

## Questions and Answers

1. Can innovation be taught?

**Jonathan Kestenbaum, NESTA:** *“Some people will always be naturally innovative. The serial entrepreneur, for example, whose ideas always seem to find a market. However, it’s also possible to instill people with the kind of skills and attitudes that will make them more likely to be innovative – creativity, confidence, and risk-taking. These are all characteristics that can be acquired and which have a significant impact on innovative capacity”.*

2. Is the way our children and young people are taught hampering innovation and entrepreneurship?

**Jonathan Kestanbaum, NESTA:** *“There is a real danger that we’re not doing enough in both formal and informal education to encourage the kind of entrepreneurial flair and creativity that will be vital to our future economic success. Evidence we’ve gathered suggests that young people do not fully recognise the value of ‘soft’ skills such as creativity and adaptability, and don’t always see the relevance of these qualities for their future. In a recent survey we asked 45-16 year olds what qualities they thought would help them get the job they wanted. Being hardworking and reliable were seen as much more valuable than creative skills. While it’s important that young people understand the need to work hard and gain qualifications, we’re concerned they are missing out on some of the wider skills that will allow them to drive the expansion of an innovative economy.*

3. There has been a lot of discussion about skills development of 14-19 yr olds. How will the new skills strategy & DEL address skills & training needs of 19-25yr olds? We come across many young people in this age range who want to get into the trades but there doesn’t seem to be an obvious route for them. What can we do?

**Aideen McGinley, DEL:** *“The new provision, Training for Success, targets 16-24 years olds with a flexible menu that will allow young people to enter training at an appropriate level and progress to a stage where they can maximise their potential through achievement of qualifications, employment, individual tailored training, personal development and employability skills. A young person can sign onto Apprenticeships up to 24 yrs. Once signed on they will receive funding until completion.”*

4. How is collaboration going to be encouraged in students, given how individualistic Key Performance Indicators such as exams are?

**Aideen McGinley, DEL:** *“Exams are not the only Key Performance Indicator used in Further Education and Training. Increasingly, coursework is conducted in groups and small teams. This form of assessment encourages individuals to learn the skills needed to succeed in a group which can often consist of people with a range of expertise and ability”.*

5. What examples can you give of collaborative innovation between FE and Industry?

**Aideen McGinley, DEL:** *“ North Down and Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education use their rapid prototyping facilities to test out local employers' designs to enable refinement and further development on working models prior to commitment to hard tooling. This identifies problems which may occur moving from design to manufacture producing a better end product and reducing the lead time between design and parts availability improving local employers' opportunities in securing contracts. This practical utilisation of facilities has supported increased business engagement with the college and employer input into curriculum design.*

- *North East Institute has a strong working partnership with FG Wilson and Motoman Robotics (UK) Ltd. The companies have established a training cell within NEI's Engineering Centre of Excellence in Ballymena - with FG Wilson contributing £40,000 in the training cell and Motoman £30,000.*
- *An increasing number of FE colleges are involved in the Knowledge Transfer Programme (KTP) which is designed to help businesses improve their competitiveness and productivity through the better use of knowledge, technology and skills that reside within the UK knowledge base. Each partnership employs one or more high calibre Associates to work on a project, which is core to the strategic development of the business.*
- *Belfast Institute is developing an Economic Development campus on the Springvale campus - this is a long term commitment that will see students involved in work based projects meeting the needs of local businesses. The outcome of each project will support the business improvement of participating companies and support their access to the range of facilities and skills within the Institute.*
- *The North West Institute has established the Electronic, Production and Innovation (EPI) Centre in partnership with the University of Ulster and the Letterkenny Institute of Technology using funding under INTERREG. The centre has to date worked with around 40 companies testing out their product proposals and developing models and prototypes. The EPI Centre provides opportunities for small businesses which they could not develop individually and brings in a broad range of expertise and support from the partner organisations.*

- *Colleges also collaborate with each other to offer innovative responses to business and industry on a co-ordinated basis. One recent example is the development of the Software Professional Course developed by the three FE Centres of Excellence in Software Engineering. Having been advised in April 2006 of the local software industry's skills demands the three colleges quickly developed a suitable 30 week intensive course to provide the requisite skills with the first cohort of participants starting in September 2006. The course has included direct input from employers through their participation in a course steering group as well as the provision of real-life case studies to support learning directly related to the workplace. The course has provided the skills and flexibility employers requested and the first cohort of learners will complete the programme in May 2007.*
- *A number of colleges have worked with local employers to address the training and development needs of migrant workers through a range of support mechanisms including the translation of health and safety materials and the use of language specialists to deliver training directly to employees.*
- *Omagh College has developed a programme to support new companies focus on green entrepreneurship which helps small rural engineering businesses exploit the opportunities in sustainable development."*

6. Given that we accept the need for innovation in our society and we recognise the need to develop innovators who are characterized by high level technical skills honed and applied in risk taking activities. Why are we recruiting teachers according to criteria the core of which is narrow academic achievement as measured by A Levels and degrees? Does DEL see a role in the development of a teaching tone consonant with innovation and risk taking?

**Aideen McGinley, DEL:** *"Admissions to courses is a matter for the individual higher education institution (HEI). The HEIs are independent autonomous bodies, responsible for their own policies and practices, including those in relation to admissions. However, the Department does acknowledge the importance of innovation in teachers and understands that teachers work in an educational landscape which is characterised by innovation and change. Through the recently revised competences for teachers, the Department is seeking to ensure teachers have an understanding of the importance of the professional community as a vehicle for the development of a culture of innovation and creativity".*

7. We in the Landscape Institute find that demand for our services currently cannot be satisfied by the present number of qualified practitioners. Would the Minister support & promote the establishment of a 3<sup>rd</sup> level course for professional qualification in Landscape Architecture in Northern Ireland? Currently no such courses are available locally; students get qualified in GB and traditionally do not return.

**Aideen McGinley, DEL:** “As I have said whilst decisions on course provision are ultimately the responsibility of the HEIs, the Department's skills strategy, Success through Skills, emphasises the importance of collaborative working between employers and their representative bodies and the education providers, in identifying skills gaps and working to meet the needs of the various sectors. The Sector Skills Councils play a vital role here, through their Sector Skills Agreements. The Department supports the Sector Skills Councils in this work and encourages them to engage directly with the HEIs; such partnerships are key to the development of future courses. This will enable providers to develop a better understanding of the needs of employers and to plan for appropriate future provision”

8. Is Northern Ireland going to embrace the ‘skills academy’ initiative that has seen the UK Government commit to 12 academy’s across many sectors including the Retail, Financial and Manufacturing Sectors? Thus enabling a one stop shop for employee training?

**Aideen McGinley, DEL:** “Northern Ireland has not as yet formally responded to Leitch and has different delivery mechanisms and infrastructure than other areas of the UK. However, the work of SSCs has been ongoing for some time now and the concept of skills academies are generally viewed as complementary to Northern Ireland's Centres of Excellence. All these matters will be further considered and consulted upon as part of a Northern Ireland statement on skills”

9. The Leitch Review and Anne Heraty both refer to the need for investment in training and expect contributions from Government, individuals and ‘business’. Given the large number of SMEs in Northern Ireland is there a concern that investment from ‘business’ may be less anticipated?

**Aideen McGinley, DEL:** “We recognise that we have a SME economy and SSCs in developing their Northern Ireland Sector Skills Agreements must take account of this. As part of our consideration of Leitch this facet of business need and their ability to invest or not in Skills will be taken into account”.

10. How can small employers get support?

**Tracy Meharg, Invest NI:** “There are a number of mechanisms to support small companies. Firstly Invest NI has developed a website, [www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk](http://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk), which has a wealth of information for small business on everything from tax to entering new markets. For non-Invest NI client companies there is also access to Invest NI's information sources, including the Business Information Centre, and for information on technical issues advice from the Technical Advisory Unit (Kieran McGuinness, Tel: 02890 698818).

*If you qualify as an Invest NI client company (criteria: in addition to showing willingness to work with Invest NI, you should be able to demonstrate that currently, or over the next three years, your business will have total sales of over £100,000 per year; sales outside Northern Ireland greater than 25% of turnover or greater than £250,000 a year) you can have access to a wide range of programmes including support for training, research and development, introducing new technology and entering new markets which are listed in Invest NI's website [www.investni.com](http://www.investni.com). If you think you meet these criteria in the first instance, please contact one of Invest NI's Business Development Executives:*

*Trevor Kerr      Tel: 028 8224 5763  
David Bradshaw   Tel: 028 8224 5763  
Tom Kinney      Tel: 028 3026 2955*

11.    Isn't innovation just for the big boys?

**Tracy Meharg, Invest NI:** *"Absolutely not. All businesses, whatever their size, need to consider how they can adapt to new market opportunities to stay ahead of the competition. Innovation is not just about R&D; it is any way in which a business can improve and differentiate itself, including not just the development of new products and processes, but also how it serves its customers. Having people with the right skills and motivation plays an important role in the innovation process.*

*Invest NI assists its clients through a wide range of programmes designed to help small companies be innovative in their approach to running the business e.g.:*

*Process Improvements  
Skills Development  
Product Development  
Design  
Market Development  
Introduction of new technology*

12.    I know from successes in the Republic of Ireland, that in order to upskill workers they very effectively used and worked in partnership with Trade Unions. Three way partnerships between Employers, Trade Unions, and Providers have made a huge difference. Are we doing much to bring this into this?

**Aideen McGinley, DEL:** *"DEL values such partnership working. The Economic Development Forum (EDF) has membership from employers, trade unions and government and the EDF Skills Sub Group has representation from all three Sectors. Furthermore the Workforce Development Forums (WDFs) are chaired*

*by prominent local employers and there is a current push for a trade union place on these WDFs”*

13. How are the departments DE and DEL addressing the declining numbers of young people taking engineering/science degrees bearing in mind some schools allow young people at the end of Key Stage 3 to drop science?

**Aideen McGinley, DEL:** *“DE and DEL are currently working on a joint strategy for encouraging young people to study STEM subjects. The Chairperson of this group is Hugh Cormican and there are several advisory groups giving a perspective on the breadth of the issue. This review will be completed in 2008. Queen’s University Belfast is for example, currently offering scholarships in STEM subjects (except medicine and dentistry) and the Step-Up programme run by University of Ulster is considered a UK exemplar of widening access to Universities and science in particular”*

14. How does the CEIAG policy mentioned by Minister Empey address the issue of risk taking and promoting starting a business as a valid careers option?

**Aideen McGinley, DEL:** *“Through the new CEIAG policy the careers service will offer impartial advice which would encourage self employment if it is an option for the individual with the right skills and entrepreneurial motivation.”*