

Welcome to this Special Edition of the Skills Newsletter which has been produced to coincide with the launch of the ICT Action Plan and to highlight how the Department is working with its partners to address the growing need for skilled workers in the ICT sector.



We are continually working with industry and representative bodies to identify and address skills needs. One of the priority sectors is ICT. We have focussed particular attention on this sector and produced a new ICT Future Skills Action Plan, in partnership with Invest NI, Momentum, the ICT trade association and e-skills UK, the sector skills council. I would particularly like to thank David Mawhinney, chair of the Future Skills Action Group for the major contribution he has made and continues to make to this process.

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One success story we want to build on is the Software Professionals Conversion Course. This course gives non graduates the chance to kick start their career in the software industry. In short, we are helping this critical industry to help itself - we want to work with local companies to tell the story that Northern Ireland's ICT sector is open for business.

**SIR REG EMPHEY MLA – Minister for Employment and Learning  
ICT Action Plan**

Much has been written in the press in recent times about how we simply don't have enough ICT graduates with the right mix of skills ready to take up the ever increasing number of job opportunities in this growth area. An increasing number of software professional jobs are being created, but there are fewer graduates currently completing degrees in computer science and software engineering subjects.

DEL and Invest NI have now joined forces to co-ordinate Government's contribution to tackling this problem. Working with the two key ICT industry bodies in NI – E-Skills (the Sector Skills Council for IT and Telecoms) and Momentum (the ICT Trade Federation in NI) a new [ICT Future Skills Action Plan](#) has been produced.

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The Plan is aimed at tackling the skills needs of the software industry. Although the actions are mainly short term, it is recognised that the benefits associated with them may not be realised for a period of years.

The plan is based around the three thematic areas of Skills Provision, Career Attractiveness and Additional Sources of Talent. Theme 1, Skills Provision, covers issues on higher education and training provision in Northern Ireland. This includes issues on accessibility, adequacy and relevancy to the industry.

Theme 2 of the Plan covers career attractiveness. One of the key elements of this theme is to ensure that the quality and quantity of information being communicated is improved. Promotional activities will be undertaken to ensure that people are aware that the ICT industry offers good quality jobs, that the software profession has particular appeal and that the work is diverse, varied and interesting.

Theme 3 concerns additional sources of talent, and aims to attract, or attract back, people with the skills to meet the needs of the Northern Ireland economy.

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### **SOFTWARE PROFESSIONAL COURSE – GRADUATION CEREMONY**

One of the key initiatives already helping increase the number of software professionals is the Software Professional Course. The Software Professional Course offers graduates of any age, from disciplines other than computer science, the opportunity to gain the necessary skills to enter



**Pictured:** Kei-Lee Chan ( with John D’Arcy, Chief Executive of ANIC and Aideen McGinley, Department for Employment and Learning)

the industry. The course is funded by the Department for Employment and Learning in association with Momentum ( the Northern Ireland ICT Trade Federation ) and the Association of Northern Ireland Colleges.

Students who successfully completed the most recent course were praised for their hard work and commitment at the official course graduation event. The ceremony took place in the Innovation Centre at the Northern Ireland Science Park, and marked the end of the 35 week-long training programme.



**Pictured:** Michael Geary, Christopher Logue and Jonathan Niblock with (John D’Arcy, Chief Executive of ANIC and Aideen McGinley, Department for Employment and Learning)

Speaking at the graduation, Aideen McGinley, Permanent Secretary at the Department for Employment and Learning said; “The software professional course has proven once again that it can deliver. The calibre of graduates qualifying from the course is very much in line with the ICT sectors requirements and the feedback we have received has been encouraging.”

John D’Arcy, Chief Executive of ANIC added, “The SPC has been highly successful since it began in 2006, both for students and employers alike. Last year for example, all graduates successfully gained an interview with a leading ICT organisation and more than 85% were offered a full-time position. The SPC not only provides a recognised training qualification but also offers a fantastic career platform.”

This year's course starts in September 2008 and lasts 35 weeks. It is an intensive programme of study which introduces students to the fundamentals of computer systems and software development. The

course is free of charge and includes an allowance of £120 per week while in training. To gain entry to the course it is necessary to pass an aptitude test and interview. Once this is completed students will embark on a 6 month programme, 30 hours a week.

The course will give students solid skills and knowledge which will enable them to compete for employment with many Northern Ireland-based companies who are looking for software developers. Employers interested in this scheme should contact [colin.woods@delni.gov.uk](mailto:colin.woods@delni.gov.uk) or visit [www.softwareprofessional.org](http://www.softwareprofessional.org) for more details.



Anna McCoy is a Modern Languages graduate in French from the University of Strathclyde. Although she'd had no previous IT experience, Anna performed well during her studies on the Software Professional Course and ended up with two job offers. She was delighted to accept the post of Graduate Trainee Analyst with Citigroup and is excited about the future development of her career in the software industry.

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