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Department for
**Employment
and Learning**
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SUCCESS THROUGH EXCELLENCE: A Quality Improvement Strategy for the Further Education and Training System in Northern Ireland



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FOREWORD

As Minister for Employment and Learning, I am committed to ensuring that the education, training and skills provision in Northern Ireland is of the highest quality.



The colleges of further and higher education, training organisations, and community and voluntary groups that make up the further education and training system play a central role in developing a highly skilled, flexible and innovative workforce which will contribute to the twin goals of social justice and economic success for Northern Ireland. The quality and effectiveness of the system are crucial elements of that process. The focus on quality and performance, and the pursuit of continuous improvement across the system is reflected in the implementation of the Skills Strategy: Success Through Skills, Further Education Means Business and the Welfare to Work Reform Agenda. The drive to improve quality is at the heart of each of these plans.

I believe we need to develop the culture of continuous improvement, and to move away from simply complying with standards to a culture of innovation and excellence driven by high expectations to achieve the very best. To that end, the Strategy aims to provide a framework to target more effectively performance that is of poor quality or which, while satisfactory, is not improving. The pursuit of high quality provision across the further education and training system is a top priority for the Department. This Strategy provides clarity about the respective roles in the quality improvement agenda and indicates the key actions for improvement in order to support change.

I want all learners to enjoy a high quality learning experience that unlocks their full potential. The provision of good quality further education and training should take account of the needs of learners, build on their prior attainments, maximise outcomes and relevance for them and their communities ensuring that employers get the skills and workforce training they want when they need it.

The Quality Improvement Strategy is for the whole further education and training system in Northern Ireland - for all the providers that participate in delivering it, and the partner organisations that will work with them to ensure its successful implementation. It requires commitment from my Department, the partner organisations and the further education and training system to turn the collective pursuit of high quality provision into a reality.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maria Eagle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Maria Eagle MP

Minister for Employment and Learning

1. BACKGROUND AND SCOPE

1.1 The Department for Employment and Learning (the Department) seeks to guarantee that the education, training and skills provision it funds is of excellent quality, and that those who provide these services on its behalf commit to suitably high performance standards. The providers are a diverse mix: colleges of further and higher education, training organisations, and community and voluntary groups. These organisations comprise the further education and training system in Northern Ireland. The Department needs to assure itself that it is sufficiently aware of the quality of performance and purpose of this wide range of providers. It is committed to improving its strategic approach to quality and performance, and giving appropriate emphasis and priority to its monitoring role in relation to the management of funding and contracting processes. The Skills Strategy: Success Through Skills, Further Education Means Business and the on-going strategic review of the Department's Employment Programmes set out the central role which colleges and training organisations must play in raising the skill levels of individuals and so raise the productivity and competitiveness of Northern Ireland companies and the economy overall. Considerable progress has been made in implementing the many strands of these strategies which has at their heart a focus on quality and its enhancement across all providers.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 The Quality Improvement Strategy (the Strategy) presents a vision of quality performance, aligns the work and business processes of partner organisations across the further education and training system, and indicates key actions for improvement in order to support change.



2.2 At an operational level, the Strategy aims to enhance the quality of further education and training programmes funded by the Department. It ensures that quality thresholds and performance measures are defined across the Department's provision, that lessons are drawn from external inspection and addressed appropriately and coherently, and that a range of support and capacity building activities aimed at improving performance, are provided in an appropriate way. In addition, the Strategy will outline principles for addressing, where appropriate, poor quality provision. The successful outworking of this Strategy is dependent on effective partnerships with the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate), the Learning and Skills Development Agency, Northern Ireland (LSDA (NI)), Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), and the providers in the further education and training system.

3. VISION

2.3 The Strategy will ensure a coherent approach to quality improvement, and the raising of standards across the system, working collaboratively with the key partners. This involves the use of inspection, support, advice and guidance, and the dissemination of good practice to support improvement initiatives, both within individual providers and across the system as a whole.

2.4 Fundamental to the success of the Strategy is building on the commitments outlined in recent publications for quality improvement including the joint Department/LSDA (NI) report, “Purpose, Performance and Public Value”. One of the key recommendations of the report, which is an objective that underpins the Strategy, is the development of a quality ethos and culture that is driven by providers to ensure they are motivated to achieve value for money. Research into effective change, indicates that improvement occurs when providers, who are required to improve, deliver the changes themselves and commit to a continuous cycle of quality improvement.

2.5 In addition, the Strategy will recognise and take account of the key recurring themes for the further education and training system outlined in the Chief Inspector’s Report 2002-2004, and subsequent annual reports provided to the Department from the Inspectorate. It will be essential that where inspection findings identify innovative and improved practice related to these themes, appropriate dissemination activities and case studies are implemented and shared across the system.

3.1 The vision underpinning the Strategy is of an excellent further education and training system that is:

- responsive to meeting the needs of learners, employers and the wider community;
- committed to continuous self-improvement through well embedded, and rigorous self-evaluation and improvement planning; and
- able to access easily a coherent framework of support and guidance that focuses on self-improvement, high quality leadership and management, and continuous professional development.

3.2 The Strategy recognises that the provision of good quality further education and training takes account of the needs of learners, builds on their prior attainments, maximises outcomes and relevance for them, employers and the communities, and plays a key role in contributing to economic growth and success, and social justice. The Department wishes to promote the best practice in the further education and training system to ensure that employers get what they want when they need it, and where learners have real influence in helping providers shape the quality of their education and training provision.

4. OBJECTIVES

4.1 The key objectives of the Strategy are to:

- develop and embed a culture of **self-improvement** that will ensure that all providers of further education and training are responsive fully to the needs of learners, employers and the wider community and commit to, and achieve, continuous self-improvement and **excellence**;
- assist in the development of clear and coherent systems of **support** to ensure that inspection findings are addressed effectively and efficiently, and that innovative and good practice is identified and shared;
- ensure that the LLUK **national professional standards** for teaching and learning meet the needs, and enhance the professional development of teachers, trainers and tutors across the further education and training system;
- develop strong and innovative **leadership and management** at all levels of the further education and training system;
- ensure that the programmes of work, protocols, business processes and standards of the key partners, including the **Inspectorate, LSDA (NI) and LLUK** are aligned with those of the Department to support more effectively and coherently the further education and training system's capacity to improve and develop; and
- help shape the work of a Departmental **Quality and Performance Branch** to ensure that quality and contracting

issues are regarded holistically, including co-ordinating more effectively findings from external inspection, quality improvement and intervention initiatives, and the on-going management and monitoring of contracts. The Branch will provide recommendations to the funding division of the appropriate Departmental business area regarding the use of suitable sanctions to deal with poor quality provision including, where necessary, removing a provider's funding and/or contract.

5. SUCCESS CRITERIA

5.1 The Strategy will ensure that all of the key partners involved focus their efforts consistently and coherently on achieving these common goals. This will include:

- a reduction in the frequency of poor provision, improvement in the satisfactory and a shift towards excellence;
- an embedded culture of self-improvement as the basis for progress towards excellence in provision;
- the development of a proportionate based inspection cycle that provides a more appropriate balance between provision that is good and provision that is poor, or not showing signs of improvement;
- an inspection cycle that supports directly the self-evaluation and improvement planning process, evaluates regularly the quality of evidence that underpins it, and which

results in accurate reporting and grading of the quality of provision, including the capacity of the leadership and management to self-improve;

- the development of support networks that enable providers to share innovative and good practice and assist in peer learning;



- a range of advice, support services and resources that meets the needs of providers and drives up the quality of provision;
- the development of a standards-based framework that meets the continuous professional development needs of teachers, trainers and tutors;
- the development of a quality and performance framework that will benchmark excellence across the further education and training system; and
- an improvement in the Department's contract management function that provides recommendations to the funding division of the appropriate Departmental business area regarding the use of suitable sanctions to deal with poor quality provision, including, where necessary, removing a provider's funding and/or contract.

5.2 The Department will use the Balanced Scorecard methodology to ensure the Strategy's success criteria, and the performance indicators associated with them, are continually monitored and, where appropriate, amended and improved upon. A range of the performance indicators that reflect evidence of success, in each of the criteria outlined above, and which will be assessed and scored leading to a single overall performance rating, are included in Appendix 1.

6. IMPLEMENTATION

6.1 In order that the success criteria outlined above are realised, the Strategy is classified into five broad strands that focus on the programmes of work to be taken forward with:

- the **Inspectorate**, to ensure that inspection provides clear, consistent and accurate reporting and grading of further education and training provision, resources and supports effectively the culture of self-improvement, and identifies and assists in the dissemination of innovative and effective practice;
- the **LSDA (NI)**, to secure better outcomes for learners and employers by providing focus and support for quality improvement in the further education and training system;
- **LLUK**, to develop a standards-based framework for the further education and training system, including the community based learning sector, which supports continuous

professional development for all teachers, trainers and tutors;

- the key recommendations outlined in the joint Department/LSDA (NI) report, **“Purpose, Performance and Public Value”**, and ensure they are integrated into the Strategy; and
- the Department’s **contract management function**, to ensure a consistent approach to the monitoring of contracts, which will focus on high quality and improved performance from contracted providers.

7. STRAND ONE: THE INSPECTORATE

7.1 Key to the success of the Strategy will be effective partnership between the Department and the Inspectorate, including the development of a Memorandum of Understanding and a Service Level Agreement between the two organisations, to promote continuous quality improvement across the further education and training system. The Department and the Inspectorate will work together in the best interests of all learners, sharing an open and transparent relationship that recognises and respects one another’s separate roles and responsibilities. External inspection will provide objective and accurate reporting and grading of further education and training provision, and support effectively the culture of self-improvement using, and underpinned by, the Improving Quality Raising Standards (IQ:RS) inspection framework. The Inspectorate will provide the Department with judgements

regarding the quality of provision and the effectiveness of self-improvement processes, to support it in managing the risks associated with the funding and contracting of provision. These will be summarised and highlighted in the biennial Chief Inspector’s Report, and detailed specifically in the Inspectorate’s annual report to the Department.

7.2 The Inspectorate provides inspection services and information for the Department about the quality of further education and training provision, with the key purpose of promoting improvement. The Department recognises that the responsibility for the provision of good quality further education and training lies first and foremost with providers, and is founded on their own processes for planning, evaluation and improvement. Consequently, the responsibility for self-improvement lies firmly in the hands of providers, and it is important that they do not simply react to inspection findings, but take control for themselves.

7.3 The programme of action agreed with the Inspectorate, and which is fundamental to the success of the Strategy, reflects and reinforces the ten principles outlined in the Office of Public Services Reform’s 2003 publication, “The Government’s Policy on Inspection of Public Services”. This policy expresses the Government’s view on the inspection of public services, based on best practice, and states that inspection should, for example, pursue the purpose of improvement, be proportionate to risk, and encourage self-evaluation.

Policy Advice and Guidance

7.4 Through its annual programme of

work, the Inspectorate provides an important source of professional and objective advice on the quality of the Department's funded and contracted provision in the further education and training system. The Department draws on this source of expertise in support of evidence-informed policy making, by seeking appropriate objective advice from the Inspectorate when new policies or strategies, including this one, are being developed or consideration is being given to major changes in existing ones. In addition, the Inspectorate provides reports to the Department on the quality of provision in relation to specified aspects across the system, in support of policy advice and development. The range of inspection, survey and advisory reports, including timescales for completion, are specified in the Service Level Agreement agreed between the Department and the Inspectorate on an annual basis. The framework for co-operation between the Department and the Inspectorate is laid out in the Memorandum of Understanding, published in June 2006.

Action Points

The Inspectorate will:

- provide an independent professional and objective assessment of the effectiveness of Departmental strategies or policies, basing its advice on the best evidence available to it through its inspection programmes;
- work closely with the Department to ensure that areas for improvement and/or policy advice and guidance identified as a consequence of the agreed programme of inspection, survey and advisory reports are disseminated and acted upon as appropriate; and
- provide an annual report to the Department, outlining the key strengths and areas for improvement of the further education and training system, which is timed to contribute to the Department's business planning process.

Self-evaluation and Quality Improvement Planning

7.5 A key principle of the Strategy is to raise further the quality and standards of provision. This will be achieved through improving the capacity of providers to implement continuous quality improvement based on effective self-evaluation and improvement plans. The chief purpose of the self-evaluation process is to support the provider's own work on quality improvement and to measure progress. The Inspectorate will play a vital and integral role in helping to develop further the self-evaluation process. The continuing pursuit of quality improvement over time, as evidenced in self-evaluation and quality improvement plan reports, will be one of the foundations of the inspection cycle.

7.6 In Northern Ireland, the IQ:RS publication is the Inspectorate's inspection framework for the further education and training system. Most providers across the system have used the IQ:RS framework effectively to develop their own approaches to quality assurance, self-evaluation and quality improvement planning. However, the requirements for contracted training providers have developed along different lines from those providers of further and

higher education. The submission of an annual self-evaluation and quality improvement plan to the Department, based on the IQ:RS framework, is a contractual requirement for all training providers. In contrast, each college of further and higher education submits annually a College Development Plan (CDP) to the Department for evaluation and cross-sector comparison, within



which a key component is an evaluation of their education and training provision, based on the IQ:RS framework. It is important, for the Strategy to be effective, that consistency is established across the two sectors, and that the Inspectorate play a key role in evaluating the quality of a provider's own judgements of its effectiveness, and set this against the accuracy or otherwise of the self-evaluation and quality improvement plan. Consequently, the Department will require each college to submit a self-evaluation and quality improvement plan, separate from their CDP, in line with the procedures already established with contracted training providers.

Action Points

The Inspectorate will:

- by April 2008, develop and embed objective and consistent procedures

that evaluate and provide appropriate feed-back to **ALL** further education and training providers on the quality of the evidence that underpins their annual self-evaluation and quality improvement plan reports. This will enable the Inspectorate to make judgements as to whether the provider has the capacity to evaluate its own performance and if there is adequate justification for the strengths and areas for improvement identified;

- share their judgements and grades with the Department on the quality and effectiveness of self-evaluation and quality improvement planning; and
- work closely with the LSDA (NI) to offer appropriate support to providers to improve the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning process.

Proportionate Based Inspection

7.7 Over time, the embedding of the ethos of self-improvement firmly with the providers, and the evolving role of the Inspectorate in assuring the quality of the judgements contained in the self-evaluation and improvement plan reports, alongside evidence generated from mainstream inspection activities, will provide the basis of a move towards a proportionate based inspection programme. A more incisive and focused inspection programme that supports and contributes effectively to a provider's self-improvement and overall performance will be crucial to the Department's ability to predict, prevent and manage poor provision. Also, the Inspectorate will be able to assign Inspector days and plan its full range of inspection activities more appropriately

to ensure that its resources are allocated proportionately across all further education and training providers. The Inspectorate will work with the Department to align the business planning processes of both organisations to focus more effectively on the quality and performance of further education and training providers. Alignment of these processes, including matching more appropriately evaluative statements contained in the IQ:RS framework with strands of Departmental policy, such as the development of key quality performance indicators for the further education and training system, will help to strengthen the focus of the Inspectorate's work when evaluating the quality of a provider's provision.

Action Point

- By April 2008, the Inspectorate will develop in partnership with the Department, a more incisive and focused inspection programme that is proportionate in its design and which ensures that the resources of both organisations are targeted more efficiently and effectively.

Inspection Reports and Grading of Provision

7.8 The Department has worked with the Inspectorate to review a wide range of inspection procedures and protocols for the further education and training system, critical among which are the structure of reports, and the publishing of inspection grades.

Action Point

- From April 2007, the Inspectorate will publish further education and training inspection reports that will be shorter,

more accessible, focus on the key areas for improvement and identify, where appropriate, best practice.

Identification of Good Practice and Professional Development

7.9 A key outcome of the inspection process is the identification and affirmation of innovative and good practice. The Inspectorate play a vital role in evaluating, at first hand, the impact that good quality teaching, training and learning has on both learners and employers, in terms of enhanced opportunities to succeed and progress, and in meeting effectively skills needs in the workplace. The commitment by the Department in establishing and funding Centres of Excellence in priority skills areas across the further education system, and by the Inspectorate in the recruitment of Associate Assessors **(1)** from the further education and training system to work alongside Inspectors, has contributed to the identification and sharing of good practice between and among practitioners. The Inspectorate is also working currently with representatives from industry, commerce and other relevant public bodies to explore the use of Professional and Technical Associates in the inspection process to ensure, for example, that both the specialist expertise of Inspectors and the provision for professional and technical education remains up-to-date, and in line with industry standards.

Action Points

The Inspectorate will:

- liaise with the Department and LSDA (NI) to ensure that where good and innovative practice is identified it is shared and disseminated in an

(1) Associate Assessors are deployed by the Inspectorate to support the work of a specialist and/or Reporting Inspector during scheduled inspection activities. They participate in all aspects of the inspection process, including evaluating the quality of teaching, training and learning, and the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning process.

appropriate format across the further education and training system, particularly in those areas identified as key recurring themes in the Chief Inspector's Report, 2002-2004; and

- by April 2007, embed further the use of Associate Assessors in the inspection process, and develop the use of Professional and Technical Associates to ensure that the specialist expertise of Inspectors and subsequently the provision for learners, remains up-to-date, and in line with industry standards.

Post-inspection Support

7.10 A key area of work underpinning the Strategy, and one that has been developed in line with the Memorandum of Understanding and Service Level Agreement, is ensuring that the findings and areas for improvement from inspection reports are acted upon by the Department in a more consistent and coherent manner. A revised set of procedures agreed with the Inspectorate ensures that, based on the inspection grades awarded, post-inspection quality improvement initiatives are put in place with the provider almost immediately at the end of an inspection. (See Appendix 2 for grade descriptors.)

Action Points

The Inspectorate will:

- in line with the agreed protocols outlined in the Service Level Agreement, share the findings of inspection including the grades awarded with the Department within one week of the end of each inspection; and

- liaise with the Department and LSDA (NI) to clarify the appropriate action to be taken forward with a provider regarding the areas for improvement identified as a result of the inspection process.

Post-inspection Improvement Plan and Follow-up Inspections

7.11 Following an inspection, a provider is responsible for deciding what improvements are needed and how these will be implemented. The LSDA (NI) are contracted by the Department



to provide the most appropriate and targeted support as required by a provider to help ensure that the improvement plan that is formulated and submitted to the Inspectorate for evaluation, addresses effectively the areas for improvement.

7.12 Following the submission of the improvement plan, a provider will be subject to a proportionate programme of follow-up inspections, which will normally be completed within 12 months. The Inspectorate, working closely with the Department and its individual business areas, aims to ensure that follow-up inspections are better fitted to the purpose of improving the quality and performance of the further education and training system.

Action Points

The Inspectorate will:

- after receiving and evaluating the improvement plan, conduct a proportionate programme of follow-up inspections, and provide to the Department at the end of the process, final recommendations and grades reflecting the improvement achieved by the provider since the original inspection; and
- by June 2007, embed follow-up inspection procedures that contribute effectively to improving the performance of providers.

Dealing with Poor Quality Provision

7.13 The Department, working with the Inspectorate will give providers notice to improve within a reasonable timescale. However, if improvements are not demonstrated to a satisfactory level, steps will be taken by the Department that may result ultimately in removing a provider's funding and/or contract; quality improvement will operate as an integral part of the Department's funding and planning arrangements for the further education and training system.

Action Point

- Where provision is of poor quality and demonstrates over a 12 month period that it is not improving as reflected in the grade(s) reported by the Inspectorate at the conclusion of the follow-up inspection process, the Department will take suitable action including, where necessary, removing a provider's funding and/or contract from all or specific areas of learning.

8. STRAND TWO: THE LEARNING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AGENCY, NORTHERN IRELAND (LSDA (NI))

8.1 The LSDA (NI) is contracted by the Department to secure better outcomes for learners and employers by providing a focus for quality improvement initiatives in the further education and training system. The LSDA (NI) work closely with the Department, the Inspectorate, and other key partners to provide support to funded and contracted providers to improve quality and performance, and to respond better to learners' and employers' needs. This includes working with providers whose provision has been evaluated by the Inspectorate as having important and/or significant areas for improvement or is poor, and which is subject to follow-up inspection.

8.2 The LSDA (NI) provide advice and support to further education and training providers through tailored programmes of quality improvement, where need is identified by the providers themselves, the Inspectorate and/or the Department. The LSDA (NI) provides a regional focus to enable providers to learn from others in the sector, and to disseminate good practice. Working with the Department, and other key partners, it will build capacity for self-improvement in the sector through the provision of support for teaching, training and learning, and by offering expert advice services to support the self-evaluation and improvement planning process.

Business Plan

8.3 The LSDA (NI) submits an annual business plan to the Department outlining the key areas of quality improvement and support they will provide across the further education and training system, in line with the Department's key priorities. In the current business cycle the plan has been reviewed and revised by the Department to ensure that it focuses more appropriately on the quality improvement needs and priorities of the whole further education and training system in Northern Ireland.

Action Point

- By April 2007, LSDA (NI) will embed and provide coherent and consistent programmes of support, advice and guidance across the further education and training system in line with the Department's key priorities.

Self-evaluation, Post-inspection Support and Cross-sector Work

8.4 The LSDA (NI) work closely with the Department and the Inspectorate to support providers to improve quality. As well as providing a range of services to support all further education and training providers' self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes, and post-inspection improvement planning, the LSDA (NI) will work with the Department and the Inspectorate to take forward a programme of work that will address and provide support for a number of broad sectoral issues including, for example, addressing more effectively the priorities outlined in the Skills Strategy: Success Through Skills, Further Education Means Business and the key recurring themes across the

system as highlighted in the Chief Inspector's Report, 2002-2004.



Action Points

The LSDA (NI) will:

- by April 2007, implement fully, appropriate support programmes for **ALL** further education and training providers whose provision has been evaluated by the Inspectorate as having important and/or significant areas for improvement or is poor across all, or part of its provision, at the conclusion of a formal inspection activity;
- provide support and advice to providers where significant issues have been identified by the Inspectorate, following the submission and evaluation of their self-evaluation and quality improvement plans on an annual basis; and
- work with the Department to address and provide support for a range of issues, including the development of appropriate key performance measures that will measure the extent and range of economic engagement provided by the further education and training system.

Leadership and Management

8.5 Essential to the on-going success of the Strategy is the capacity it provides to support and develop effective leadership and management at all levels of the further education and training system in Northern Ireland. A key focus of the work of the LSDA (NI) is to provide support for leadership and management development across the system. They will, in partnership with the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL), lead on providing leadership and management development programmes informed by research and good practice. It is a particular priority of this aspect of the Strategy that the LSDA (NI) target more effectively the training sector to ensure a range of appropriate leadership and management programmes are developed and embedded successfully.

Action Point

- By April 2007, in line with the business plan agreed with the Department, the LSDA (NI) will implement a range of leadership and management development programmes across the whole further education and training system.

Dissemination of Good Practice

8.6 It is recognised that there is some excellent provision across the further education and training system in Northern Ireland. The work of the LSDA (NI) will be to focus on those organisations across the system who demonstrate good teaching, training and learning and those who lead, manage and support them, and ensure that what constitutes excellence is shared effectively.

Action Points

The LSDA (NI) will:

- co-ordinate and support effective transfer of good practice, working closely with the Inspectorate to ensure that it is disseminated effectively, and that there are clear messages to the system about what constitutes excellence; and
- develop further its web based Teaching and Learning Communities portal to provide online resources and case studies to support and facilitate the exchange of good practice in teaching, training and learning.

9. STRAND THREE: LIFELONG LEARNING UK (LLUK)

9.1 LLUK is the Sector Skills Council (SSC) responsible for developing and implementing a range of services to support continuous professional development for those who work in further education, higher education, work-based learning, community learning, libraries, archives and information services. In terms of the Strategy, a priority for LLUK will be to develop a standards-based framework for the further education and training system, including the community based learning sector, which supports continuous professional development for all teachers, trainers and tutors.

9.2 The programme of work being taken forward by the Department with LLUK is at an early stage of development. However, LLUK is vital to ensuring that the national professional standards for

teaching and learning are developed, and that programmes of professional development for teachers, trainers and tutors are established to meet the



significant challenges in relation to the quality of provision offered to learners. In the Northern Ireland context, it will be particularly important for LLUK to work closely with the University of Ulster to ensure that the existing Postgraduate Certificate in Further and Higher Education (PGCFHE) is developed in line with the national professional standards for teaching and learning, and to consider developing similar programmes of professional development aimed specifically at the management and staff who work exclusively in the work-based learning and training system.

Action Points

LLUK will:

- by September 2007, develop national professional standards for teaching and learning to meet the continuous professional development needs of all teachers, trainers and tutors who work in the further education and training system in Northern Ireland;
- work with the University of Ulster to ensure that the PGCFHE programme develops appropriately to meet the

national professional standards for teaching and learning, and

- work with the Department to ensure that continuous professional development programmes are developed to meet the specific training needs of the management and staff of the work-based learning and training system.

10. STRAND FOUR: THE REVIEW OF PURPOSE, PERFORMANCE AND PUBLIC VALUE

10.1 This review of the quality and performance arrangements for professional and technical education and training in Northern Ireland, was carried out by Chris Hughes CBE **(2)**, commissioned through the LSDA (NI) on behalf of the Department, and published in May 2006. The key purpose of the review is to ensure that professional and technical education provided by the further education and training system has the capacity to support the future economic development and skills needs of Northern Ireland, by identifying measures that will deliver excellence to learners, employers and communities. The Department will integrate the key recommendations identified in the review into the Strategy. This will involve working closely with the Inspectorate and the LSDA (NI) to ensure key areas, such as the IQ:RS framework, develop appropriately in line with the Department's strategic priorities, and that benchmarking and performance measurement schemes are developed

(2) Chris Hughes was Chief Executive of the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) from 1998 to December 2004. During that time, at the invitation of the Department for Employment and Learning, LSDA extended its operations from England and Wales to Northern Ireland.

and implemented across the further education and training system.

Action Points

The Department will:

- by April 2007, in concert with the further education and training system, develop a range of performance measures and a benchmarking scheme that monitors and improves providers' performance across the further education and training system;
- work with the Inspectorate to ensure that inspection procedures focus more effectively on the quality of providers' self-evaluation and improvement planning processes, and that the performance indicators contained in the IQ:RS framework reflect more appropriately the strategic aims for the further education and training system outlined in the Skills Strategy: Success Through Skills and Further Education Means Business; and
- ensure a stronger focus on learner and employer satisfaction to assess the public value of the professional and technical further education and training system.

11. STRAND FIVE: THE DEPARTMENT'S CONTRACT MANAGEMENT FUNCTION

11.1 The recent Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) report on Jobskills raised issues about the Department's overall contract management and monitoring

function. These related mainly to the monitoring of compliance checks including learner attendance, employment and qualification outcomes.

11.2 The management and monitoring of contracts can include different and wider measures of performance, such as compliance with financial and audit requirements, and generic contractual obligations and targets. While there are strengths in the existing contract management function, there is a need to define clearly the key elements that will ensure there is a more accountable and robust contract management system. This will include the development of a range of key performance measures and indicators, including appropriate compliance standards that reflect more accurately the key outcomes of the different training and employment programmes funded by the Department. It is not the intention to separate quality improvement and contract management. They are part of the same process, which will ensure that learners gain the education and training to enable them to acquire the necessary skills and progress into work. It will be important, for example, to ensure that the performance measures and indicators developed for contract management complement similar measures of performance used by the Inspectorate to evaluate the quality of standards and outcomes of the contracted providers, both in their on-going programme of inspections, and in

their annual evaluation of providers' self-evaluation and quality improvement plans. Figure 1 below, illustrates the linkages and lines of communication between the key partners in quality improvement, and the business/funding areas of the Department.

Action Points

The Department will:

- by April 2007, ensure that its contract management and quality improvement processes are clearly defined and centralised within a Quality and Performance Branch. This will ensure a consistent approach to the management and monitoring of contracts that focuses on high quality and improved performance and outcomes from providers;
- ensure that quality and contracting issues are regarded holistically, including co-ordinating more effectively findings from external inspection, quality improvement and intervention initiatives, and the on-going
- management and monitoring of contracts. Decisions with regard to the termination of a contract, however, or the use of other appropriate sanctions such as the withdrawal of funding to deal with poor quality provision, is a matter for the funding division of the appropriate Departmental business area, advised by the Quality and Performance Branch; and
- ensure that the Quality and Performance Branch takes appropriate action on the recommendations arising from Financial Audit and Support Team (FAST) inspections. FAST will continue to provide assurance to the Department's Accounting Officer with regard to the quality of financial systems operated by contracted providers, and the propriety of claims paid by the Department.

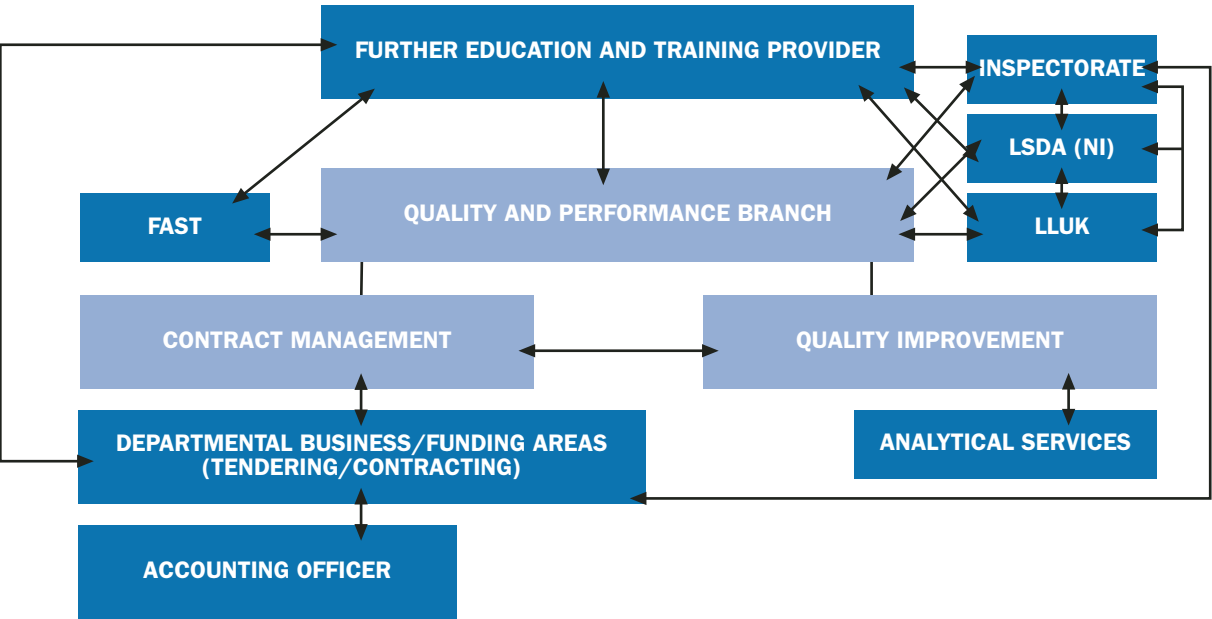


Figure 1

12. CONCLUSION

12.1 The drive to improve the quality and performance of the provision that it funds is the Department's top priority. Key to the Strategy is developing and managing the capacity for all further education and training providers to become self-improving organisations. Quality improvement cannot be imposed; it must come from within. However, the Strategy provides the framework and structure that facilitates the best support, advice and guidance to ensure that providers achieve consistently high quality, and strive for excellence.

12.2 The Strategy outlines the roles that all of the key partners in quality improvement and support will have to play to ensure its success within each of the five strands. While they are all inter-related, the success of the Strategy will be judged on how well each partner, including the Department, strives to meet the challenges contained in it. The Strategy ensures that all providers can access the support they need, basing their improvement activities on clear and objective evidence, facilitated by the strengthened role of the Inspectorate in the self-evaluation and improvement planning process, and a move towards a more proportionate inspection regime. Those providers that are identified as poor will be given the support to improve within a reasonable timescale.

12.3 The Strategy provides the further education and training system with the best support and resources for improving teaching, training and learning, and to meet employers' needs more effectively. In addition, it provides the capacity to

develop appropriate leadership and management programmes, and professional development opportunities for all teachers, trainers and tutors that will ultimately underpin its successful delivery.

APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY OF SUCCESS CRITERIA, KEY ACTION POINTS AND RELATED PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

SUCCESS CRITERIA	KEY ACTION POINTS	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
<p>Strand One: The Inspectorate</p> <p>A reduction in the frequency of poor provision, improvement in the satisfactory and a shift towards excellence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that areas for improvement and/or policy advice identified as a consequence of the agreed programme of inspection, survey and advisory reports are disseminated and acted upon. • Liaise with the Department and LSDA (NI) to clarify the appropriate action to be taken forward with a provider regarding the areas for improvement identified as a result of the inspection process. • Work closely with the LSDA (NI) to offer appropriate support to providers to improve the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning process. • At the end of the follow-up inspection process, provide final recommendations and grades reflecting the improvement achieved since the original inspection, that will enable the Department to take suitable action including, where necessary, removing a provider's funding and/or contract from all or specific areas of learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous improvement in inspection grades. • Targeting and supporting provision that is satisfactory but not improving. • Targeting and removal of poor provision by 2008.
<p>Strand One: The Inspectorate</p> <p>An embedded culture of self-improvement as the basis for progress towards excellence in provision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work closely with the LSDA (NI) to offer appropriate support to providers to improve the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning process. • Share judgements and grades with the Department on the quality and effectiveness of self-evaluation and quality improvement planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous improvement in grades for annual self-evaluation and improvement plans. • Increase in frequency of best practice events and services.

SUCCESS CRITERIA	KEY ACTION POINTS	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
<p>Strand One: The Inspectorate</p> <p>The development of a proportionate based inspection cycle that provides a more appropriate balance between provision that is good and provision that is poor, or not showing signs of improvement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop, in partnership with the Department, a more incisive and focused inspection programme that is proportionate in its design and which ensures that the resources of both organisations are targeted more efficiently and effectively. • Liaise with the Department and LSDA (NI) to clarify the appropriate action to be taken forward with a provider regarding the areas for improvement identified as a result of the inspection process. • After evaluating a provider’s improvement plan, conduct a proportionate programme of follow-up inspections. • Liaise with the Department and LSDA (NI) to ensure that where good and innovative practice is identified it is shared and disseminated in an appropriate format across the further education and training system. • Embed further the use of Associate Assessors in the inspection process, and develop the use of Professional and Technical Associates to ensure that the specialist expertise of Inspectors and subsequently the provision for learners, remains up-to-date, and in line with industry standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeting and supporting provision that is satisfactory but not improving. • Increase in number of providers of professional and technical excellence. • Increase in frequency of best practice events and services. • Sustained use of Associate Assessors and Professional and Technical Associates in the inspection process.
<p>Strand One: The Inspectorate</p> <p>An inspection cycle that supports directly the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning process, evaluates regularly the quality of evidence that underpins it, and which results in accurate reporting and grading of the quality of provision, including the capacity of the leadership and management to self-improve.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and embed objective and consistent procedures that evaluate and provide appropriate feed-back to ALL further education and training providers on the quality of the evidence that underpins their annual self-evaluation and quality improvement plan reports. • Publish further education and training inspection reports that will be shorter, more accessible, focus on the key areas for improvement and identify, where appropriate, best practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embedded scrutiny and grading of self-evaluation and improvement plans. • Accessible and prioritised inspection findings. • Continuous improvement in inspection grades.

SUCCESS CRITERIA	KEY ACTION POINTS	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
<p>Strand Two: LSDA</p> <p>The development of support networks that enable providers to share innovative and good practice and assist in peer learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To embed and provide coherent and consistent programmes of support, advice and guidance across the further education and training system in line with the Department's key priorities. • To implement fully, appropriate support programmes for ALL further education and training providers whose provision has been evaluated by the Inspectorate as having important and/or significant areas for improvement or is poor across all, or part of its provision, at the conclusion of a formal inspection activity. • To provide support and advice to providers where significant issues have been identified by the Inspectorate, following the submission and evaluation of their self-evaluation and quality improvement plans on an annual basis. • To develop further its web based Teaching and Learning Communities portal to provide online resources and case studies to support and facilitate the exchange of good practice in teaching, training and learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved access to good and innovative practice. • Continuous increase in the use of Teaching and Learning Communities portal. • Increase in frequency of best practice events and services.
<p>Strand Two: LSDA</p> <p>A range of advice, support services and resources that meet the needs of providers and drives up the quality of provision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To work with the Department to address and provide support for a range of issues, including the development of appropriate key performance measures that will measure the extent and range of economic engagement provided by the further education and training system. • To implement a range of leadership and management development programmes across the whole further education and training system. • To co-ordinate and support effective transfer of good practice, working closely with the Inspectorate to ensure that it is disseminated effectively, and that there are clear messages to the system about what constitutes excellence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous improvement in inspection grades. • Continuous improvement in learner satisfaction. • Continuous improvement in employer satisfaction. • Continuous improvement in responding effectively to employers' needs. • Increase in number of staff with leadership and management qualifications.

SUCCESS CRITERIA	KEY ACTION POINTS	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
<p>Strand Three: LLUK</p> <p>The development of a standards-based framework that meets the continuous professional development needs of teachers, trainers and tutors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop national professional standards for teaching and learning to meet the continuous professional development needs of all teachers, trainers and tutors who work in the further education and training system in Northern Ireland. • To work with the University of Ulster to ensure that the PGCHE programme develops appropriately to meet the national professional standards for teaching and learning. • To work with the Department to ensure that continuous professional development programmes are developed to meet the specific training needs of the management and staff of the work-based learning and training system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in percentage of appropriately qualified and recognised teachers, trainers and tutors.
<p>Strand Four: The Review of Purpose, Performance and Public Value.</p> <p>The development of a quality and performance framework that will benchmark excellence across the further education and training system.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Department will, in concert with the further education and training system, develop a range of performance measures and a benchmarking scheme that monitors and improves providers' performance across the further education and training system. • The Department will work with the Inspectorate to ensure that inspection procedures focus more effectively on the quality of providers' self-evaluation and improvement planning processes, and that the IQ:RS performance indicators reflect more appropriately the strategic aims for the further education and training system outlined in the Skills Strategy: Success Through Skills and Further Education Means Business. • Ensure a stronger focus on learner and employer satisfaction to assess the public value of the professional and technical further education and training system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and implementation of a range of performance measures for the further education and training system. • Implementation of learner and employer satisfaction surveys.

SUCCESS CRITERIA	KEY ACTION POINTS	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
<p>Strand Five: The Department's Contract Management Function.</p> <p>An improvement in the Department's contract management function that provides recommendations to the funding division of the appropriate Departmental business area regarding the use of suitable sanctions to deal with poor quality provision including, where necessary, removing a provider's funding and/or contract.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the Department's contract management, and quality improvement processes are clearly defined and centralised, providing a consistent approach to the management and monitoring of contracts that focuses on high quality and improved performance and outcomes from providers. • Ensure that quality and contracting issues are regarded holistically, including co-ordinating more effectively findings from external inspection, quality improvement and intervention initiatives, and the on-going management and monitoring of contracts. • Ensure that appropriate action is taken on the recommendations arising from Financial Audit and Support Team (FAST) inspections. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of Departmental Quality and Performance Branch. • Development and implementation of a range of key performance measures and indicators for the further education and training system. • Targeting and removal of poor provision by 2008.

APPENDIX 2: INSPECTION GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The Inspectorate has, to date, used a four-point grading scale when evaluating the quality of the provision of a further education and training provider. After completing a review of the four-point scale, the Inspectorate is piloting a new six-point scale from September 2006. They have revised key aspects of their inspection guidance and protocols in line with this new grading scale. The descriptors associated with the new six-point scale are:

Grade 1: Outstanding characterised by excellence;

Grade 2: Consistently good;

Grade 3: Many good features but some areas for improvement which the organisation has the capacity to address;

Grade 4: Overall sound/satisfactory but with some areas for improvement which need addressed;

Grade 5: Significant areas for improvement which outweigh strengths; and

Grade 6: Poor.

people:skills:jobs:



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Further information:

telephone: 028 9044 1910

email: qpb@delni.gov.uk

web: www.delni.gov.uk/qualityimprovementstrategy