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Department for
**Employment
and Learning**
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A Statement of Skills in Northern Ireland

A STATEMENT ON SKILLS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Introduction

- 1.1 Following publication of the Leitch Report, **Prosperity For All In The Global Economy – World Class Skills** in the United Kingdom, and **Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy** in the Republic of Ireland, the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) brought together a group of key stakeholders¹ to review the potential implications, and possible lessons to be learned, for Northern Ireland from these contrasting strategies. The purpose of this statement is to outline how DEL will continue to implement **Success through Skills**, whilst taking into account developments in both the UK and Ireland.
- 1.2 The Leitch Review was commissioned to identify the UK's optimal skills mix for the year 2020, to maximise economic growth, productivity and social justice, and to consider the policy implications of achieving the level of change required. The interim report was published in 2005, with the final report, **Prosperity for all..** published in December 2006. The complete report is available at http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/leitch_review/review_leitch_index.cfm
- 1.3 **Prosperity for all** has created a high level UK policy framework, within which government in both England and the Devolved Administrations can tailor their own strategies to contribute to the UK targets contained within the report.
- 1.4 The aspirations contained in **Prosperity for all** and **Success through Skills** are similar, and the continued implementation of **Success through**

¹ Including representation from DEL, DETI, OFMDFM, DCAL, DFP, DARD and DE

Skills will contribute to the achievement of the overall UK targets. Other Northern Ireland Departments including the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) are committed to contribute in their specific areas, while the Department of Education has recognised that its education strategy needs to link effectively to this work.

- 1.5 **Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy**, published in 2007, outlines the issues faced by the Irish economy and the critical importance of workforce skills to maintaining the country's economic success. The report concludes that, "*...if Ireland is to realise a vision of a new knowledge-based economy which can compete effectively in the global market place, it requires enhancing the skills of the resident population, increasing participation in the workforce and continuing to attract highly skilled migrants.*" This report is available at <http://www.skillsstrategy.ie/>

2. Current Position in the UK

- 2.1 The UK is building on a period of sustained economic strength and stability, with 14 years of unbroken growth and the highest employment rate in the G7. Its skills base has improved significantly over the last decade, with rising school standards and growth in graduate numbers.
- 2.2 Despite this, the UK's skills base remains weak by international standards, holding back productivity growth and social inclusion. The Leitch Review found that, even if current targets to improve skills standards were met, the UK's skills base would still lag behind that of many comparator countries in 2020.
- 2.3 England has fully accepted the recommendations of the Review and published its own implementation plan in July 2007. Scotland published **Skills for Scotland** in September 2007 and **Skills That Work For Wales: a skills and employment strategy** is currently out for consultation.

The Way Forward

- 2.4 **Prosperity for all** argues that unless the United Kingdom can build on reforms to schools, colleges and universities and significantly strengthen its skills base, then UK business will find it increasingly difficult to compete internationally. The Report recommends that the UK urgently raise achievements at all levels and commits to becoming a world leader in skills by 2020, as benchmarked against the upper quartile of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Principles

- 2.5 The following principles underpin delivery of a raised ambition:

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Employers, individuals and the Government must increase action and investment. Employers and individuals should contribute most where they derive the greatest private returns. Government investment must focus on market failures, ensuring a basic platform of skills for all and targeting help where it is most needed.

FOCUS ON ECONOMICALLY VALUABLE SKILLS

Skills development must provide real returns for individuals, employers and society; wherever possible, skills should be portable to deliver mobility in the labour market for individuals and employers.

DEMAND-LED SKILLS

The skills system must meet the needs of individuals and employers. Professional and technical (vocational) skills must be demand-led rather than centrally planned.

ADAPT AND RESPOND

No one can accurately predict future demand for particular skills types. The framework must adapt and respond to future market needs.

BUILD ON EXISTING STRUCTURES

It is not necessary to continually develop new processes and structures, instead, improve the performance of current structures through simplification and rationalisation, stronger performance management and clearer remits. Continuity is important.

The Prize for the UK

- 2.5 If the recommendations are implemented, the Report estimates a possible net benefit for the UK of at least £80 billion over 30 years. This would come from a boost in the productivity growth rate of up to 15% and an

increase in the employment growth rate by around 10%. Social deprivation, poverty and inequality will diminish.

3. Current Position in Ireland

- 3.1 Ireland has recently produced several key documents relating to skills. **Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy** seeks to identify the skills required for Ireland to become a competitive, innovation-driven, knowledge-based, participative and inclusive economy by 2020. In addition, **Towards 2016 – A Ten Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2016**, places the skills issue, particularly for the less-qualified, as a strategic national priority.
- 3.2 Ireland has enjoyed 15 years of successful economic growth, based, in large measure on large inflows of foreign direct investment and subsequent employment growth. From an unemployment rate of 16% in 1988, Ireland now enjoys practically full employment.
- 3.3 Ireland's economy has reached a turning point. Job growth is no longer an end in itself. Rather than focusing on the quantity of jobs created, policymakers, the development agencies and firms alike are now also concentrating on the quality of employment.
- 3.4 At the same time, the changing economic circumstances have seen Ireland not only become one of the wealthiest societies in the OECD, but also one of the most expensive in which to live and work. Ireland can no longer sell itself on the basis of cost competitiveness to multinational companies. Instead, there is an acknowledgement that if Ireland is to continue to grow and succeed in international markets, it must differentiate itself by offering potential investors (FDI and indigenous entrepreneurs) higher quality human capital.

The Way Forward

3.5 **Tomorrow's Skills** proposes a vision of Ireland in 2020, in which a well-educated and highly skilled population contributes optimally to a competitive, innovation-driven, knowledge-based, participative and inclusive workforce.

Investing in Education and Training

3.6 The report considers that participation in education and training has an unambiguously positive impact on earnings for employees, firms and the economy in general. However, due to a lack of recognition of this positive impact, or due to other obstacles, employees and firms do not always participate in education and training to their full potential. The report maintains that this market failure justifies state intervention for education and training. The intervention is seen as particularly justified in primary and post-primary education and in training for certain target groups, such as the low-skilled and socially marginalised.

Developing Skills for Economic Growth

3.7 **Tomorrow's Skills** also states that Government, in particular through the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE), and the Department of Education and Science (DES) should, through their commitment to a National Skills Strategy, develop and implement a comprehensive set of policies and actions to provide the skills required for economic and social development.

3.8 The key recommendations of **Tomorrow's Skills Towards a National Skills Strategy** are to²:

- Implement a One-Step-Up approach;
- Target the Low Skilled and Educationally Disadvantaged;
- Integrate Migrant Workers;

² Further details can be found at www.skillsstrategy.ie

- Increase Generic Skills;
- Improve Basic Skills; and
- Collect and disseminate information.

4. Current Position in Northern Ireland

- 4.1 The skills agenda has been the key priority for DEL in recent years. The Department recognises that the skills levels of the workforce will play a vital role in raising productivity and increasing competitiveness within our economy. However, skills are also important in promoting social inclusion, since, for individuals, they provide a route to stable employment, better wages, and long- term prosperity, as well as to personal development and fulfilment. DEL is committed to playing its part in ensuring that Northern Ireland is able to achieve the **Economic Vision for Northern Ireland** by 2015. In line with the Economic Vision, **Success through Skills** will also work towards realising its skills targets by 2015.
- 4.2 DEL acknowledges that Northern Ireland needs to compete globally and, in common with other developed economies, cannot compete on cost for manufacturing investment, but must strive for high value knowledge-based jobs. This relies on having a high level of skills across all areas of business and industry. DEL, in concert with DETI and Invest NI, has recognised this reality and has been jointly addressing these issues in recent years.
- 4.3 **Success through Skills** sets out the projects and milestones for the first few years, which will see the early goals and targets of the Skills Strategy realised.
- 4.4 The implementation of the Strategy is grouped under four themes.
- *UNDERSTANDING THE DEMAND FOR SKILLS*
 - *IMPROVING SKILLS LEVELS OF THE WORKFORCE*
 - *IMPROVING THE QUALITY AND RELEVANCE OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING*
 - *TACKLING SKILLS BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT*

While a full statistical overview of the current position will be included in the planned review in 2008, the PSA figures highlight the fact that while the targets for Essential Skills have been exceeded, not all of the interim 2007 targets set in **Success through Skills** have been met. The following table outlines the position in 2007 against what was proposed.

Table 1: Comparison of Skills Strategy interim Targets and PSA Achievements

Skills Strategy interim targets	PSA Achievements
By 2007 - to support the essential skills learning for 46,000 adults, of whom 18,500 will achieve a qualification.	22,280 recognised Essential Skills qualifications have been achieved up to 31 March 2007.
By 2007 - increase to 75% the proportion of adults in the workforce having a level 2 qualification	By December 2006, 66.1% of working age people in Northern Ireland were qualified at Level 2 or above.
By 2007- increase to 50% the proportion of adults in the workforce with at least a level 3 qualification.	By December 2006, 47% of the working age population in Northern Ireland were qualified at Level 3 or above.

4.5 Following the Programme for Government, a new set of PSA targets has been set. The full list of PSA targets can be accessed at

<http://www.pfgbudgetni.gov.uk/psaframework241007.pdf>

The targets listed in Table 1 have been updated and now read :

- By March 2011, 42,000 adult learners will have achieved a recognised qualification in Essential Skills;
- Increase the proportion of the working age population who are qualified at skills level 2 and above to 80% by 2015;
- Increase the proportion of the working age population who are qualified at skills level 3 and above to 60% by 2015;

All of the revised targets will be reviewed by March 2009.

4.6 The Department of Education has also recognised the importance of primary and post-primary education to this approach. From 2007, it is rolling out a revised curriculum, allowing a stronger emphasis on numeracy and literacy skills and access to applied courses from 14 years onwards. There is also a strong emphasis throughout education on preparation for work and life.

5. The Way Forward

- 5.1 Employment and skills are both devolved matters in Northern Ireland. However, Northern Ireland policy must operate within the context of, and contribute to, the employment and skills policies of the United Kingdom as a whole. Therefore, careful consideration must be given to **Prosperity for all** and its recommendations and targets.
- 5.2 However, it will not always be possible to make direct comparisons between Northern Ireland and GB targets, as the Leitch Review team often used English data sources that are not replicated in Northern Ireland. For example, the number of people in Northern Ireland gaining qualifications in Essential Skills is higher than the NI interim 2007 target, with over 22,280 recognised qualifications having been awarded, but it is still likely that Northern Ireland lags behind the UK as a whole, on the basis of the data of the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) undertaken in the mid-1990s. In addition, Northern Ireland has a higher proportion of the population with no qualifications and poor literacy levels.
- 5.3 However, if the 2015 target of 80% of the working age population holding a Level 2 qualification and 60% with a Level 3 can be achieved, Northern Ireland will exceed the equivalent targets for the UK as a whole. Appendix A provides a summary of all of the recommendations contained in **Prosperity for all** and, where possible, outlines the corresponding position within Northern Ireland.
- 5.4 One of the key outcomes of the Leitch Report was the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations' agreement to the establishment of a UK Commission for Employment and Skills (Commission) from 1 April 2008, at which time the Sector Skills Development Agency and the National Employment Panel will cease to exist. The Commission is

intended to be primarily advisory in nature and will have a key role in the reform and re-licensing of the Sector Skills Councils; it will also performance manage and fund them. The Commission will report to the Prime Minister in the UK Government and the relevant Ministers in the Devolved Administrations, this will be the DEL Minister in Northern Ireland. The Minister has agreed that Northern Ireland will participate in the Commission.

- 5.5 It is vital that employment and skills policy in Northern Ireland also takes full account of the changing nature of the economy and labour markets in the Republic of Ireland. The Irish economy has been transformed utterly in the last 10 to 15 years, and much of the success has been attributed to the coordination of policies across skills and employment matters. There is much to be gained, particularly in FDI markets, by closer alignment of the relevant policies on both sides of the border.
- 5.6 Over the last few years, there has been a considerable increase in cross-border co-operation on the shared skills and employment agenda. The Department is in regular contact with both Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS) – the Training and Employment Authority, and Forfás – Ireland's national policy and advisory board for enterprise, trade, science, technology and innovation. These government bodies meet to share information and best practice and, where appropriate, to undertake joint work.
- 5.7 Some cross-border activity has been undertaken already to address issues of mutual concern and, in the North West, there is close local liaison at Workforce Development Forum (WDF) level, to jointly undertake practical initiatives to help the sub-regional economy. Northern Ireland is committed to continuing this work and strengthening links with colleagues and stakeholders in the Republic, where there is a mutual benefit.

- 5.8 As planned, the Department intends to carry out a first review of **Success through Skills** in 2008. This review will examine the strategic direction, taking account of the high aspirations of **Prosperity for all** and to ensure that Northern Ireland's own skills achievements match the wider expectations. It will include a discussion on the key sectors for Northern Ireland and the need to focus increasingly on higher-level skills, along with a practical review of the operational delivery of the Strategy.
- 5.9 To achieve the ambitions outlined in **Success through Skills**, partnership will be key. Government has its role to play, but the acquisition of higher-level skills is also the responsibility of the employer and the individual. The Department will take forward the proposals contained in this document, in partnership with employers and their representative bodies, individuals and trade unions, training and education providers, the Voluntary and Community sector, and other Government Departments and Agencies, in order to deliver the longer-term vision. Success will depend on cooperation between Government, employers, individuals and social partners; and a shared vision of what together we can achieve.

ANNEX A: Key Recommendations

Prosperity For All In The Global Economy – World Class Skills

Prosperity for all makes sixteen recommendations covering four themes. This section outlines these recommendations and, where appropriate, how **Success through Skills** is addressing these issues in respect of the Northern Ireland economy.

A1 Making the UK a World Leader in Skills

A1.1 Increasing Attainments

Prosperity for all recommends a new ambition to achieve world class skills. Achieving world class skills will require the UK to commit to achieving by 2020:

- *95% of adults to have the basic skills of functional literacy and numeracy;*
- *exceeding 90% of the adult population qualified to at least Level 2;*
- *shifting the balance of intermediate skills from Level 2 to Level 3;*
and
- *world class high skills, with a commitment to exceed 40% of the adult population to be qualified to Level 4 or above.*

Northern Ireland will make a contribution to these targets through the continued implementation of **Success through Skills**. Table 2 compares the targets contained within **Prosperity for all** and **Success through Skills**. The Department of Education recognises its role in ensuring that young people enter adulthood with appropriate skill levels. It is worth noting that Northern Ireland has a history of out migration, particularly at graduate level and this adds complexity

to the establishment of workforce-based targets at the regional level. The outcome of the current Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) will greatly influence Northern Ireland’s ability to achieve these targets.

Table 2: Comparison of Leitch Targets and NI Skills Strategy Targets

Leitch Targets	Skills Strategy Targets
By 2020 - 95 per cent of adults to achieve the basic skills of functional literacy and numeracy, an increase from levels of 85 per cent literacy and 79 per cent numeracy in 2005.	By 2015 - to support the essential skills learning for 100,000 adults, with a milestone of 46,000 by 2007, of whom 18,500 will achieve a qualification.
By 2020 - 90 per cent of adults qualified to at least Level 2, an increase from 69 per cent in 2005.	By 2015 - increase to 90% the proportion of adults in the workforce having a level 2 qualification, with a milestone of a 75% proportion by 2007.
By 2020 shift the balance of intermediate skills from Level 2 to Level 3. Improving the esteem, quantity and quality of intermediate skills. This means 1.9 million additional Level 3 attainments over the period and boosting the number of Apprentices to 500,000 a year.	By 2015 - increase to 60% the proportion of adults in the workforce with at least a level 3 qualification with a milestone of 50% by 2007.

Note: The Leitch Targets relate to 2020 and define an ‘adult’ to mean someone aged 19 to State Pension age. Whereas, the Northern Ireland targets relate to 2015 and define an ‘adult’ to be someone aged between 16 and State Pension age. In addition, Leitch sets out a target of 40% of adults qualified to Level 4 or above by 2020. There is no corresponding target in Northern Ireland. It should also be noted that, unlike Northern Ireland, Leitch does not use the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to measure levels.

A1.2 Delivering World Class Skills

Prosperity for all recommends that adults will increasingly need to update their skills in the work place.

Apprenticeships, as a form of training for young people, are highly valued by employers. DEL is piloting an Adult Up-skilling programme, with 111 participants, in three training organisations. The participants are working towards achieving an NVQ Level 3, as well as other relevant qualifications.

A1.3 A New Partnership

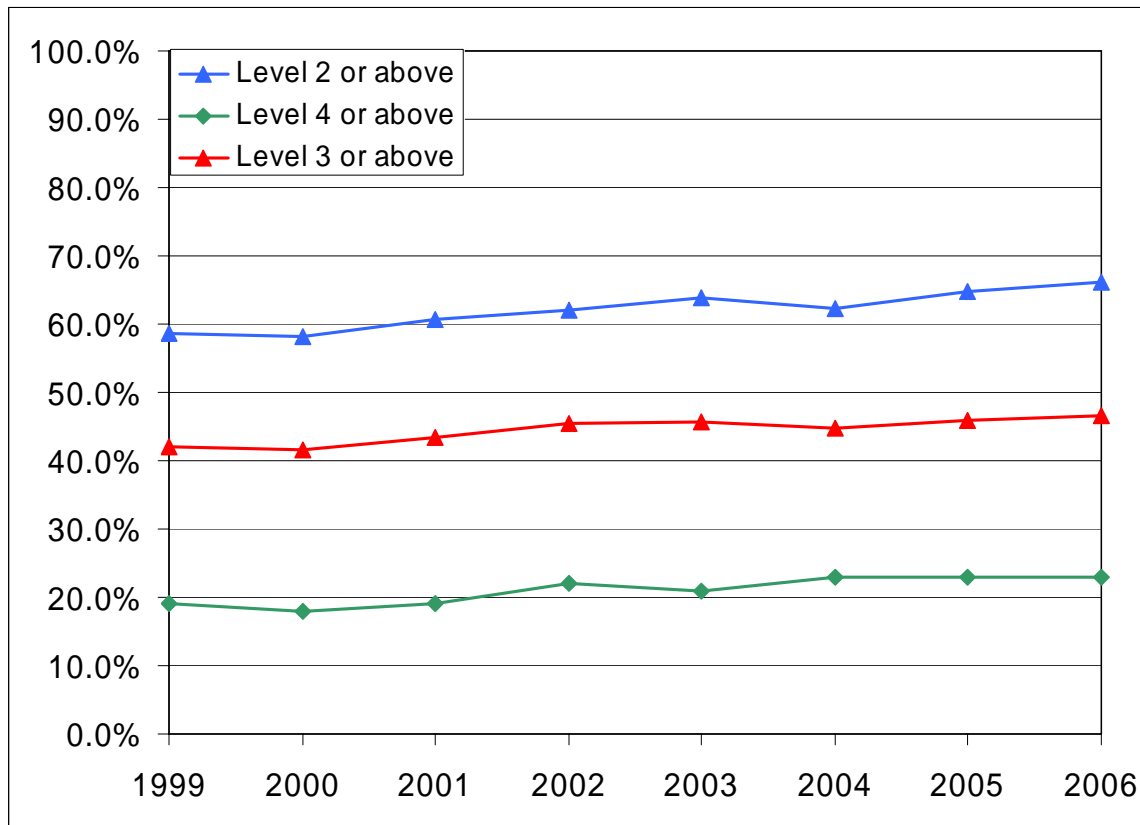
Prosperity for all recommends a new partnership approach, building on the success of recent initiatives to build a more demand-led system, meeting the new challenges the UK faces through common action. In practice, this means:

- **Government, investing more, focusing on the least skilled;**
- **employers, increasing their investment in skills to impact productivity, and wherever possible increasing investment in portable accredited training;**
- **individuals, raising their aspirations and awareness; demanding more of their employers; and investing more in their own skills development.**

The Department, in **Success through Skills**, recognised that there is a balance of responsibility between government, the individual and the employer to invest in skills. At present, Government covers the cost of a significant number of Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications, in line with the rest of the UK. Table 3 shows the number of people in Northern Ireland who gained a Level 2 and Level 3 qualification between 1999 and 2006.

The Department recognises that Northern Ireland's economy is comprised primarily of micro businesses and Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) that have limited resources; nevertheless, employers and individuals are encouraged to invest more in their own training and to recognise the benefits that will flow directly to them as a result.

Table 3: Skills Levels of Northern Ireland Adult population³



A2 A Demand-led System

A2.1 Demand Led funding

Prosperity for all recommends that all publicly funded, adult vocational skills in England, apart from community learning, go through demand-led routes by 2010.

This recommendation applies to England only, but **Success through Skills** places very heavy emphasis on demand-led training provision.

Prosperity for all recommends that a portion of higher education funding for vocational courses, currently administered through Higher Education

³ Data obtained from Labour Force Survey

Funding Council for England in England, be delivered through a similar demand-led mechanism as Train to Gain.

This recommendation applies to England only. Train to Gain does not extend to Northern Ireland

A2.2 Strengthening Employer Voice

***Prosperity for all* recommends strengthening the voice of employers through the creation of a single, employer led Commission for Employment and Skills to deliver leadership and influence within a national framework of individual rights and responsibilities.**

DEL has recognised already in **Success through Skills** the need for a strengthened employer voice in the development and delivery of education and skills. The Department has established an international Skills Expert Group (SEG) and is finalising the establishment of six sub-regional Workforce Development Forums (WDF) to help identify skills needs at a regional and local level across Northern Ireland. The Skills Expert Group (SEG) has been operating since February 2006, with a remit to advise and make recommendations to DEL, and other government departments and agencies, on matters affecting **Success through Skills**, the skills strategy for Northern Ireland. The six Workforce Development Forums will each be chaired by a prominent local employer with the secretariat function provided by the new regional FE colleges. WDF are charged with identifying local skills shortages and the implementation of appropriate local interventions.

In addition, the Sector Skills Councils are undertaking the largest single examination of the UK's sectoral skills needs and represent the employers' voice at the sector level.

The Department has already made it a requirement that employers and employer bodies, in particular the Sector Skills Councils, must play a significant role in the development and delivery of Foundation Degrees. The implementation of **FE Means Business** also addresses this issue and seeks to make the FE sector more responsive to employer needs. The primary strategic focus of the FE Sector is to support sub-regional and regional economic and workforce development.

A2.3 Increasing Employer Engagement

Prosperity for all recommends a new, clearer remit for Sector Skills Council, focused on:

- raising employer engagement, demand and investment;
- lead role in developing/approving vocational qualifications;
- lead role in collating and communicating sectoral labour market data; and
- considering collective measures.

Northern Ireland has acknowledged through **Success through Skills** that increased employer engagement is critical to the achievement of its targets in skills and is already working on this agenda. The DEL Minister is a member of the Economic Development Forum and the Department is represented on three out of its four subgroups. In addition to the Skills Expert Group and the Workforce Development Forums, the Department also meets regularly with employer representative organisations such as the Confederation of Business and Industry (CBI), Institute of Directors (IoD) and Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) and Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce (NICCI).

Northern Ireland has participated fully in the work to establish the UK Commission for Employment and Skills and will appoint its own employment and skills advisor, who will be the Northern Ireland National Commissioner.

The Department welcomes the review of the Sector Skills Councils, their structures, governance and funding, etc, and also to review their role in Sector Qualification Strategies, National Occupational Standards and approving professional and technical (vocational) qualifications. Northern Ireland is currently participating fully in the UK Project Board Review and Re-licensing process of the SSCs.

The Department would be keen to ensure that the SSCs are given a realistic and focused role, that they are appropriately funded to undertake this role, that systems are put in place to ensure consistency of delivery and, that all SSCs perform to the same standards.

Initial discussions with employers in Northern Ireland suggest there would be significant opposition to the reintroduction of a levy to fund skills training. Even if the opposition was overcome, the introduction of a UK-wide levy would raise a number of difficulties, not least of which would be the complex legislative changes and administrative arrangements that would be required.

A2.4 Economically Valuable Qualifications

Prosperity for all recommends that Sector Skills Councils continue to lead in developing National Occupational Standards. It recommends that SSCs are also placed in charge of a simplified process of developing qualifications.

In principle, the Department agrees that SSCs should continue to have a key role in developing National Occupational Standards and that this should be part of their core remit. This issue will be addressed by the SSC Reform and Re-licensing Project Board, on which the Department is represented.

Sector Skills Councils should be responsible for approving qualifications after their development by examining boards or lead bodies, rather than the

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. SSCs will be able to approve qualifications developed by an organisation, including education institutions and employers, if these meet the required standards.

In principle, the Department is content to agree with the proposals for an integral SSC role in the approval of qualifications below level 4.

For vocational qualifications, only those approved by SSCs should qualify for public funding.

In Northern Ireland, the SSCs already work closely with the awarding bodies to ensure that qualifications are more closely aligned with the needs of industry.

A3 Employer Engagement in Skills

A3.1 Management and Leadership

***Prosperity for all* recommends that Sector Skills Councils drive up employer investment in these skills by employers. The Review recommends that the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills' Leadership and Management programme be extended to firms with between 10 and 20 employees, so that smaller firms are able to access its help and grow.**

Following extensive cross-sectoral consultation work, in June 2007 the Department for Employment and Learning published a new comprehensive Management and Leadership Strategy, **Leading...to Success**, that outlines the challenge for Northern Ireland, articulates a vision for the future and maps the actions required to deliver it.

The Department's own market interventions have been revised into a number of new programmes aimed at improving competitiveness. Management: Analysis

and Planning (MAP), a new online diagnostic product which specifically targets SMEs with between 10 and 250 employees, will help organisations to identify management development needs linked to the achievement of its overall business objectives. Participants can also avail of direct financial support to help them source the training and development solutions they need. Additional new products will also help to improve managerial skills levels from new entrants to Board members.

A3.2 Training Low-Skilled Employees

Prosperity for all recommends a major campaign to encourage all employers in the UK to make a skills pledge that every employee be enabled to gain basic skills and a first full Level 2 equivalent qualification.

The relevance of a Skills Pledge to companies in Northern Ireland will be considered in concert with the business community.

A3.3 Investment in Higher Skills Levels

Prosperity for all recommends that employers drive up attainment of intermediate and high skills, including in Apprenticeships, led by SSCs and skills brokers.

Prosperity for all recommends widening the focus of HE targets to encompass both young people and adults via workplace delivery.

The Department agrees that there needs to be a step change in the numbers of people who have qualifications at Level 4 and is supporting the expansion of Foundation Degrees in Northern Ireland. These are intermediate level applied higher education qualifications, which integrate academic and work-related learning across a wide range of occupations.

In **Success through Skills** the Department is committed to working with industry, especially the Sector Skills Councils to ensure that Foundation Degrees significantly meet the needs of employers and are industry led. In particular, it is the Department's policy to increase part-time participation on Foundation Degrees, particularly by those in employment.

The Department will also seek to achieve increased employer engagement and investment in skills by developing a methodology to support the co-funding of HE provision for those already in employment.

In order to meet the challenge for higher-level skills and to ensure that employers secure the high level technical up-skilling or retraining they require, and that employees can acquire accredited qualifications, the Department, in co-operation with higher education and employers, will also:

- support the development of new short-cycle work-based provision to meet identified high level skills needs within sectors; and
- establish the accreditation and credit accumulation mechanisms needed to ensure continued progression.

The universities will provide open access programmes in executive management and leadership, developed with employers, that are both relevant and responsive.

A4 Embedding a Culture of Learning

A4.1 Raising Aspirations and Awareness

***Prosperity for all* has developed fresh recommendations to raise awareness and aspiration among adults across society. At the heart of these is a new universal careers service for England, bringing together**

current separate sources of advice. This service should operate under the already successful and well-known learndirect brand.

Prosperity for all also recommends that all adults should be entitled to a free 'Skills Health Check', building on the success of a similar approach in Sweden, that would identify an individual's skill needs and strengths.

DEL and the Department of Education have recently published for consultation, **Preparing for Success**, a joint impartial all-age Careers Education, Information Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) strategy for Northern Ireland. The overall aim of the strategy is to develop effective career decision makers, leading to increased participation in education, training and employment. This will include:

- enabling young people to develop the skills at school to be able to make informed and realistic decisions about their education, training and employment options;
- providing young people with opportunities and experiences to develop the essential employability and life skills, in order to become effective citizens and employees;
- setting in place a framework to ensure people of all ages have access to good quality CEIAG, so that they are able to make informed choices and achieve their potential.

Currently, adults are eligible to access free Careers Education, Information Advice and Guidance. This provision is provided in conjunction with a number of partner organisations including the Education Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA) and learndirect.

A4.2 Improving Choice

Prosperity for all recommends that all adult further education funding for individuals in England, including the current Level 2 entitlement, be channelled through Learner Accounts by 2010.

This recommendation applies to England only.

A4.3 Financial Support

Prosperity for all recommends a new system of financial support, based on the principle of transparency and building on best practice elsewhere:

- clear and transparent financial support for those considering skills development as well as for existing learners; and
- greater use of Career Development Loans particularly for those looking to progress to intermediate level and beyond.

Prosperity for all also recommends that a Skills Development Fund (SDF) replace the LSF.

This recommendation applies to England only, although the Department has applied to have the Career Development Loans extended to Northern Ireland.

5. Integrating Employment and Skills

Prosperity for all recommends a new integrated employment and skills service to help people meet the challenges of the modern labour market.

The Review recommends:

- a new programme to help benefit claimants with basic skills problems.
- a new universal adult careers service, providing labour market focused careers advice for all adults.
- a new integrated objective for employment and skills services of sustainable employment and progression.
- a network of employer-led Employment and Skills Boards to give employers a central role in recommending improvements to local services, mirroring the national role of the Commission for Employment and Skills.

The Department for Employment and Learning already has responsibility for both employment and skills.

It is agreed that benefit claimants need to have difficulties, such as essential skills, addressed. Currently, in the New Deal programmes, participants are screened for possible essential skills needs; appropriate support is then provided. In addition, those on Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), who do not meet the normal eligibility criteria for New Deal, may avail of early entry to New Deal if they have an identified essential skills need.

A new, flexible menu-based approach to the delivery of training and employment provision is currently being piloted. Within these offices, training in essential skills will mirror that available in New Deal and will be available to claimants who are economically inactive, in addition to those on JSA. Subject to evaluation and resource availability, this will be rolled out across Northern Ireland in 2008.

The Department will review the role and remit of the existing Skills Expert Group and Workforce Development Forums, to ensure best fit with the new UK Employment and Skills Commission and the employer-led Employment and Skills Boards

Table 4: Leitch recommendations versus Skills Strategy

		How NI will contribute to these Recommendations	
		Leitch Recommendations	
Leitch Recommendations	Making the UK a World Leader in Skills	Increasing Attainments	Northern Ireland will make a contribution to these targets through continuing to implement <i>Success through Skills</i> .
		Delivering World Class Skills	DEL is currently piloting an Adult Upskilling programme. The further roll out of this programme will be dependant on a positive evaluation and the availability of sufficient resources.
		A New Partnership	In principle, Northern Ireland agrees with this balance of responsibility. At present, Government covers the cost of a significant number of Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications, in line with the rest of the UK.
	A Demand-Led System	Demand-led funding	This recommendation applies only to England.
		Strengthening Employer Voice	DEL has agreed to the appointment of the Chair of the new Commission for Employment and Skills. DEL will also facilitate the engagement between the new Commission for Employment and Skills and the Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions on the development of a demand-led higher-level skills system in Northern Ireland through the Sector Skills Agreement process. The Department has already made it a requirement that employers and employer bodies, in particular the Sector Skills Councils, must play a significant role in the development and delivery of Foundation Degrees. The implementation of <i>FE Means Business</i> also addresses this issue and seeks to make the FE sector more responsive to employer needs.
		Increasing Employer Engagement	NI has developed a network consisting of the WDF, SEG and SSCs. In addition, the Department has regular dialogue through the Economic Development Forum (which is unique to Northern Ireland) as well as bi-lateral meetings with employer representative organisations such as the CBI, IoD and FSB. Northern Ireland is currently participating fully in the SSC Review and Re-licensing process.
		Economically Valuable Qualifications	In principle, Northern Ireland agrees that SSCs should continue to have a key role in developing National Occupational Standards.
	Employer Engagement in Skills	Management and Leadership	In June 2007, the Department for Employment and Learning published a new comprehensive Management and Leadership Strategy, Leading...to Success , that outlines the challenge, articulates a vision for the future and maps the actions required to deliver it.. The Department's own market interventions have been revised into a number of new programmes that will help organisations to identify management development needs, linked to the achievement of overall business objectives
		Training Low-Skilled Employees	DEL will consider the relevance of the Skills Pledge to companies in Northern Ireland, in concert with the business community.

		Investment in Higher Skills Levels	The Department is supporting the expansion of Foundation Degrees in Northern Ireland.
	Embedding a Culture of Learning	Raising Aspirations and Awareness	DEL and DE have jointly published <i>Preparing for Success</i> , the impartial all-age Careers Education, Information Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) strategy for Northern Ireland. The overall aim of the strategy is to develop effective career decision makers leading to increased participation in education, training and employment. Currently in NI, all adults are eligible to access free Careers Education, Information Advice and Guidance. This provision is provided through the Careers Service in conjunction with a number of partner organisations including EGSA and learndirect.
		Improving Choice	This recommendation applies only to England.
		Financial Support	This recommendation applies only to England.
Integrating Employment and Skills		In Northern Ireland employment and skills are both devolved matters already under the single remit of the Department for Employment and Learning.	

Glossary

CBI	Confederation of Business and Industry
CEIAG	Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance
DEL	Department for Employment and Learning
EGSA	Education Guidance Service for Adults
FE	Further Education
FSB	Federation of Small Businesses
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IoD	Institute of Directors
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PSA	Public Service Agreement
SME	Small and Medium sizes Enterprise
SSC	Sector Skills Council
SEG	Skills Expert Group
WDF	Workforce Development Forum

people:skills:jobs:



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