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Department for  
**Employment  
and Learning**  
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# DEL QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS –

A Response to the Key Issues Raised in the  
DEL Quality and Performance Reports

MAY 2010

## DEL QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS– AN ACTION PLAN

### A Response to the Key Issues Raised in the DEL Quality and Performance Reports

#### A. SKILLS -

##### A.1 Attainment of Key Public Sector Agreement (PSA) Targets

(see Section 4 of the Quality and Performance Baseline Analysis report for further details)

Issue	Current Position	Planned Action	Timescale
Attainment on Level 2 (and above) and Level 3 (and above) PSA Skills Targets.	Based on current trajectories, significant challenges remain in attaining these Level 2 and 3 targets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work with other departments and agencies to encourage and facilitate uptake and accreditation of level 2 and level 3 skills.</li> <li>- Review reasons for non-completion of qualifications and encourage DEL sponsored education and training providers to focus further on level 2 and 3 enrolments and on achievement of these qualifications.</li> <li>- Assess the validity of the level 2 and level 3 measurement tool via the planned review of DEL's PSA Data Systems. Bring forward recommendations for change as appropriate.</li> </ul>	By end 2010/11 Business Year
Extend and enhance the benchmarking of DEL programme performance.	The Quality and Performance report sought to benchmark DEL programme performance against similar provision elsewhere but recognised the need to develop this work further.	Assess how benchmarking within and across DEL programmes can be extended and made more meaningful. Consideration will be given to developing national and international benchmarks. Build further robust benchmarks into the next iteration of the Quality and Performance report.	By end of 2010

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Current Position</b>	<b>Planned Action</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
Promote and facilitate enrolments in STEM areas.	The Quality and Performance report highlights the significant challenges that lie ahead if STEM PSA targets are to be attained.	An independent STEM Review report was published in late 2009 The Department for Employment and Learning, in conjunction with the Department of Education, will publish a strategic response and Action Plan.	By end of 2010

## A.2 Higher Education Teaching and Learning

(see Section 5.1 of the DEL Quality and Performance Baseline Analysis report for further details)

Issue	Current Position	Planned Action	Timescale
<p>Pattern of HE Enrolments at NI HEIs, particularly part-time enrolments</p>	<p>Developing a Northern Ireland Higher Education Strategy. As part of this process Expert Groups, a Project Group and overarching Steering Group have been established to consider this and other issues relevant to HE in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>As Accounting Officer for the Department, the Permanent Secretary holds meetings with the Heads of the Higher Education Institutions to provide comfort on the accountability arrangements each has in place. These meetings provide an opportunity to discuss issues on the performance, operation or accountability of the institution.</p>	<p>Expert Group reports to be produced, Project Group to produce strategic document for consideration by the overarching Steering Group.</p> <p>HEI representatives to outline what actions they are taking, or plan to take, to address concerns raised including in the Quality and Performance report. These will be reviewed at the next Accountability Meeting.</p>	<p>Autumn 2010 draft document to be ready for consultation</p> <p>Annual reviews with interim monitoring of progress as required</p>

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Current Position</b>	<b>Planned Action</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
Promoting STEM enrolments in HE	There is a PSA target to increase the number of students studying STEM (especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds) by 25% by 2015. This target is not on track to be met currently.	Develop a Widening Participation Strategy (WP) for NI which will examine a range of measures including the possibility of expanding the Step-Up to Science programme.	The WP strategy is scheduled to be completed at the same time as the HE Strategy (see above)
HE Non-Completion Rates	The NI universities have improved their position compared to last year although their non-completion rates are still above their benchmarks.	Both universities are taking a series of measures to reduce rates still further.	Measurement of progress will be monitored each year.

### A.3 Further Education

(see Section 5.2 of the DEL Quality and Performance Baseline Analysis report for further details)

Issue	Current Position	Planned Action	Timescale
Increasing Level 2 and Level 3 enrolments	The Department has PSA targets to increase the proportion of enrolments at FE colleges in levels 2 and 3. Latest data show that progress is being made.	FE Division to share the outputs of the quality and performance report and specific PSA monitoring data with Colleges in advance of the College Development Planning (CDP) process. It will agree actions with colleges to aid achievement of these targets. Policy drivers which will help to achieve above targets include: Curriculum Policy (including ILP); Work Based Learning; and VQ Reform	By end 2010/11
Increasing numbers on priority skill areas including STEM	The Department has PSA targets in these areas and latest data show that significant progress is still required.	FE Division to share the outputs of the quality and performance report and specific PSA monitoring data with Colleges in advance of the CDP process and agree actions with the colleges to aid achievement of these targets.  Policy drivers which will help to achieve above targets include: Curriculum Policy (including ILP); Work Based Learning; and VQ Reform. Consideration to be given to attaching weighted funding to STEM areas that are not already included in priority skills areas.	By end 2010/11

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Current Position</b>	<b>Planned Action</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
<p>Variability in success rates across colleges</p>	<p>The Quality and Performance report identifies variability in the success rates of students across colleges, subject areas and across a range of student characteristics.</p> <p>The Department continues to implement, its Quality Improvement Strategy, 'Success Through Excellence', and has recently carried out a review of its effectiveness.</p> <p>Each of the FE colleges has had a range of inspection activities in 2009 including their provision of priority skill areas at level 2. Overall grades awarded ranged from satisfactory to very good.</p> <p>Survey evaluations across all of the colleges are being carried out by the ETI in three priority skills areas at level 3 in 2010.</p>	<p>FE Division to share and discuss the outputs of the quality and performance report with Colleges in advance of the CDP process and agree actions with the colleges to address variability in success rates.</p> <p>Colleges are currently undergoing training in self-evaluation to strengthen their ability to identify weaknesses in their own provision and to plan for improvement appropriately.</p> <p>Areas for improvement arising from these inspections are being addressed through the provision of post-inspection support and follow-up inspection activity.</p> <p>To strengthen the quality of provision across FE Colleges and again post-inspection support and follow-up inspection activity will be provided as required.</p>	<p>By end 2010/11</p> <p>Follow up inspections and support through 2010/11</p>

## A.4 DEL Training Programmes

(see Section 5.3 of the DEL Quality and Performance Baseline Analysis report for further details)

Issue	Current Position	Planned Action	Timescale
<p>Contribute further to level 2 and Level 3 attainment.</p>	<p>The current level of achievement is summarised in the Quality and Performance Baseline analysis.</p>	<p>Ensure that individuals are not prevented from attaining a qualification to reflect their skills and knowledge – this will be to the advantage of the individuals concerned, while contributing to the Department meeting its PSA targets.</p> <p>The Department will assess options for the development of an up-skilling programme, as an alternative to an apprenticeship for individuals who only require a small amount of training or only require assessment and recognition of existing skills.</p> <p>The Department is working with the University of Ulster to develop a teacher education qualification for those employed in the work based learning sector. A pilot programme for this qualification commenced in February 2009 and the evaluation, which has just been completed by ETI, confirmed that the quality of the programme was very good. The Department will roll this programme out across the sector.</p>	<p>By December 2010</p>

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Current Position</b>	<b>Planned Action</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
Increasing Occupancy in priority skill areas including in STEM areas	From September 2007 to 2009, there has been a marked increase in apprenticeship occupancy for: Health and Social Care/Child Development and Wellbeing; Retailing; Administration; and Hospitality and Catering. However, occupancy has fallen in some priority skills areas including Electrical Installation and Construction.	<p>Consider options for enhancing apprenticeship occupancy in Northern Ireland's priority skills areas. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• further promotion of priority skills areas (including STEM) through the current re-contracting exercise; and</li> <li>• using the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) to promote specified qualifications;</li> </ul>	By December 2010 to inform the FE college CDP process for the 2011/12 academic year and the monitoring of Apprenticeship provision.
Address variability in achievement rates	The current level of achievement is summarised in the Quality and Performance Baseline analysis.	Evaluate the quality of provision through inspection and other quality regimes, and support improvement where appropriate.	By December 2010

## A.5 Essential Skills

(see Section 5.4 of the DEL Quality and Performance Baseline Analysis report for further details)

Issue	Current Position	Planned Action	Timescale
Engaging further with older age groups	The Department is seeking to introduce separate targets for key providers of essential skills to encourage further focus on enrolments from the harder to reach age groups.	Separate age targets for Essential Skills enrolments to be agreed as part of the CDP process.  In addition, a pilot Workforce Delivery programme to be developed in conjunction with the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils. It will target 500 Essential Skills learners. The pilot will be evaluated and reported upon by the ETI. That evaluation will include a focus on the barriers to participation from older age groups.	By end 2010/11
Addressing variability in success rates	The Quality and Performance report identifies variability in the success rates of students across providers, subject areas and across a range of student characteristics	The Department will engage individually with the FE colleges as principal providers of Essential Skills to discuss the outputs of the Quality and Performance report and agree actions that will be taken as part of the CDP process	By end 2010/11

## B. THE EMPLOYMENT AGENDA -

(see Section 6 of the DEL Quality and Performance Baseline Analysis report for further details)

Issue	Current Position	Planned Action	Timescale
Due to data limitations related to the new Steps to Work programme, analysis of the employment section of the Q&P report was conducted at a high level. Validated information on Steps to Work is therefore required to conduct a more detailed analysis	Work ongoing to provide validated outcomes for the Steps to Work programme	Provide validated programme outcome data for further analysis	By March 2010
PSA3 Indicators 4, 5 and 6 which relate to: moving people into employment; increasing use of e-vacancy service; and modernising the employment service.	See detail in Quality and Performance Baseline Report  Note: all targets in PSA3 subject to economic conditions	Actions detailed in the DEL PSA3 Monitoring Report and performance is monitored on a quarterly basis	By March 2011

## C. THE INNOVATION AGENDA -

(see Section 7 of the DEL Quality and Performance Baseline Analysis report for further details)

Issue	Current Position	Planned Action	Timescale
Support knowledge transfer from the NI research base	The latest HE-BCI survey for AY 2007/08 shows that the continuing investment through the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) is yielding tangible benefits in terms of the commercialisation and exploitation of university research (see section 7.9 to 7.18 of the Q & P Report). This success is reflected in the recent Times Higher Education Award naming QUB as the UK's Entrepreneurial University of the Year.	Review NI HEIF 2 with a view to developing a third round of funding to cover AY 10/11 to AY 12/13.	NI HEIF 3 to commence August 2010.
Encourage increased HE/FE collaboration focused on meeting the needs of business and the wider community.	DEL's Connected project (launched in April 2007) has received a positive evaluation (see sections 7.24 to 7.25) and Ministerial approval has been granted to develop the next phase of the programme from April 2010.	Liaise with QUB/UU/ANIC to develop a new 4-year programme to cover FY 10/11 to FY 13/14.	The Connected 2 programme to commence April 2010.

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Current Position</b>	<b>Planned Action</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
Support increased postgraduate provision to meet the needs of the local economy.	The Department has funded two intakes of 100 additional PhDs for AY 08/09 and AY 09/10 focused on areas of economic priority as informed by MATRIX.	Liaise with DETI/MATRIX to agree the priority areas for a third intake of 100 additional PhDs for AY 10/11.	Third intake of 100 additional PhDs to commence AY 10/11.
Increase the quality of research as measured by the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE).	The results of the most recent RAE, published in December 2008, confirmed that research undertaken in Queen's University and the University of Ulster is of world class quality, with 87% of the assessed research in Northern Ireland considered to be "internationally excellent" of which 14% was adjudged "world leading".	The Department, in conjunction with the other UK HE funding bodies, will develop a new mechanism, (known as the Research Excellence Framework) which will continue to assess research on the basis of quality but will use a process which is simpler and less burdensome.	New mechanism in place by 2013.

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Our aim is to promote learning and skills,  
to prepare people for work and to support  
the economy.

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