

Department for Employment and Learning's Strategic Approach to International Activity

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Department for
**Employment
and Learning**

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Department recognises that it supports an increasingly wide range of international activities across many business areas. In order to ensure that our current international activities and programmes are helping the Department to achieve its aims and objectives, and to gain maximum benefit from an increasingly competitive international student and labour market, we need to develop a more strategic approach to international activity.

1.2 The purpose of this document, therefore, is to:

- i) provide a framework within which all existing or new international programmes and activities can be supported by the Department; and
- ii) assist the Department in determining how it can add value to the work already being carried out by the Northern Ireland education and training sector in the area of international activity.

1.3 The increased globalisation of economies, trade and services creates challenges for all countries worldwide. If we in Northern Ireland are to remain competitive on an international stage, we must respond actively to these challenges by exploiting our strengths. As a region of 1.7 million people on the western edge of the European Union, with increasing competition from both developed and rapidly emerging developing nations, it is even more imperative that we maximise our opportunities for international collaboration and involvement. By developing strategic international partnerships we can increase our influence and reputation as a global player; thus attracting more inward investment, skilled workers and high calibre overseas students coming to study at our Higher and Further Education (HE and FE) institutions. This outward, forward looking approach offers the best means of securing our place in the world for the benefit of all citizens of Northern Ireland.

1.4 Our first challenge in Northern Ireland is to have a clear strategic vision of how we are to engage internationally. As a small region, we must decide when it is most appropriate to develop collaborative international

partnerships with other countries; when it is most appropriate to link up with national, European or global initiatives for international engagement; and when it is more appropriate to act on our own as a devolved administration.

- 1.5 We need to develop the skills necessary to compete on a global stage if we are to remain an economically competitive, productive nation. As the Secretary of State, Peter Hain, indicated in his recent budget announcement for 2006-2008: "Our working population must have the skills to allow us to prosper in the new, more competitive and highly skilled international markets that will dominate all our futures."
- 1.6 Through proactive engagement on the global stage and the development of a clear strategic approach to international activity, we can maximise our abilities to perform as a global player.
- 1.7 A Key Action of the Department's Corporate Plan 2005 – 2008 is to "develop and implement a strategy for the increased internationalisation of higher and further education, training and research." Up to now, our approach to international activity has been mainly focussed on:
 - funding international exchange programmes and research activity;
 - providing support for outgoing Ministerial trade missions and study visits;
 - hosting receptions for international visitors;
 - developing collaborative partnerships with other countries through, for example, the signing of Memoranda of Understanding in the field of education; and
 - monitoring and contributing to the international dimensions of UK policy development.

A full list of the international activities/programmes currently supported by the Department can be found at Annex A.

- 1.8 This paper is a high level strategic document which will inform our thinking across the whole Department in order to ensure that all international aspects of our work are based on the same key principles

outlined in this paper. In considering any future new policy or programme or possible change to existing policies or programmes, this document will act as a framework for Departmental officials in considering the potential international dimension of Departmental policy.

- 1.9 In Section 4 of this document, we have outlined a number of new actions we will wish to take forward as part of our strategic approach to international activity. In taking forward any new activity, we will balance the benefits of such activities against our existing programmes and initiatives within the context of our new framework.
- 1.10 The Department is aware that international activity is most effective if it is carried out in a coherent and co-ordinated way, working in partnership across local and central Government, business, and the education sector. In developing this strategic approach, the Department consulted closely with key partners, including the Northern Ireland HE institutions, the further education sector, the British Council, NI-CO, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), Invest NI, the Department of Education (DE) and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD).

2. Context

The Department for Employment and Learning

- 2.1 Our vision of Northern Ireland is one where we provide international excellence in HE and FE, training and research to enhance the level of skills and competencies of those entering or already in the labour market; thereby contributing to Northern Ireland's economic growth and prosperity and enabling employers to compete in today's global economy. This is achieved through the movement and exchange of both people and knowledge across borders to stimulate innovation and enhance the competitiveness of industry.
- 2.2 Providing individuals with the skills and qualifications required by employers is the key theme running through the Department's work. The Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland presents an overarching skills and

workforce development strategy to ensure that the skills needs of businesses are identified and met. Major elements of this strategy focus on the need to raise levels of qualifications and to increase the flexibility of the workforce which will, in turn, help to raise the productivity and competitiveness of the Northern Ireland economy. The education and training sector exists in a world where national boundaries are increasingly unimportant and integrated solutions and strategic partnerships will be required to meet international skills and training needs. The Department's Skills Strategy recognises the need to deal with the impact of globalisation, the potential for new jobs with higher skills requirements and the reality of a national and increasingly international labour market.

Northern Ireland

- 2.3 The Department for Employment and Learning's strategic approach to international activity has been developed in the context of wider Northern Ireland Government policies and priorities which cut across all Northern Ireland Departments in the field of economic competitiveness, capacity building and European and global relations. Details of these policies can be found in Annex B.

- 2.4 The OFMDFM Practical Guide to Policy Making recommends that good policy making should take account of influencing factors in the regional, national, European and international situations and draw on experience in other regions and countries. It is clear that international comparisons are helpful in developing the wider evidence base. The Department for Employment and Learning supports this approach and recognises the importance of building in an international dimension to policy making and development where it is appropriate to do so. It actively considers research and the effectiveness of policy responses in regions outside of the UK to inform its own major policy reviews. The Department builds the evidence base for policy formulation and development through its Research Agenda and rolling programme of evaluation which, where appropriate, builds in international comparisons.

United Kingdom

- 2.5 The development of a strategic approach to international activity by this Department must take into consideration UK immigration policy in the context of the Government's Five Year Strategy on Immigration & Asylum. Through the Joint Education Taskforce, we will ensure that the concerns and views of the Northern Ireland education sector are taken into consideration by the Home Office in the context of future immigration policy decisions which may affect (potential) international students coming to Northern Ireland, in particular in relation to the proposed new points-based migration system.
- 2.6 This Department has also taken account of existing international strategies across the UK. In particular we have considered the vision and goals expressed in the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) publication "Putting the World into World-Class Education - An international strategy for education, training and children's services" and, where applicable, we have mirrored the goals expressed in this document. DfES has expressed a vision of the UK as a confident, outward-looking society and a leading edge economy playing its full part in the world. In support of this vision, they have identified three key goals with associated priorities for action which are detailed in Annex C.

Europe

- 2.7 The Northern Ireland Government, with the UK Member State, remains committed to active participation at European level in pursuing the Lisbon agenda to promote economic reform in Europe and so become "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world." To this end, challenging benchmarks/targets have been set for the contribution that education and skills development should make to this goal by 2010.

Ireland

- 2.8 The Department of Education and Science in the Republic of Ireland is also considering its way forward in relation to the internalisation of Irish education and recently launched an Internationalisation of Irish

Education Services Report. Details of this report can be found at Annex D.

- 2.9 In taking forward this strategic approach to international activity in Northern Ireland, the Department will monitor developments in the HE sector in the Republic of Ireland and, when appropriate, support North-South co-operation in international activities.

3. Key Principles

- 3.1 The Department's strategic approach to international activity cuts across the areas of HE and FE, training and employment.
- 3.2 The Department has developed two key principles as the framework to guide its international activity. The principles, while distinct, are interdependent and are as follows:
- developing the skills and competencies to compete in a global economy through exposing individuals to global issues, and nurturing in them an appreciation of cultural diversity; and
 - maximising the contribution of the tertiary education sector, including university research, to overseas trade and inward investment, by encouraging strategic partnerships and opportunities for international collaboration.
- 3.3 These principles will provide a framework within which existing or new international programmes and activities can be supported by the Department. All programmes supported by the Department in the area of international activity in the future must aim to meet at least one of these two key principles and all new activity will be assessed for its ability to fit within this framework. This will assist the Department in determining how it can add value to the work already being carried out by the Northern Ireland education and training sector in the area of international activity.
- 3.4 This section aims to outline the international activity currently being taken forward/supported by the Department for Employment and

Learning under each key principle. We believe that all of our existing international programmes and activities currently sit within the framework of our key principles as outlined above.

Key Principle 1 – Developing the skills and competencies to compete in a global economy through exposing individuals to global issues, and nurturing in them an appreciation of cultural diversity

- 3.5 International involvement is, essentially, about exposing individuals to global issues, providing them with an appreciation of cultural diversity and widening their horizons. The benefits include a population which is more socially and culturally aware, one which is more economically and politically active and one which can contribute to the development of a more outward-focused society in Northern Ireland - a society that, through an international perspective on education and training, is better prepared for the global challenges of the 21st century. Periods of study, work experience and employment abroad also develop skills sought by employers such as initiative, self-reliance, maturity of outlook and the ability to work confidently and efficiently in an international context. International exposure, therefore, not only has economic benefits for employers but also increases an individual's employment prospects in an increasingly international market.
- 3.6 If we are to compete on the global stage, we need to make significant improvements in terms of skills levels in order to match the best of our competitors and EU partners. To achieve this, we need to face a number of challenges, which include the following:
- dealing with the impact of the new skills and flexibilities demanded by increased globalisation, which has meant a migration of traditional manufacturing to low-cost economies, an acceleration in the pace of technological change, and the potential for new jobs with higher skills requirements;
 - working with the reality of a national and increasingly international labour market, in which labour is mobile; and
 - a shortage of specific skills in certain highly skilled areas which will be identified by the Northern Ireland Skills Expert Group.
- 3.7 This strategic approach to international activity aims to address these challenges and to develop the global skills and competencies necessary for Northern Ireland citizens to compete in a global economy. These skills have been as identified through international best practice and

include the following:

- the ability to work comfortably in multinational teams;
- knowledge of different business methods, legislation and ways of working;
- understanding and appreciating different cultures; and
- feeling confident when working in multinational projects.

3.8 The foreign language skills of those involved in exporting and foreign investment activity in Northern Ireland are well below the EU average and evidence suggests that this may act as a barrier to the establishment of trade contracts with overseas companies. It is vital that the language capacity and cultural understanding of those involved in overseas trade is developed in order to exploit new markets and develop existing ones, and to improve relations between Northern Ireland and other countries.

3.9 HE and FE institutions in Northern Ireland currently offer a number of opportunities for students to study or undertake periods of work-experience abroad through, for example, European Community education and training programmes such as Erasmus and Leonardo. These programmes aim to give domestic students a more global perspective and to improve their global skills.

3.10 Practical work-based exchange programmes such as IAESTE offer students the opportunity to gain quality training in other countries and to promote Northern Ireland expertise and culture abroad. These programmes, as well as international employment programmes such as Walsh Visas, provide an opportunity to create long-term business to business partnerships and to learn from good practice in terms of international working and business methods. Participation in these programmes develops the skills of Northern Ireland citizens, thus making a direct contribution to our economy.

3.11 If our citizens are to have the capacity and opportunity to work abroad, their qualifications need to be recognised in the places they want to work. The same applies in reverse: Northern Ireland gains from having access to qualified migrant workers, who have contributed considerably in recent years to the growth of the Northern Ireland economy.

Current Activity

3.12 In order to meet our obligations under this key principle, the Department currently works towards:

- a. working with our partners to make progress within Europe towards the mutual recognition and improved transparency of qualifications; greater mobility of students and graduates; and the development of a European Qualifications Framework and European Credit Transfer System within the emerging European Higher Education Area;
 - *We will do this through our support for the Bologna process which Education Ministers from 45 countries have now signed.*
- b. supporting FE and HE institutions in the promotion of opportunities for outward mobility of Northern Ireland students and FE and HE staff through participation in the European Community's education and training programmes such as Erasmus and Leonardo and other international exchanges/initiatives;
 - *We currently contribute financially towards the administrative costs of Erasmus and we will continue to monitor the development of UK and EU policy in this area. We are also working to ensure more efficient operation, greater flexibility and ease of access to European mobility programmes through our membership on the New Programme Steering Group which has been set up to negotiate a new EU integrated Lifelong Learning programme for 2007-2013.*
- c. promoting exchange programmes which encourage international co-operation in the field of work-based training and facilitate long-term business to business partnerships;
 - *We do this through our support for international training, employment and study programmes such as Wider Horizons, Walsh Visas, and the Business Education Initiative (BEI); and through the hosting of receptions for IAESTE students in*

Northern Ireland.

- d. promoting the active recruitment of highly skilled workers to Northern Ireland to address the skills gaps in the Northern Ireland economy.
 - *We do this through the European Employment Services (EURES) programme which enables employers and job-seekers to access relevant information about the countries of the European Community.*

Key Principle 2 - Maximising the contribution of the tertiary education sector, including university research, to overseas trade and inward investment, by encouraging strategic partnerships and opportunities for international collaboration

- 3.13 The increased globalisation of economies, trade and services has turned HE into a first necessity for all countries to enable them to meet their challenges successfully.
- 3.14 The HE and FE sector can be a major driver for a country's "knowledge economy": it is high value-added, and its growth has been strong and consistent over many years. However, in addition to the direct economic return to a country, international education is linked increasingly to national agendas, such as skilled migration, research, domestic education provision and international competitiveness. It is viewed as a means of building long-term relationships for influence that are important for political, trade and cultural purposes. As well as broadening the educational experience of UK students, international education contributes to the diversity of the student body within the UK.
- 3.15 It is also recognised that universities need quality international students and staff to grow their reputation; research students are necessary at the national level to contribute to the country's research and innovation and English Language schools and colleges have key roles in preparing these same students for their future studies.
- 3.16 The European Commission's proposals for reform of Structural Funds (SF) for the 2007-2013 Financial Perspective will have a significant impact on UK regions. The European Community has proposed that the new generation of Structural Fund programmes target investments in knowledge, innovation and research capacities as well as improved education and vocational training. It is clear that the HE sector has a valuable role to play in each of these main priorities, and that they also overlap with several key agendas in the HE sector.
- 3.17 To date, the two Northern Ireland HEIs have received EU SF largely for the development of research infrastructure and other Research and Development (R&D) initiatives. From 2007, Northern Ireland will no

longer have “Objective One in Transition” status and will receive significantly less Structural Funding than previously. In anticipation of this inevitable reduction, the UK administrations are currently exploring ways in which we might best influence decision-making arrangements post-2006 in order to maintain the momentum of activities and the sustainability of research infrastructure currently supported through Structural Funding, and also influencing the European Commission’s decision-making arrangements post-2006.

3.18 UK higher education institutions (HEIs) have a long tradition of welcoming international students and researchers who are attracted by the wide range of high quality courses and a world class research base. However, we cannot afford to stand still and it is vital that we maintain our strength in international activities as HE becomes an increasingly globalised commodity and international competition for students, staff and research funding continues to grow.

3.19 There is great potential to grow the already large number of international students at academic institutions in Northern Ireland. These totalled 6,360 students from 87 countries at Northern Ireland universities and a further 2,634 at FE colleges in 2003/04. The economic value of international students should also not be underestimated, contributing at least £67.2m per annum to the Northern Ireland economy.

3.20 Over the next decade or so, when the demand for higher level skills and qualifications in many societies will be growing faster than the capacity to deliver them, the prospects are that the global market for high quality education goods and services will continue to grow at a significant rate. The best forecast is that total global demand for international tertiary education student places will increase from 2.4 million in 2005 to 5.8 million by 2020, with over 1 million seeking HE in the UK by 2025.

3.21 Trans-national education, via a variety of delivery modes including distance and e-learning; licensing, validation and franchising arrangements; twinning etc. is attracting increasing attention. It is forecast that global demand for trans-national education will expand even faster than that for international students seeking an overseas campus-based experience. Open and e-learning are becoming current

practices at traditional universities as well. Given the increasingly competitive nature of the student marketplace, combined with the impact of new technology and the constraints on Northern Ireland HE capacity, it will be increasingly important to deliver more courses overseas. We must also ensure that the quality of such courses is as high as that delivered in Northern Ireland HEIs. This can only be achieved through the fostering of partnerships with prestigious academic institutions overseas.

3.22 One of Northern Ireland's key strengths is the high quality of our people. Our education systems produce consistently world class science and technology graduates, technicians and business people. In addition, Northern Ireland's inventiveness, creativity and capacity for innovation are recognised. In conjunction with DETI, we seek to create the conditions to harness these strengths and to place science, technology, research and development (R&D) and innovation at the centre of the region's economic and social development. As part of this process, we need to consider a range of research and collaborative links with institutions in certain target countries across the world.

3.23 Whilst it is recognised that the HE and FE sectors need to attract quality international students, we must also foster global and cross-cultural knowledge and understanding in our local students in order for them to compete in a global society. Northern Ireland students should be encouraged to go abroad for part of their studies in high quality programmes to ensure they are able to function effectively in the world into which they will graduate.

Current Activity

3.24 In order to meet our obligations under this key principle, the Department currently works towards:

- a. promoting the role of our universities as international hubs for learning and research and working with our partners to demonstrate the strength of Northern Ireland's research base;

- *We do this through support for the US-Ireland R&D Partnership and the Cross Border Programme for Research and Education Contributing to Peace and Reconciliation. We also facilitate in the organisational arrangements for outward educational visits as part of Invest NI Trade missions. We will also continue to support the development of national and international interregional networks as part of the Northern Ireland Regional Innovation Strategy (RIS) to ensure that Northern Ireland is aware of best practice in R&D and innovation, and can benchmark its overall innovation performance against comparable regions competing in the global economy.*

- b. supporting Northern Ireland research activity to attract inward foreign investment and improve the long-term research, innovative and productive capacity of Northern Ireland;
 - *We support this activity through the Strategic Priority Fund, the Support Programme for University Research (SPUR) and the Cross Border Programme for Research and Education Contributing to Peace and Reconciliation.*

- c. funding scholarship programmes, in particular for international post-graduate students and research staff in certain subject areas that allow for some of the most able students from around the world to study in Northern Ireland and promote global learning;
 - *We currently support the Overseas Research Students Awards Scheme (ORSAS), Chevening and Mitchell scholarship programmes.*

- d. assisting our HE and FE establishments in developing collaborative links with prestigious institutions that are of strategic importance to Northern Ireland and in accessing new overseas markets, involving innovative means of delivery and partnerships and strengthened quality assurance;
 - *We currently do this by facilitating in the organisational*

arrangements for Invest NI Trade missions and through the signing of Memoranda of Understanding on co-operation in the field of education. We support the Joint Academic Network (JANET) and the Higher Education and Research Opportunities (HERO) website. We also provide financial support for the administration of the Erasmus Mundus programme. We are also assisting in the organisation of the Smithsonian Folklife Festival 2007 which aims to promote opportunities for collaborative research between Northern Ireland and US universities.

- e. promoting Northern Ireland as a key destination for international students;
- We currently do this through our support for the continuation and further development of the Prime Minister's Initiative and through support for the Northern Ireland pages of the Education UK and HERO websites. We also ensure, where possible, that international visitors in the fields of HE and FE and overseas students in Northern Ireland receive appropriate information about the HE and FE sectors here through the hosting of receptions for international visitors and students participating in the IAESTE and Chevening programmes. We are also assisting in the organisation of the Smithsonian Folklife Festival 2007 which aims to increase opportunities for educational exchange through the promotion of Northern Ireland as a key study/research destination to US students.*
- f. promoting the creative and supportive use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for education in Northern Ireland;
- We will do this through the development and implementation of an e-learning strategy for further education and training to which is a Key Action of the Department's Corporate Plan, and through continued support for the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning initiative.*
- g. bringing effective influence to bear on the UK Government, other

countries, regions and institutions on international policy issues affecting Northern Ireland;

- *We endeavour to achieve this through our membership on various national steering groups such as the Joint Education Taskforce and the European Coordinating Group; and through liaison with Whitehall colleagues. We will continue to monitor and contribute to the international dimensions of UK and EU policy developments and their potential implications for Northern Ireland.*

h. considering the implications of the reform of EU Structural Funds post-2006 for the NI HE sector's research activities and exploring ways of maintaining the momentum of activities and sustainability of the research base currently supported through the SF.

- *We are currently liaising with the other UK funding bodies to explore ways in which we might best influence decision-making arrangements post-2006.*

i. working with our EU, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and other partners worldwide to learn from one another and to benchmark our own performance against world-class standards, drawing on best practice everywhere;

- *We achieve this through Departmental study visits, our contribution to international studies and reviews and through the monitoring of best practice and policy across the globe.*

j. promoting best practice in the provision of support to overseas students in Northern Ireland and identifying and promulgating best practice in ensuring that the presence of overseas students adds to the quality of the education experience of home students;

- *We currently support the work of Universities UK, UKCOSA, the British Council, the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) and other UK Government Departments in this area.*

4. Proposed New Actions

- 4.1 This section identifies new actions which the Department will consider taking forward in an international context. These proposed new actions are in addition to those international activities currently supported by the Department for Employment and Learning as outlined above and in Annex A. In taking forward any new activity, this will have to be assessed against existing provision in this area within the context of competing priorities and resources. In doing so, the Department will be better placed to determine how it can add value to the work already being carried out by the Northern Ireland education and training sector in the area of international activity.
- 4.2 In taking forward our strategic approach, we will consider the following new actions:

Developing Global skills

- i. identify which generic and specific skills for the global economy might be promoted in relevant areas of publicly funded HE and FE, training and employment programmes and services;
- ii. encourage the enhancement of foreign language skills and cultural competencies of those involved in international activity in Northern Ireland, in conjunction with further education colleges, HEIs, Invest NI and DE; e.g. by supporting the joint initiative by the two Northern Ireland Universities to develop a languages strategy for Northern Ireland;
- iii. review the activities of the European Employment services (EURES) programme and, in so doing, consider opportunities to further promote the key principles outlined in this Strategy;

Promoting Northern Ireland HE and FE abroad

- iv. explore the potential of a Northern Ireland specific education marketing brand to promote Northern Ireland as a key destination for international students;

- v. work with our partners such as NI-CO to achieve international recognition for the world-class skills and expertise in Northern Ireland society and avail of commercial opportunities to exploit such skills;
- vi. promote Northern Ireland in the USA through cooperation with the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington; and
- vii. promote Northern Ireland in Europe through cooperation with the Northern Ireland Executive office in Brussels.

Promoting international mobility and collaboration

- viii. explore the potential of further scholarships, in particular for international post-graduate students and research staff in certain subject areas in partnership with the Northern Ireland universities;
- ix. support universities, colleges and other providers in accessing new overseas markets by participating in and facilitating the organisation of inward and outward education-focussed study visits overseas;
- x. consider the potential of encouraging Northern Ireland education establishments to build more short-term overseas work experience components into FE and HE courses;
- xi. in conjunction with the HE and FE institutions and the British Council, explore the possibility of identifying a number of geographical markets upon which efforts could be focussed for which attracting overseas students to Northern Ireland;
- xii. ensure that Northern Ireland HE and FE students and staff are better informed about the overseas exchange opportunities available to them by working with the British Council, Northern Ireland FE and HE institutions and other partners;
- xiii. encourage and support institutions in the further development of trans-national education at quality-assured overseas campuses;

xiv. consider the relevant issues surrounding the implementation of the new EU integrated Lifelong Learning programme for 2007-2013 in relation to vocational education and training and higher education in Northern Ireland.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 We have identified above our key principles which will act as a framework for all future programmes and initiatives supported by the Department in the area of international activity. All new activities, including those identified in Section 4 above, will be assessed against existing programmes in light of competing priorities and resources and within the context of our new framework.
- 5.2 Government accepts that it has a responsibility to take forward the actions contained in this document. However, education and training providers, employers and individuals have a major role to play if the actions contained in this document are to be realised, as have other organisations that are keen to support learners. To succeed, it will require the engagement of all these stakeholders.
- 5.3 The Department acknowledges the contribution of the members of its International Strategy Working Group to the development of the Department's policy in this area of international activity. The Department will continue to consult with the members of this group and other key stakeholders as it takes forward new and existing international initiatives and programmes.
- 5.4 The Department is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and good community relations, the delivery of the goals of targeting social need, and to strategies on regional and rural development. The Department will meet its obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and ensure that equality impact assessments and policy proofing will be carried out as policies are developed.

Current International Programmes and Initiatives

Higher Education Initiatives

Prime Minister's Initiative

The Prime Minister launched a strategy in 1999 to attract more international students to the UK. He set targets of an extra 50,000 non-EU students in HE, and an extra 25,000 in FE by 2005 (compared to 1996/97). The HE and FE targets for 2005 have now been achieved. These overseas students bring a new and different perspective to university or college life, significantly broadening the experience of UK students and the communities within which they live. On their return home many students maintain affection for and ties with the UK. This is hugely beneficial in terms of fostering mutual understanding and recognition between the UK and our international partners. The PMI was a five-year programme which ended on 31 March 2005. A new strategy group has been set up to advise on a successor to the PMI from 2006 which aims to develop a new strategy for the recruitment of international students to the UK and to advise on funding arrangements.

Mitchell Scholarships

The Mitchell scholarship programme provides an opportunity for students between the ages of 18 and 30 from the United States to develop their perspectives through studying at universities in Ireland. Mitchell scholarships allow Americans to pursue one year of post-graduate study in any discipline at HEIs in the North and South of Ireland and are intended to interest and involve the next generation of America's leaders in the US-Ireland relationship. The Mitchell Scholarship provides tuition, housing, a living expenses stipend and international travel. Normally, 12 scholarships are awarded each year.

IAESTE

The International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Expertise (IAESTE) is a world-wide organisation encompassing more than 80

countries which provides students in HE with course-related practical experience in another country. Since it was formed in 1948 it has accommodated over 300,000 student exchanges. Northern Ireland is a key player in the exchange programme. This year, of the 180 students that came to the UK as part of the programme, 80 were placed with companies in Northern Ireland, while a similar number from Northern Ireland universities were placed abroad.

Chevening Scholarships

The Chevening Scholarships are prestigious awards, which enable overseas students to study in the UK. They are on offer in more than 150 countries, and enable tomorrow's leaders, decision makers and opinion formers from overseas to become familiar with the UK, and to make contacts with UK institutions and companies which can continue throughout their careers. The Chevening programme currently provides more than 2,200 new scholarships each year for postgraduate study or research at UK HEIs.

Higher Education (HE) Links

The HE Links programme is run by the British Council and is funded by the UK government's Department for International Development (DfID) and aims to promote collaboration between HEIs in the UK and developing countries and to contribute to the sustainable development of the countries in which it operates by enhancing the research and training capacity of the HEI. From these links patents have been registered, curricula developed and courses initiated in many Indian institutions, with academic inputs from leading UK institutions. The current links (13 in number) are nearing completion and the existing scheme will end in March 2006.

A full review of the HEL Scheme was carried out recently, the outcome of which was that DfID were to continue with a redesigned HE links programme, maintaining current levels of annual investment but with some modifications to the existing scheme. In 2004, Hilary Benn, the Secretary of State for International Development, announced Development Partnerships in Higher Education (DEPHE) as the successor programme to the HE Links Programme. The new programme will run for a seven year period from 2006, with a review after five years.

Higher Education and Research Opportunities (HERO) Website

The Department for Employment and Learning, along with the other three funding bodies, funds the operation of the HERO website (www.hero.ac.uk), which aims to be a gateway into the UK HE sector for all prospective students. It guides users through a complex system, providing reference information and helpful background context.

Erasmus Mundus

The Erasmus Mundus programme (formerly Erasmus World) offers high-profile assistance in the form of 250 European masters courses and thousands of study grants and fellowships for nationals of third countries and for Europeans. It will help to strengthen intercultural dialogue and communicate European cultures and values more effectively to the rest of the world. Covering the period 2004-2008, Erasmus Mundus will have a budget of EUR 200 million.

Socrates-Erasmus

Socrates-Erasmus is the mobility programme for Higher Education in the European Union (EU). The aim is to increase awareness and understanding of other European cultures amongst university students by encouraging them to have a period of study in another member state, or member states of the European Economic Area (EEA). Only EU or EEA nationals are eligible to participate. Employers put a high value on initiative, self-reliance and maturity of outlook; they are also keenly aware of the need for staff who can work confidently and efficiently in an international context. Participation in the scheme should enhance a student's employment prospects in an increasingly international labour market. An Erasmus study period is a beneficial addition to a degree which should be promoted to UK employers. As more and more students across Europe and beyond are undertaking study or work placements abroad, the students who have an international study placement on their CV will certainly have an advantage over those who do not.

Smithsonian Folklife Festival 2007

The Smithsonian Folklife Festival is the largest cultural event in Washington DC's calendar and is widely recognised as a significant promotional platform for participants and their homeland. The Festival has been voted the top Tourist Attraction in America in a survey of regional tourist bureaux. It started in 1967 with the goal of highlighting the living cultural heritage of communities across America, and their roots in other nations. Since then, the Festival has evolved into a two-week programme of demonstrations, events and performances, with an emphasis on community based music, dance and song, celebrations, arts, crafts, story telling vernacular architecture, culinary and work culture. The Festival presents an important opportunity for people to learn about Northern Ireland's history, heritage and culture from Northern Ireland's finest musicians, storytellers, cooks, craftspeople, occupational specialists and cultural experts. The Festival also aims to expand opportunities to promote research and study in Northern Ireland to US students and promote opportunities for collaborative research links between Northern Ireland and US universities. 2007 will be the 41st Folklife Festival and will run from 27 June – 8 July.

US – Ireland R&D Partnership

The US-Ireland R&D Partnership emanates from the Business Summit held in Washington DC in September 2002, which recommended the setting up of a Task Force, with members from the US, the Republic of Ireland and N Ireland, to examine the potential economic benefits of R&D collaboration, particularly in biotechnology and ICT, and to develop a strategy and models for collaboration. A formal agreement on the scope and operation of the Partnership was announced by all three Governments in January 2005. The first meeting of the Steering Group was held on the 20 December 2005 at which it was agreed in principle to move to a competitive call for proposals where consortia of researchers, drawn from the three jurisdictions, would compete for funding. Avian influenza, diabetes and nanotechnology were designated as immediate priority areas, with the Steering Group to agree calls for proposals at its next meeting in Washington DC.

Support Programme for University Research (SPUR)

The SPUR initiative runs from 2001 to 2008, in two phases, and will invest a total of £94m over that period as a 50/50 partnership with a private charitable funder. The focus of SPUR is on strengthening those areas of research at QUB and UU already operating or with the potential to operate at the highest international standards.

Many of the projects being supported have explicit international dimensions. For example, part of the programme of the International Research Centre for Experimental Physics at QUB involves inviting Distinguished Visiting Fellows from across the globe to conduct research and share knowledge. Around six visiting scientists are based at the Centre at any one time. The Centre for Media Research at UU, meanwhile, has developed links with the Centre for the Study of Culture and Society at Bangalore, India.

Strategic Priority Fund

This fund, which will invest £5.5m between 2004 and 2007, aims to expand the capacity of areas of research which can contribute to Invest Northern Ireland's key technological areas for foreign direct investment. Again, the importance of internationally recognised and benchmarked research activity is central to meeting the aims of the fund. Beyond this, the QUB programme extends the Distinguished Visiting Fellowships scheme to other strong research areas.

Cross-Border Programme for Research and Education Contributing to Peace and Reconciliation

This is a joint PEACE II-funded programme between the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education and Science in the Republic of Ireland which supports research and development to reap benefits for Northern Ireland and the border counties, with the specific objective of impacting positively on peace-building and reconciliation. The programme aims to generate new policies for future peace programmes — as well as improving the effectiveness of existing ones — and also to demonstrate new models for mutually beneficial cross-border collaboration. Over €3 million is shared between 5 projects, which will run until April 2006.

Overseas Research Students Awards Scheme (ORSAS)

ORSAS was set up by the Secretary of State for Education and Science in 1979 to attract high-quality international students to the United Kingdom to undertake research. The Scheme is funded through the four UK HE funding bodies.

ORSAS awards offer international students the opportunity to carry out a broad range of research at well-established UK academic institutions of worldwide recognition. ORSAS award holders make a valuable contribution, not only to the UK research base, but also to economic, scientific, educational and other aspects of life in their own country. Meanwhile, their involvement in UK academic life and the wider cultural experiences offered in the UK contribute to their personal development and can help increase their future opportunities.

ORSAS awards provide funding to pay the difference between the international student tuition fees and the home/EU student tuition fees charged by the academic institution that the student attends/will be attending.

Dorothy Hodgkin Postgraduate Award Scheme (DHPA)

In November 2003 the Prime Minister launched the Dorothy Hodgkin Postgraduate Award Scheme (DHPA). The scheme is a new UK initiative to bring outstanding students from India, China, Hong Kong, South Africa, Brazil, Russia and the developing world to come and study for PhDs in top rated UK research facilities.

Following the success of the 2004 pilot, which provided funds to support 129 PhD students, it has been decided to extend the scheme beyond the pilot. The 2005 awards will provide funding for up to 160 new PhD students.

Employment Programmes

Walsh Visas

The Walsh Visa Programme offers opportunities for young long-term

unemployed people aged between 21 and 35 and residing in Northern Ireland or the border counties of the Republic of Ireland to obtain temporary visas to live and work in the USA for up to two years. As a result of this work and life experience, it is expected that, on their return, participants will be better equipped to make a more tangible contribution to their home economy.

European Employment Services (EURES)

The Department's Employment Service, in conjunction with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), provides a service to employers and job-seekers, enabling them to access relevant information throughout the countries of the European Community. EURES activities include:

- helping employers with recruitment difficulties to successfully recruit migrant workers from other EU member states;
- accompanying employers to other EU countries, marketing clients through EURES Adviser network, and providing onsite interview facilities for our employers while out in the foreign country;
- helping Northern Ireland residents to find work in other EU member states; and
- offering daily advice and guidance for national and non-nationals.

Disablement Advisory Service (DAS)

The Department's Disablement Advisory Service is currently involved with two EQUAL projects, one in partnership with the Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment and one with the Orchardville Society on Autism. These are European funded trans-national projects which the Department supports in terms of either match funding or staff time and provide examples of best practice from other European Countries.

Training programmes

Wider Horizons

The Wider Horizons Programme is managed jointly on behalf of the International Fund for Ireland by the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland and by FAS, The Training & Employment

Authority in the Republic of Ireland. It is delivered by Integrated Area Partnerships which were set up on a cross-community and cross-border basis. The programme is a Peace and Reconciliation based initiative which targets socially and economically disadvantaged young people between the ages of 18 and 28. Vocational training, personal development and work experience opportunities are provided for participants at home and abroad. Participants are drawn equally from the Nationalist and Unionist traditions in Northern Ireland and young people from the Republic of Ireland (mostly in the Border Counties).

Management Development programmes

Business Education Initiative

The Business Education Initiative enables undergraduate students from any discipline to study business and management related subjects for one academic year at private, church affiliated university or college in the United States. Participants who at the time of application are in their penultimate year of study at a Northern Ireland college or university, gain an enhanced “global perspective” as well as exposure to American business methods and practice. The Department provides students with board and lodging, books, travel and insurance, and a small settling in allowance while the US Colleges and Universities waive their fees for participants. The programme has been running since 1994 and to date over 1,200 students have graduated.

The Northern Ireland policy context

Economic Vision

The future economic direction for Northern Ireland is articulated in the Government's Economic Vision, published alongside the Draft Priorities and Budget 2005-08. The overarching vision is for Northern Ireland to be a high value-added, highly skilled, innovative and enterprising economy which enables us to compete globally, leading to greater wealth creation and better employment opportunities for all. New skills must be acquired and competencies developed if Northern Ireland is to compete in international markets where industry and commerce are increasingly knowledge based. The Department for Employment and Learning's strategic approach to international activity aims to address this challenge directly.

Programme for Government for 2002-2005

The Programme for Government for 2002-2005, published by the Northern Ireland Executive in April 2001, committed the Government to the development of Northern Ireland as an outward looking region, ready to work with others on areas of mutual benefit and to improve our own policies. To this end, the Government remains committed to the development of North/South, East/West and international relations, in particular with the UK, Europe and North America. The commitment by the Government to examine ways of forging mutually beneficial links with other regions in Europe and with North America and to raise the positive profile of Northern Ireland in Europe and across the rest of the world is central to the Department for Employment and Learning's strategic approach to international activity.

Fit for Purpose: The Reform Agenda in the Northern Ireland Civil Service

Fit for Purpose: The Reform Agenda in the Northern Ireland Civil Service, published in October 2004, sets out the need for public bodies to improve their efficiency, build their capabilities, and utilise the talents of their staff to the full. To this end, the Government committed itself to taking forward a new reform programme for the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS). Our proposed

strategic approach to international activity reflects the commitment by the NICS to build capacity of the Northern Ireland workforce and those entering the workforce in order to develop the necessary skills and competencies required by a competitive global economy.

Northern Ireland Regional Innovation Strategy (RIS) “think/create/innovate”

Northern Ireland Regional Innovation Strategy (RIS) “think/create/innovate” was launched by an Inter-Departmental Working Group (IDWG) comprising all Northern Ireland Government Departments and Invest NI in June 2003. The key aim of the strategy is to enhance our regional innovation system by coordinating the research and education sector with business and government in a new and dynamic partnership. It sets out to promote the significance of innovation through research and development and best business practices to ensure that Northern Ireland has the necessary innovation infrastructure to be an internationally competitive innovating region. “think/create/innovate” seeks to enable individuals and business to absorb, adapt and exploit the research, development and innovation that is created and disseminated by our universities, public sector and innovative firms, for the benefit of Northern Ireland society as a whole. In providing a coordinated and consensual framework for the creation of a globally competitive, innovation-driven regional economy, one of the six key areas of RIS is to enhance interregional collaborations with strategic innovation partners across the UK, Ireland, the EU and beyond. Interregional networks – both national and international - will therefore continue to be developed to ensure that Northern Ireland is aware of best practice in R&D and innovation, and can benchmark its overall innovation performance against comparable regions competing in the global economy.

OFMDFM’s European Strategy

During devolution, the Northern Ireland Executive decided that developing Northern Ireland’s role as a region in Europe should be a high priority. A European strategy for Northern Ireland entitled *Taking our place in Europe* was launched for consultation on 4 July 2005. The overarching aim of this strategy is for Northern Ireland to be a preferred region of choice for partnership working and within which to live, work, study or invest. To this end, we must ensure that our people are equipped to operate effectively in the European Union (EU) context. In doing so, we need to link to EU mechanisms

for the mutual recognition of skills and qualifications and ensure that adequate opportunities are provided to enable people to develop the language skills necessary to participate fully in Europe. These principles are contained and reflected in the Department for Employment and Learning's strategic approach to international activity. The European strategy also aims to raise awareness of the EU and increase civil society participation in European matters. Education will play a crucial role in ensuring that Northern Ireland society and citizens are aware of the opportunities, challenges and responsibilities that stem from membership of the EU. Our aim is to maximise this role played by our education providers.

The Department for Education and Skills International Strategy's Goals and Priorities

Goal 1: Equipping our children, young people and adults for life in a global society and work in a global economy:

- to instil a strong global dimension into the learning experience of all children and young people;
- to transform our capability to speak and use other languages;
- to equip employers and employees with the skills needed for a global economy; and
- to move towards the international mutual recognition and improved transparency of qualifications.

Priorities for action:

- Promote the inclusion of the eight key concepts of global citizenship in the learning experience of all children and young people, working with QCA and Ofsted to provide the right curricular, assessment and inspection framework.
- Embed the Olympic ideals of sporting excellence, combined with a spirit of fair play, community cohesion and global exchange into our educational and sporting policies and practice at all levels.
- Develop the International Sporting Award as a key means to promote international partnerships between schools and global citizenship in the school curriculum. Our aim is that, over time, all schools should gain the Award.
- Implement the National Languages Strategy vigorously with our partners, ensuring that all children at Key Stage 2 have the opportunity to study languages

- Promote the inclusion of generic and specific skills for the global economy in publicly funded education and training for those entering or in employment.
- Ensure that further and HE students are better informed about and equipped to take advantage of the opportunities for study and work experience abroad available to them.
- Make progress within Europe towards greater comparability of qualifications and more effective arrangements for credit transfer and quality assurance, so as to improve the transparency and recognition of learning outcomes and to promote the mobility of students and graduates.
- Work with our EU partners to negotiate and implement a new integrated EU Lifelong Learning programme for 2007-2013 to support the achievement of this goal.

Goal 2: Engaging with our international partners to achieve their goals and ours:

- to benchmark our own performance against world-class standards, drawing on best practice everywhere;
- to develop our capacity to engage strategically with a wide range of partners across the world;
- to work with our European partners to realise the goal that the EU should become “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world”; and
- to share expertise and resources in support of the improvement of education and children’s services worldwide, particularly in Africa.

Priorities for action:

- Work with our EU, OECD and other partners worldwide to learn from one another and from the best in the world.
- Make the Lisbon agenda – to make Europe “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world”- a key theme of our presidency of the EU in 2005.
- Work with UN agencies, the World Bank and our G8, Commonwealth and EU partners to develop and offer educational support programmes, including policy and practitioner experts and information exchange, especially for Africa.
- Extend the Global Gateway to support partnerships across all sectors of education and children’s services and to include increasing numbers of strategic partners overseas.
- Engage in a programme of action between now and 2010 to enable every English school and college to establish a sustainable partnership with at least one equivalent institution in another country.
- Develop web-based and other resources that support a more systematic approach to sharing our experience of development of our education system.

Goal 3: Maximising the contribution of our education and training sector and university research to overseas trade and inward investment:

- to promote further expansion in the number of international students at FE and HE institutions, including increasing quality assured overseas outlets;
- to make the UK an international leader in the creative and supportive use of ICT for education;
- to promote the role of our universities as international hubs for

learning and research; and

- to encourage education and training providers to work internationally in partnership with business.

Priorities for action:

- Build on the success of the Prime Minister's Initiative to support universities, colleges and other providers in accessing new overseas markets, involving innovative means of delivery and partnerships and strengthened quality assurance arrangements.
- Continue to fund scholarship programmes that allow for some of the most able students from around the world to study in the UK.
- Promote best practice in the provision of support to overseas students while they are studying in this country.
- Identify and promulgate best practice in ensuring that the presence of overseas students adds to the quality of the education experience of home students.
- Support universities in developing strategic partnerships that improve the long term research, innovative and productive capability of the UK.
- Continue to promote the UK as an international leader in the creative and supportive use of ICT for education through the annual BETT conference and other means
- Consider with the funding, regional and sectoral bodies and institutions themselves, in the context of the Skills Strategy, how best to promote increased joint work internationally with business.

The Internationalisation of Irish Education Services Report

This Report makes a total of 31 recommendations in relation to the most effective way of promoting Ireland as a centre of educational excellence for international students and for the promotion of Irish education abroad.

A central recommendation is the establishment of a new statutory body, Education Ireland, to oversee and co-ordinate policy development and activities. This body would have specified functions in a range of areas including:

- responsibility for the award of the Education Quality Mark;
- the operation of a code of conduct for pastoral care of international students; and
- the certification of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Schools.

The report also recommended that educational institutions should be encouraged to collectively provide a scholarship fund from their international earnings which should be matched by the Exchequer initially up to a limit of €1 million per annum.