

The first anniversary of the restoration of devolution has provided not only a chance to celebrate the progress that has been made in the political arena but also a time for reflection on what has been achieved in the past year.

Over the next 12 months my officials and I will continue to work with our stakeholders to ensure that the Department's key priorities are met. As one of the key pillars identified in the Investment Strategy, skills is still very much on the agenda, both in terms of raising the skills levels of our existing workforce and attracting people here to increase our skills base.



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In our continuous drive to encourage suitably skilled people to consider Northern Ireland as a place to live and work, we have developed the 'C'Mon Over' initiative. As part of this campaign the Department signed up to attend two Scottish Graduate Recruitment Fairs last month. The events were a great success and I was able to make it along to Glasgow to support the local employers participating in the event. I would like to thank BT, Openwave, Almac and Citi for their commitment and support with this venture. It is anticipated that the Department will become involved in more events such as this which have proven to be an excellent means of highlighting the opportunities now available in Northern Ireland.

Let's hope that the next 12 months can mirror that of

How can DEL help employers?

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the last and that we continue to work together, in partnership, to shape the skills agenda for Northern Ireland.

SIR REG EMPEY MLA - Minister for Employment and Learning

Skills Development – The US way

During the Minister's visit to the US last year, he met with Gerri Fiala, who is Director of Workforce Development Research at the National Centre for Education and the Economy (NCEE), Washington. Gerri visited Northern Ireland (NI) in recent weeks to meet up with Sir Reg and hosted a seminar for Department staff. The seminar was well received, with Gerri highlighting the similarities between NI and the US and stressing how we can learn from each other. The main focus was on skills, the labour market and the economy. If you are interested in obtaining a copy of the presentation please email successthroughskills@delni.gov.uk

Employers and Essential Skills



The [Essential Skills](#) levels of a workforce have a direct and measurable impact on the efficiency and profitability of an organisation. Research shows that one third of the working population in NI has poor levels of Essential Skills. Those people who are regarded as having essential skills difficulties encounter literacy and numeracy problems at varying levels. Figures indicate that, as a result, employers could be losing thousands of pounds each year. A lack of good Essential

Skills can prevent employees from carrying out their jobs to the best of their abilities, whether it is reading and understanding health and safety instructions, completing an appraisal or grasping new technologies. The Department encourages all employers to offer learning opportunities directly in the workplace as improving Essential Skills is a win-win situation for everyone concerned. During April the Department held its first ever Essential Skills Awards event and it was a huge success. Learners from throughout NI were recognised for their hard work and achievements. One such learner, Stephen Boden from Co Down (pictured above), who won the Essential Skills Learner of the Year having undertaken his Numeracy Level 2 as part of his Traineeship and Modern Apprenticeship programme with Hugh J O'Boyle Training Ltd. He is on target to achieve his NVQ 3 in Administration and complete his full Apprenticeship. Stephen is now a full time employee with Natural Home Interiors.

[Read more >>](#)

If you are an employer who is interested in offering learning opportunities within the workplace or at your [local Further Education College](#), then please call 0800 731 2426.

Major changes to Skills Landscape

On 1st April 2008 the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UK CES) and the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils came into operation. The Department for Employment and Learning will shortly instigate a public appointments process for a Northern Ireland Employment and Skills Advisor, who will also represent

Northern Ireland on the UK CES.

[Read more >>](#)

C'Mon Over



You may recall that the Minister visited Belfast City airport over the Christmas period to raise awareness of local employment opportunities to those visiting Northern Ireland. As part of the Department's drive to attract graduates and those with more experience to Northern Ireland we developed the 'C'Mon

Over' initiative to encourage people to consider Northern Ireland as a place to live and work. To promote this initiative we hosted stands at the Scottish Graduate Recruitment Fairs in Edinburgh and Glasgow accompanied by some NI employers; BT, Almac, Openwave and Citi and launched a Northern Ireland page on [Facebook](#). Both events took place at the end of May and were a great success. Many of the employers who exhibited alongside the Department noted that they had considerable interest from graduates wanting to come to NI to live and work and were confident that they could get suitably skilled graduates to fill the many vacancies they had on offer. Our Facebook page, called 'Northern Ireland', has been set up to enable us to engage with our target audience. The site aims to facilitate a discussion between those people who wish to move to Northern Ireland to work, those people who work here now and those employers who have employment opportunities. So far we have over 150 fans to the page and you are very welcome to join us. Not only does the page allow the Department and companies to showcase some of the employment opportunities currently available in Northern Ireland but you can post items and use the site as a tool to communicate. The site continues to expand and we are now developing the site to include video clips from employers and people who have come over to Northern Ireland. For further information about how you can become involved with [Facebook](#) please contact [Sian McCleave](#) or email cmonover@delni.gov.uk or telephone 028 9044 1778.

If you are an employer wanting to advertise graduate vacancies then visit the Department's FREE online service [Employers Online](#) or alternatively check out the 'Northern Ireland' page on [Facebook](#) to view and post your comments. If you would like to discuss this initiative further, or find out ways in which your company can become involved then please contact [Sian McCleave](#) or email cmonover@delni.gov.uk or telephone 028 9044 1778.

Apprentice of the Year Awards 2008

Each year the Department for Employment and Learning plays host to the Apprentice of the Year Awards. This year's event was held in May and saw the introduction of new awards to recognise not only the Apprentice of the Year but also Employer of the Year and Training Provider of the Year. Other award categories included the Most



Promising 1st Year Apprentice and a Personal Achievement Award. The

Employer of the year Award for 2008 was presented to NIE (PLC) (pictured). With well over 8000 apprentices in NI alone, representing a diverse range of industry and business sectors, the popularity of Apprenticeships as the route to a successful career continues to grow. Apprenticeships offer young people the opportunity to acquire the skills necessary to produce a more flexible and creative workforce and by investing time and effort in developing the right skills this not only benefits the economy but helps to meet the needs of local industry and employers.

[Read more >>](#)

Growing need for skills development

During a recent address to the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions the Minister, Sir Reg Empey, highlighted the importance of skills development.

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Building skills for the future

Apprentices from all over Northern Ireland tested their skills at this years Skillbuild NI competition which was held at CITB on 29th and 30th May 2008. The competition involves 12 crafts from the construction industry and is the largest multi-trade competition for young students and apprentices aged 21 and under in the Province. The competition not only encourages trainees to improve their own skills but provides an example of the high quality work being produced in training organisations across NI to meet skill levels in the construction industry. This is a superb event which enables competitors to benchmark themselves against their fellow competitors in Northern Ireland and providing the winners with the opportunity to compete for medal success at National and WorldSkills levels. The next WorldSkills event will be held in Calgary, Canada in 2009 followed by London in 2011.

[Find out more >>](#)

Department publishes Skills Research Reports

The Department recently published the findings of two reports which examine skills issues in Northern Ireland. These reports will help inform the Northern Ireland Skills Expert Group (NISEG) as it assesses current and future skill needs in the region.

[Read more >>](#)

Investors in People case study - firmus energy, Antrim



firmus energy has been supplying natural gas to more than half million customers in Ireland over the last 20 years during which time it has developed a highly skilled team at its Antrim headquarters. Underpinning the significant growth and development experienced by the company in the past two years has been its learning and development strategy, designed to equip people in every

area of its business with the knowledge, skills and ability required to deliver organisational aims and objectives. Operating in a highly competitive environment makes it essential that the company recruits, develops and retains a flexible and motivated multifunctional team.

firmus believes this has been achieved through a strategic investment in

employee development and introduced a balanced scorecard approach to performance management with the view that people could better understand their role when put in context of their department and the overall business objectives. The company progressed to use the [Investors in People](#) Standard in order to take a more holistic approach to business improvement at all levels and in all areas of business activity. One outcome was the development of both graduate and work placement programmes in conjunction with local universities in an effort to ensure the retention and recruitment of local talent which has already proven a great success. By aligning their development strategy with the Investors in People Standard, firmus energy has successfully managed a workforce that has doubled in just two years, whilst attaining retention figures significantly above the national average.

[Read more >>](#)

The Department for Employment and Learning delivers the Investors in People programme and each year celebratory events are held to recognise those organisations who are awarded the Standard.

[Read more >>](#)

If you are interested in finding out more about Investors in People then contact Kevin Rogan on 028 9044 1794 or email kevin.rogan@delni.gov.uk

Do you need help with your recruitment?

Ever thought of using the Department's online recruitment service? Employers and recruitment agencies can avail of our vacancy listing service - at no cost - by simply logging on to [EmployersOnlineNI](#). Your vacancy is then automatically displayed on [JobCentreOnline](#) and throughout the Department's network of Jobs and Benefits Offices. One new feature recently added to the JobCentreOnline service is a 'salary indicator' which makes it much easier for job searches to be carried out, particularly where wages are a key factor in making a decision to apply for a particular position. If you would like to find out more, call 0800 3289135.



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