for Women Network
Ufi/Learndirect
Ulster Farmers Union

Further Education

Association of Northern Ireland Colleges (ANIC)
Armagh College of Further & Higher Education
Belfast Institute of Further & Higher Education
Belfast Institute of Further & Higher Education (BIFHE) @ St. Louise's
Comprehensive College
Castlereagh College of Further & Higher Education
Causeway Institute of Further & Higher Education
Department of Community Education, Belfast Institute of Further & Higher
Education (BIFHE)
East Antrim Institute of Further & Higher Education

East Down Institute of Further & Higher Education
East Tyrone College of Further & Higher Education
Fermanagh College of Further & Higher Education
Limavady College of Further & Higher Education
Lisburn Institute of Further & Higher Education
National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers
(NASUWT) – Regional Centre
National Association of Teachers in Further & Higher Education (NATFHE)
Newry Institute of Further & Higher Education
Northern Ireland Public Service Association (NIPSA)
North Down & Ards Institute of Further & Higher Education
North East Institute of Further & Higher Education
North West Institute of Further & Higher Education
National Union of Students – Union of Students in Ireland (NUS/USI)
Omagh College of Further & Higher Education
Upper Bann Institute of Further & Higher Education
Ms Dympna Brownlee
Ms Anne Coburn
Ms Kathleen Collins
Ms Geraldine Connolly
Mr Lowell Courtney
P Crawford
Mrs I Devenney
Pat Donnelly
Ms Maura Giles
Mrs S Goldsmith
Ms Helen Griffin
Ms Margaret Hammond
Ms Mary Hill
Ms Pauline Hughes
Ms Alison Ince
Mrs Mary Kelly
Professor Arthur Kingston
Ms Florence Maguire
Ms Pauline Marley
Mrs Joan McCann
Ms Maureen McCloskey
Ms Bernadette McCourt
Ms Alice McGreevy
Ms Eileen McKee
Ms Patricia McLarnon
Ms Clare McMurray
Ms Sally McVicker
Ms Jean Newman
Miss Phyllis O’Loan
Mr John Quinn
Ms Alice Reid
P Rogan
Ms Doris Smyth
Ms Eileen Stafford

Local Area Development Bodies

Antrim Borough Council
Ards Borough Council
Ballymoney Borough Council
Banbridge District Council
Belfast City Council
Belfast Learning City Forum
Craigavon Borough Council
Lisburn City Council
Londonderry Chamber of Commerce
North Down Borough Council
North Down Development Organisation
Newry & Mourne District Council
Newry Chamber of Commerce & Trade
Omagh 2010 Taskforce
Omagh Business Forum
Omagh District Council
SIGNAL Business Growth Initiative Steering Group
South Belfast Learning Partnership
Strabane District Council
West Belfast & Greater Shankill Employment Services Board
West Belfast Economic Forum & Upper Springfield Development Trust
(WBEF + USDT) Consortia Response

ANNEX B

Additional points and comments made in responses from the further education sector.

- The sector should cater for a wider age range, not solely focusing on the young.
- Facilitate wider international imperatives.
- Develop an independent guidance service for young people with strong relationships between employers and skill taskforces, to enable consideration of options available with all schools and colleges.
- Further education must be recognised as an active partner in higher education development and delivery.
- The Foundation Degree should be controlled jointly by a representative body comprising universities and colleges.
- There needs to be a better understanding of the 'value' of vocational education, and qualification needs of this sector should be promoted and benchmarked.
- The estimated budgets, issued by the Department to colleges, should be sent in January not May/June.
- The Review of Public Administration gives an opportunity to link colleges with key organisations involved in economic and community development. The Department should develop more considered versions of the Regional Planning Body and area based colleges suggested in the document.
- To focus and fund further education colleges primarily on skills training could ultimately diminish our current general education role for individual and capacity building for our communities.
- The public sector would benefit from access to Centres of Excellence in Public Administration and Health. All colleges should be encouraged to develop as Centres of Excellence otherwise a two-tier further education sector will be developed by default.
- Further education should offer a different curriculum than schools; however the review is not clear on what schools will offer.
- Colleges may need to establish units dedicated to managing enterprise and work-placements.

- Consideration should be given to the introduction of a further education diploma, recognising core skills and additional studies.
- Whilst a package of additional qualifications to enhance employability may include a certificate in enterprise, there are other qualifications that may be as pertinent to particular students e.g. a foreign language.
- The Costello Report must be an integral consideration to the implementation of the Further Education Review.
- There is an opportunity for a practical demonstration of 'joined up' government. For example Health Promotion advocates the benefits of a healthy life style; it is not unreasonable to claim that through the provision of a range of courses, this contributed to better health and well being with fewer demands on the health sector and encouraging economic development.
- DCAL could be a source to fund leisure type classes and if the further education sector is no longer expected to provide such programmes who will?
- If further education colleges do not deliver level 1, how does this sit alongside Costello, who would provide level 1 provision. Are full-time students with poor entrant attainment ready to start at levels 2-4?
- A means tested non-vocational provision will accentuate the chasm between the haves and have-nots in our society. The social and health benefits of non-vocational courses have not been fully recognised.
- The need for sensitivity cannot be overstressed. Restructuring should be made in tandem when dealing with the human resources issues.
- If mergers are inevitable the sooner change is effected the better, three years of uncertainty for staff is difficult to manage.
- The review has little to say about the estate and an overhaul of the sector cannot be achieved without investment to this area. The estate is school-like in appearance, the estate should reflect a sector providing for 16 year olds, mature students, and high level entrants to training, recreational users paying full fees and increasing numbers of overseas students on full fees. This profile reflects the need for quality technical/professional provision to deliver training.

- The review will need to recognise and support good management skills and leadership among support staff. Employers need an organisation with professionalism in managing contracts and administration systems. It is imperative that support staff are not only trained to the level required but that this training is kept up to date.
- Any institution proposing to offer vocational courses should have to gain approval from the relevant department and that approval should only be given where criteria such as range and depth of provision, appropriate staffing and physical resources can be met.
- Need to expand the Centres of Excellence scheme to other skill areas such as social care, early years and sports studies.
- The departments should encourage the development of vocational courses for more able pupils to avoid reinforcing the view that such courses are only for the less able.
- The traditional view of measuring the performance of a lecturer needs to be addressed - the number of hours in a classroom and the staff/student ratio does not truly reflect or reward lecturers trying to develop excellence.
- Systems must be put in place to reward innovation, excellence and entrepreneurship within the further education sector.
- Clear focus need not necessarily mean a diminution in the range of activities further education colleges perform, but rather a re-engineering in the way they are managed.
- Cognisance needs to be taken of the respective strengths and weaknesses of colleges that might merge in some form or other and the various reviews going on elsewhere e.g. local council areas, health trusts, education and library boards, must be taken into account to ensure cohesion through operational and strategic partnerships.
- While colleges and schools are forced to continue to compete for school leavers for financial reasons, the student will continue not to get the best deal.
- The concept of employer-led Workforce Development Fora is an interesting one, but will employers participate effectively? Will employers be able to articulate what they can then support, both theoretically and practically? Will the reluctance of some locally grown firms to support training impede on the work of the local WDF? If the WDF identifies skill needs will it follow that the opportunities will be taken up, especially in times of low employment? If the skill needs are identified will the lead-in-time

required for provision of new skills be such that, the newly skilled workers are available, but the need has passed and new needs are being identified?

- There is an issue of competition between members of the WDF, colleges and private training organisations all offering training. Tensions could develop as colleges occupy areas such as enterprise and business incubation structures, areas currently occupied by existing providers.
- Increase of governing power and associated work load may lead to governing body members re-considering their position as volunteers.
- The optimum size for a college needs consideration.
- The Department must ensure that 'turbulence' is kept to a minimum and the negative impact of the loss to the sector of experienced staff has not been taken into account. They need timely, accurate information to allow them to plan their future. Support staff in colleges do not enjoy the same conditions in relation to job severance as teaching staff, and this should be taken into account.
- We ask that throughout the process of reorganisation all stakeholders are kept fully informed and timetables for implementation are published and communicated to all interested parties.
- The Department should consider the concept of a partnership model (involving all the key local stakeholders) rather than being strictly employer-led.
- More must be done to address the gender imbalance on governing bodies.
- Consideration of transport infrastructure and rail networks, as they presently exist and in the future, need to be considered with college placement.
- ANIC's role should not be allowed to migrate to that of becoming an agency of a government department.
- The needs of the increasing ethnic minority communities in N. Ireland must also be provided for.
- We are disappointed to learn that the Department appears to confine participation in the regional planning process to itself, the Skills Task Force, ANIC and the colleges. We would wish to see a much broader spread of representation to include community organisations, local authorities, public sector employees and trade unions.

- There is a case for colleges to have a role in funded speculative training based upon informed skills forecasting.
- The Department has not carried out any analysis or sought an inspection into the functioning of governing bodies. Governing bodies need to be reformed in a major way to make them accountable and transparent.
- The Assembly called for an ombudsman for the sector. A statutory ombudsman is necessary.
- There needs to be clearer and more transparent criteria for the award of Centres of Excellence.
- The facilities and support offered in the Republic of Ireland is a model which is worthy of consideration for the sector's applied research and incubation facilities.
- It is crucial that training for potential principals/directors should include finance, planning, human resource and that a mentoring process is established for newly appointed principals/directors to help them cope with the many demands of managing a complex and sizeable organisation.
- The strategy makes no consideration of employees or employee related issues or concerns.
- It is important to receive clear input from employers in respect of the identification of their needs.
- We strongly support the Foundation Degree approach but the model as currently structured militates against the provision of speculative training in new areas that are essential in attracting new inward investment.
- Throughout N. Ireland there is a heavy preponderance of SMEs and considerable care has to be exercised in eliciting their involvement in a manner that will not prove counterproductively burdensome.
- It would be wrong to attempt to establish new local structures to identify local skill needs if existing fora clearly exist.
- The development of a comprehensible and comprehensive credit accumulation and transfer system is essential to meet both the needs of employers and individual learners.
- There is a need for increased collaboration between the Centres of Excellence so that their development is co-ordinated across N.

Ireland and establishes links further a field.

- The new relationships between colleges and voluntary sector providers are welcome. Colleges should be prepared to take the lead in developing these new collaborative arrangements in a manner which is not perceived as threatening.
- Research and objective evidence must be assembled to justify the final proposal on the number of area colleges or management units established.
- The emphasis placed on the six priority skills areas is relevant to the manufacturing sector but has less immediate impact upon the developments in the service and business sectors of the economy.
- The imposition of minimum entry requirements to the sector could further marginalise those who have already been disadvantaged or underachieved.
- To recognise the benefits achieved by entrants with low academic achievement the sector should develop a unitised accreditation system which would chart and record progress at levels below full qualification.
- It should be remembered that qualifications are portable and provision should permit participants to gain qualifications for employment elsewhere as well as servicing the needs of the local economy.
- There is emphasis on the sector providing bespoke training for employers but the report neglects to address how such training will be funded.
- We would question the assumption that institutions can only develop Foundation Degrees and be involved in research and development activities in areas where Centres of Excellence status has been previously awarded. Such a view runs contrary to any concept of ongoing improvement and development of excellence.
- The Department should set up a specific cultural diversity funding programme, to combat prejudice and segregation in the sector.
- Learner representatives should have a key role in any new regional planning authority and local Workplace Development Fora.
- Clear lines of accountability from provider to learner should be built into sector skills agreements.
- Information should be made widely available on fee charges.

- The government should maintain entitlement for lone parents to income support for the duration of a full-time course.
- Extensions should be made to housing benefit availability in particular for students with disabilities in institution owned accommodation.
- More information should be given to learners on the relevance of key skills.
- There should be a N. Ireland Skills Alliance as modelled in England to replace the Skills Task Force and extend membership to learner representatives.
- The Department should develop a sports strategy for further education.
- It is recommended that new providers brought into the market for adult training via the consultation paper must have a complaint process, operate within similar compliance boundaries as publicly funded colleges and operate with proactive equal opportunities and health and safety policies and procedures.
- The Department should fund evidence based research on learner experiences in moving from level three to higher education.
- The Department should commission an independent annual student satisfaction survey with the Education Training Inspectorate (ETI).
- It is also advisable to consider that a 'one size fits all' model of structure may not adequately serve the sector. The geographical distance from sites, demography and urban/rural factors may lead to mixed model solution being a preferred option.
- The colleges need to have a guaranteed fixed basic rate of funding for a minimum of three years.
- The sector must encourage people of all ages to re-engage with the learning process.
- It is important that FE/HE partnership arrangements extend to universities on the UK mainland so that choices for students are not limited.
- Funding for Jobskills needs thoroughly reviewed.
- The role of the Central Support Unit must be teased out so that there is no blurring of responsibilities or unnecessary bureaucracy.

- Before making decisions the Department should undertake a thorough analysis of the likely impacts.
- Bigger is not always better when meeting local community needs.

ANNEX C

Additional points and comments made by respondents from the employment sector.

- There are more practical skills which are highly desirable but on which little emphasis is placed within formal education classes. These key 'soft' skills, such as team working, motivation, innovation etc. are equally important and we would like to see more emphasis in this area in a formal setting.
- Given the critical role ICT will provide in supporting business and development in the sector, attention should be focused on the provision of ICT skills both at user level and for ICT practitioners. A good vehicle for this would be the Skills Framework for the information age. This is a framework based on competencies rather than technical skills and is built upon a matrix of levels of responsibility and accountability within different areas of work.
- A formal structure to maintain dialogue between employers and further education in the provision of Foundation Degree is suggested.
- The work based learning element of the N. Ireland model may inhibit certain adults in manual or basic skilled employment from undertaking a Foundation Degree.
- Further education review needs to be implemented province-wide. Crucial that transportation and communication issues are clearly identified and addressed to ensure maximum uptake of outreach activity.
- Government should provide qualitative information to SMEs and support them to find suitable training. Employers and individuals are the best judges of their own skill needs so funding should be channeled through them rather than through training providers. A key element is the timescale for implementing changes - there is no sense of urgency.
- The colleges must also be given responsibility for encouraging positive attitude in all learners. The most significant concern employers have of potential employees is their attitude to work this needs to feature more prominently.

- In England there are employer training pilots in about a third of the country, run by local skills councils; they are widely regarded as a great success. CBI understands that the Department is reluctant to support training that is undertaken on company premises unless it is entirely funded by the employer.
- There should be a 'no wrong door approach' which requires all advisers from every support agency to have a great deal of knowledge and understanding of both what support is available and which organisation could provide it. This information should be readily available to all small employers who want to organise training themselves and it should also be disseminated to banks and accountants for example, in order to ensure that as many people as possible involved in information and guidance know what is available and where businesses can turn for help.
- The Department should draw up a map to show how different agencies and initiatives fit together with signposting to more detailed advice and information. It should include the funding support available and be disseminated to SMEs, enterprise agencies, Invest N. Ireland offices and client executives and all other business advisers.
- Employers could work with providers and the awarding bodies to accredit their own in-house programmes and could also get their provision commercially inspected so they can qualify for accreditation, additional funding and 'beacon training' status. Many firms have training resources that they may be prepared to open up for other employers to use if funding were available.
- One way to place more purchasing power with SMEs is through the Small Firms' Learning Account currently being piloted in England. This scheme should be rolled out in N. Ireland.
- There is a danger that lifelong learning will not be given enough importance in the overall strategy despite the Minister's foreword.
- The strategy fails to highlight the importance of promoting a more inclusive society and its impact on social issues e.g. such as reducing incidence of juvenile and young offences. The literature on juvenile delinquency and crime accepts that low educational attainment is one of the main explanatory factors of anti-social behaviour by young people.
- The characteristics of modern production processes affect directly the relative demand for labour skills. It is therefore important to distinguish between generic, vocational and job specific skills or knowledge.
- There are two shortcomings in the stakeholder approach. Firstly the

list of stakeholders includes trade unions; the paper subsequently fails to give them any relevant role at all. Secondly, parents are not mentioned either and they should be considered as relevant.

- The strategy should make an estimation of the impact to other departments' policy initiatives to increase participation in primary and post-primary education of students from socially disadvantaged households.
- Community education courses have preferably to be present within the community they cater for. It is recommended that the Department undertake a thorough analysis of the economic feasibility of the proposed approach.
- The overview of demographic trends is sufficient to underscore the distinct pressure the further education sector will have to deal with over the following decade.
- Further education should develop the Lecturers into Industry programme.
- The Special Education Needs and Disability Order must become an integral component in the strategy for this sector.
- There is no reference made to how the sector will promote equality of opportunity for disadvantaged groups. It is essential there is a planned approach to achieve this. The Macpherson inquiry report suggests that there is scope in the further education sector to promote cultural diversity and tackle racism. This needs to be considered to focus initiatives.
- Colleges must actively provide for the full inclusion of disabled students. Rafferty highlights experiences of disabled people in the further education sector. The disabled adult learner may be faced with a degree of ignorance and prejudice in assessment of abilities. Especially true where the tutor has little, or no expertise in dealing with disability issues.
- The sector has potential to promote equality of opportunity among school leavers with little qualifications. Other learning settings are characterised by gender segregation, college development plans should overcome these traditional barriers.
- Colleges need to recognise the diversity of learners; this strategy would be much improved by a detailed understanding of the specific needs of young and adult learners. Importantly cultural diversity training would increase awareness about the needs of specific groups, for staff, tutors and management.

- The Institutes should be able to support the development of increasingly higher levels of technology, which may attract, or make more feasible, the development of technologically-based industries that are currently not strongly present in N. Ireland.
- A well managed pilot might be used to test the effectiveness of a funding scheme for SMEs.
- Care should be taken to build upon existing successes and avoid undue disturbances to existing initiatives and collaboration.
- The quality and enthusiasm of teachers taking declining subjects, i.e. maths, is critical.
- Further education staff may not consider applying for secondments because they fear that their existing duties and work may be rescheduled around the secondment resulting in increased personal stress rather than a rejuvenation experience.
- In implementing the Regional Delivery Plan senior management within all sectors will need to ensure that individual staff members are not overloaded in the process of initiating change within fairly ambitious timescales.
- The further education sector must not be portrayed as the second best option for those who fail to get accepted to higher education. It is suggested that attention should be paid to why such students are achieving poorly at school and what they are subsequently achieving within the further education sector. This suggests ways of improving educational efficiency, taking into account further education is voluntary and school is compulsory.
- Is the N. Ireland 14-19 school curriculum providing a good match to the needs of students taking the vocational route? It would benefit stakeholders if there were a good interface between the school and further education curriculum.
- The careers advice given to students at secondary level may be inadvertently counter-productive for the economic future of the region. The subject selection is often motivated by the potential to achieve a high grade and may rule out mathematics, physics and other sciences.
- A strong emphasis should be made to promote starting a business as a valid and equal career option for students.
- Functional skills such as marketing and selling also needed to be included in the curriculum.

- The promotion of successful role models could be a powerful motivator.
- Will the Department demonstrate similar thrust, drive, support, commitment, focus and direction to their existing cohort of providers which sit outside of the further education sector?
- Will the Department, in engaging with employers and other bodies, include representation from the Jobskills Provider Forum in this process?
- There is no mention of the role of the Sector Skills Councils or the Skills for Business Network in terms of our role in developing individuals and businesses to aid economic development.
- Many hobbies can grow to become serious business interests.
- Further education ethos needs to provide a more entrepreneurial culture and to encourage students to seek and exploit opportunities to use enhanced skills.
- Further education colleges have a role to play in the 'internationalisation of the province'.
- There is a need for an increase in experienced further education staff to work with the private sector in a more collaborative way.
- There is a significant proportion of the owner manager population disengaged from the learning process.
- Curriculum content is focused on management processes with little emphasis on leadership practices.
- There is a perceived lack of experienced business tutors within teaching staff.
- Our company would like to see something standard built into any type of preparation for the world of work that enables future employees to become better corporate citizens with a greater work ethic.
- In the food industry sector a shortage of skilled labour is noticeable in areas concerning the construction and maintenance of expensive and complex high tech machinery.
- In the longer term, it is inevitable that foreign labour will move into supervisory and technical positions and note should be taken of this point.

- The rewarding career and higher level qualifications available today at our further education colleges are not being effectively promoted.
- There is a need to promote, advertise and stimulate demand through enhanced funding for Modern Apprenticeships. Promote vocational apprenticeships as a more dynamic experience.
- The fact that three quarters of all enrolments are for less than one year doesn't fit, something has to be done on retention.
- On Foundation Degrees, the programme needs to be developed quickly. If HND accreditation is to be replaced then everyone familiar with the latter qualification needs to be fully informed.
- Modern Apprenticeships should not be age-confined.
- In relation to Foundation Degrees, it is disappointing little has been done to raise awareness among employers or potential students. There is a need for an adequately resourced industry-focused information campaign to raise awareness of Foundation Degrees.
- Policy development should address arrangements for the provision of child care and other forms of domestic caring responsibilities, transport provision and flexible course arrangements.
- Efforts can also be increased to address the predominance of single gender streaming in education, training and the workforce. These gender barriers require explicit policy development in the field of education and training in N. Ireland.
- To allow area based colleges the best chance to succeed, the Department for Employment and Learning must accept, as a primary consideration, that boundaries matter. Boundaries tend to largely shape administrative function and behaviour.
- The amount of bureaucracy is increasing on farms and there is an increasing need amongst the farming community for computer, managerial, business, accountancy skills etc. and it is important that the further education sector can provide such training at appropriate times and locations for farming families.
- There is continual pressure on farming families to diversify their business and the further education sector must continue to assist the farming community in doing this. The Department must consider carefully the location of colleges and be aware of the importance of access for those living in rural areas.

ANNEX D

Additional points and comments from community representatives, charities and the voluntary sector.

- The lack of development in the document regarding the age shift is a serious omission.
- There is a need to consult with the older community to discover needs and wants.
- There is a need to address special needs and disability issues.
- There is a need for the Department to be involved with anti-poverty policy.
- There is a need to develop ethnic minority policy.
- There is a need to develop a regional policy for work experience and employment opportunities.
- The understanding of what constitutes lifelong learning in the document is narrow, with little recognition of non-accredited courses.
- There is a need to recognise the role of community education in establishing a peaceful future for N. Ireland.
- There is a need to introduce National Occupational Standards in community development work.
- Lifelong learning in relation to the older learner gets no specific mention despite the high number of enrolments.
- Government direction on working lives and extension of working life is not given prominence even when on the economic tact.
- It is wrong to believe that everyone in N. Ireland will travel forty to fifty miles to avail of the course that best fits their needs.
- The education sector could benefit from the efficiencies that would be gained by having all provision under the remit of one department.
- It must be remembered that for young people with learning and/or physical disabilities, employment is not just a goal in itself but is closely linked to independent living and adult status.
- With a predicted figure of 150 young people leaving schools of special need over the next five years in the Northern Health and Social Services Board alone, there is surely an unmet need out in the community, and with one in five people in N. Ireland with a registered

disability it is not only a present need but also one that must be met in the future.

- Young people with learning and/or physical disabilities must be allowed to inform the process and the Department, in drawing up this strategy, has missed an excellent opportunity to engage with students and allow them to have an input in the way forward.
- The much-admired vocational education system in Germany provides a good balance between vocational education and training and the personal and social development of its young students. It would be good to see a similar balance reflected in the report's recommendations for young students in the sector in N. Ireland.
- There seems to be little space for individuals to have the learning space needed to experiment with creative ideas before risking themselves commercially. Creative learning can often be the spur for this entrepreneurial activity that drives the creative industries.
- The clearly stated objective "to promote lifelong learning" needs to take account of the learner from birth and the learning needs of parents as facilitators of that process both for themselves and their child.
- The consultation document did not establish if any groups have different needs or experiences, if there was any way to enhance equality of opportunity for groups identified under Section 75 or if there were any adverse impacts likely to result from the implementation of the proposed strategy.
- Lack of reference in the document to the need to establish formal arrangements with the special school sector, with day centres organised by Health and Social Services and with specialist employment and training organisations.
- There must be an opportunity for the Institutes to make partners with Social Services who are responsible for adult centres, who provide some form of vocational pathway.
- While there are many examples of voluntary and community groups working together to deliver provision, it is often the case that the further education college gets the credit for the number of enrolments and the contribution of the group is overlooked.
- Any conceptual framework to address educational underachievement must recognise the impact of disadvantage and deprivation as barriers to learning.

- Lifelong learning must be underpinned by equality of opportunity.
- There is a need for a North South dimension to further education particularly in the area of the harmonization of qualifications. There is also a need for consideration to be given to a European dimension.
- College boards must be more democratic and include representation from the local sectors they are meant to provide for.
- Adequate resourcing of second level Irish medium education is required.
- Following an examination of best practice models would advocate the formation of a Lifelong Learning Unit within the Department.
- Further consultation from the Department required, on the basis of this review.
- Would like to know if disability agencies will be included in 'closer working relationships between potential providers'.
- The move from community education to further education is fraught with difficulties and excludes students, disability awareness should be a mandatory element of training and development for ALL staff.
- A statement regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities should have been incorporated as part of the role in economic development, particularly in vocational experience for 14-19 and 16-19.
- The sector must accommodate the needs of disabled and special needs students when placing them in work experience placements.
- Would like to see a pre-entry curriculum.
- Regional Delivery Plan must set targets for disabled students.
- Would like to see an examination of the underlying reasons for poor achievement of level 1 courses by disabled students.
- There is a danger that decision on the future of lifelong learning in N. Ireland will be made on the basis of an inaccurate and limited understanding of the extent and nature of current provision and of the level of expertise within the voluntary and community sector.
- The document focuses on the review of further education, however a broader perspective can be taken on the provision of adult education in N. Ireland and the question of how adult participation in learning can be increased and addressed from that perspective.

- It is difficult to see how voluntary, community and training organisations will fit into the further education long term strategy; there is a culture of 'them and us' which does not help positive collaboration.
- The strategy does not recognise women's education or the educational needs of women. In the light of social cohesion, there is no framework or indication of how this will be achieved in the document's proposals.
- Women are still socially and economically disadvantaged and policies should recognise these issues.
- The document does not account specifically of N. Ireland as a 'post conflict' society and issues such as sectarianism, trauma etc.

ANNEX E

Additional points and comments from respondents from the education sector.

- Learner progression is central to the N. Ireland skills base being refreshed. Libraries can play a key role in this by developing closer links with the local colleges.
- Particularly impressed with the development of 'return to education' courses in many colleges which offer access to higher education and professional careers.
- It is alarming that over 20% of the adult population have weaknesses in literacy or numeracy. This points to serious inadequacies in current school teaching strategies and curriculum arrangements.
- The success of the further education sector in motivating and empowering students who enter with few qualifications is to be commended.
- It is vital that all involved understand the equivalency of qualifications and progressions are easily recognisable. It is also important that consideration is given to the portability and acceptance of these by employers, higher education and professional bodies throughout the United Kingdom (UK) and beyond.
- The diverse nature of further education provision means that the full role is not always either understood or appreciated and for that alone the document is helpful.
- Opportunities must be offered which compliment the restrictions of the workplace including provision for part-time workers. Such an approach is only feasible with commitment from Government (supported by Europe).
- The Workforce Development Fora should include some mechanism for feedback from organisations working with learners.
- Current demographic trends will result in increased participation by the over 50s who will need guidance to update their skills and keep them in the labour market.
- There are wider policy trends in public services reform in the UK which may offer lessons at this early stage of reforms in N. Ireland. UK policy development is shifting towards freeing up providers to respond more effectively to local needs and interpreting national priorities in a local context. It may be worth expanding on the idea of learner-centred provision in the implementation of the review.

- There may be benefit in considering the role of higher education in strategic partnership and provision. In England, the Learning & Skills Council and Higher Education Funding Council are currently developing the concept of Lifelong Learning Networks as a means of ensuring strategic partnership in provision. The Department should monitor the development of these Lifelong Learning Networks with a view to assessing whether a similar approach would be relevant in N. Ireland.
- Recognition by the Department of the role that library and learning resource staff has not always been apparent. The Department should consider how it could improve inspection of college libraries, perhaps by appointing an inspector for libraries.
- The Department should consider funding the standardization of a computerised library management system in further education.
- NIBEP is completing two pieces of work that they believe will support the implementation of the strategy. One is the collection of detailed data on business education links in N. Ireland. The second is a sector by sector analysis of the business education link scene in N. Ireland, based on Sectoral Skills Council classification.
- Participation rates in adult learning are dropping according to a recently published National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) survey. There is a need to look again at why we are not meeting people's needs at a community level.
- We believe the strategy could have made more of the opportunities presented by a credit framework.
- The need for the transportability of qualifications and skills has not been mentioned. The potential for transportability is an important aspect of credit. It is noted that the next review of the priority skills areas will include the needs of the public sector as well as the private sector.
- There is a danger that one awarding body's provision is being promoted to the exclusion of others.
- The role of e-learning in the future will influence the aspirations and needs of the student, the structure and style of delivery and the support structures necessary for staff this impact must be borne in mind.
- Further education colleges in Great Britain have had much greater involvement, in conjunction with higher education. This began as Partnerships for Progression and is now known as Aimhigher. The new strategy should be easily translated to the N. Ireland context.

- There should be clear terms of reference for the relative roles of the Quality Assurance Agency and the Education and Training Inspectorate with regard to HE/FE partnerships e.g. Foundation Degrees.
- School teachers need to be well informed of FE courses.
- The Department might wish to reconsider the position of the two university colleges in relation to the delivery of Foundation Degrees in N. Ireland.
- Economic development must be interpreted in a broad sense to include workforce development in the public sector, especially the healthcare and education sectors. It should also be recognised that significant parts of the healthcare and education sectors lie outside the public sector for example many care homes and child care facilities.
- For the development of Foundation Degrees it is vital the key characteristics of the pilot schemes are retained, especially the compulsory work-based element.
- It is important that graduates of Foundation Degree programmes are provided with sufficient 'bridging' learning opportunities to provide them with equal probability of success in the honours degree.
- It must be recognised that the compulsory work-based element makes it difficult for those in full-time employment and those with full-time family responsibilities to complete the Foundation Degree.

ANNEX F

Additional points and comments from respondents belonging to Local Area Development Groups

- The FE sector should aim to develop programmes targeting every day skills for life and not just for employment.
- Important links established with local grammar and secondary schools may be lost if further education units are remote from local area.
- Centres of Excellence are confined to the six economic priority skills areas identified. This does not take account of service industries such as health and leisure.
- Enterprise is a critical component of further education. Belfast continues to experience a low business birth rate and co-operation is required with a range of partner organisations to promote and invigorate the entrepreneurial culture.
- There appears to be a lack of detail in terms of how this strategy will be implemented. Implementation is key to the success of the strategy, and therefore more detail is needed.
- Despite the significant investment made by government in further, higher and continuing education since it came to power in 1997, a survey of participation in learning by adults conducted by NIACE and launched as part of Adult Learners Week 2004, shows there has been no sustained increase during that time. 19% of adults report they are currently learning, the lowest participation figures since before the Government came to power. NIACE attributes this downturn in part to the drive by funders towards a qualifications-based curriculum that is narrowing what is on offer for learners.
- The report briefly alludes to the Department's obligations under section 75 of the NI act (Paragraph 18 of the Executive Summary), yet, surprisingly, fails to address explicitly these obligations in the main body of the report.
- Recommend that the Department analyse the data presented by Section 75 group, in order to determine what patterns may exist in relation to inequalities in the further education sector. Such information should also be analysed in light of any proposed changes to the sector, in order to ensure that equality is promoted, and not diminished.
- It is also vital that the Department ensures that an excessive reliance on employer demand in guiding further education priorities does not serve to underemphasize the needs of some communities to develop

curricula that promote social cohesion.

- There is need for a full equality impact assessment at all stages of policy. If the needs of business are elevated at the expense of the needs of those most excluded from the education system, the strategy will fail.
- The implementation requires strong leadership to make it all happen.
- The outworking of the strategy must take account of variance within the regions of N. Ireland.
- The Department must map trends and forecast skills requirements. This forecasting of opportunities is something which our colleagues in the Republic of Ireland have managed to do to great effect.
- Workforce Development Fora should include a cross border aspect in border regions.
- Would wish to see interview skills and citizenship added to the curriculum. In hospitality industry this often extends to the basics of good manners.
- The name change has the potential to add to the amalgam which already exists if it is not adopted universally across the sector. The abbreviated name has become a meaningless acronym. The new name will reflect progression, the main vocational focus and the quality of the product.
- Consider the provision of an independent guidance service for young people as crucial in order that young people are able to have an informed and full consideration of options available to them with schools and the further education sector.
- The Department should recognise the community education sector, through a formalised partnership which should not restrict the community sector's innovation and responsiveness.
- Narrowing the curriculum and taking an accreditation heavy approach will not promote and encourage inclusive learning.
- The Department should consider the role which family literacy could play in facilitating the role out of Essential Skills Strategy.
- The addition of annual publications of non financial performance indicators should also be made available for part-time and non vocational courses.

- If there is a consideration within the Department that the economy in the north of Ireland is too heavily dependent upon public sector employment then this needs to be articulated within the proposed framework for change.
- At what stage will there be an equality impact assessment of the policy?
- What about Irish language education?
- Great concern is felt about the proposal to 'farm out' to the community sector Essential Skills and level 1 work. Where was the consultation regarding this?
- FE as a monitor of quality causes concern. The community sector through European funding programmes has undergone a very public monitoring of quality.

ANNEX G

ABBREVIATIONS

A-Level	Advanced Level
ANIC	Association of Northern Ireland Colleges
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CCEA	Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
DCAL	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
DE	Department of Education
DEL	Department for Employment and Learning
DETI	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EDF	Economic Development Forum
ETI	Education and Training Inspectorate
HNC	Higher National Certificate
HND	Higher National Diploma
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LSDA	Learning and Skills Development Agency
NATFHE	National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education
NIACE	The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
NIBEP	Northern Ireland Business Education Partnership
NUS-USI	National Union of Students – Union of Students in Ireland
SME	Small Medium-sized Enterprises
UK	United Kingdom