

# The Department for Employment and Learning

## Development of Workforce Development Forum Strategies

Final Report

April 2009



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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1	Introduction	2
1.2	Background to the Assignment	2
1.3	Methodology Deployed	3
1.4	Remainder of this Report	3
<b>2</b>	<b>Establishment of the Workforce Development Forum Initiative</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1	Establishment of the WDFs	5
2.2	Terms of Reference for the WDFs	6
2.3	Membership of the WDFs	7
<b>3</b>	<b>Progress and Effectiveness of the WDF Initiative</b>	<b>8</b>
3.1	Activities across the WDFs	8
3.2	Commonality and good practice	14
<b>4</b>	<b>Moving the WDF Initiative Forward</b>	<b>16</b>
4.1	The overall WDF concept	16
4.2	Fulfilling WDF Potential	16
4.3	Resourcing the WDFs	21
<b>5</b>	<b>Conclusions &amp; Recommendations</b>	<b>24</b>
5.1	Conclusions	24
5.2	Recommendations	24
	<b>Appendix A: Guidelines for the Delivery of WDFs</b>	<b>26</b>
	<b>Appendix B: Job Description for WDF Development Exec</b>	<b>31</b>
	<b>Appendix C: Funding Application for WDF Assistance</b>	<b>33</b>



# 1 Introduction

In this section we provide the background to this assignment to support the development of Workforce Development Forum strategies and detail its overall objectives. The methodology deployed in undertaking the assignment is discussed, with the structure of the remainder of the report outlined.

## 1.1 Introduction

This document is the final report from the assignment to support the development of Workforce Development Forum strategies. It is the culmination of work with the 6 WDF Chairs in each area to review progress, address issues and identify a way forward in each case. The report brings together the findings in this regard to consider the effectiveness of the Workforce Development Forum initiative to date and make recommendations on how this can be maximised in the future.

## 1.2 Background to the Assignment

The Department for Employment and Learning commissioned PA Consulting Group to provide additional support in development of Workforce Development Forum strategies in October 2008 following a competitive tendering process. The overall aim of the assignment was to provide practical assistance to Workforce Development Forum Chairs to identify and articulate development plans and strategies for their own WDF. In this regard 4 key requirements were set:

- Assessment of the extent to which each WDF has developed the capacity to achieve the stated aims and objectives of the Terms of Reference.
- Advising on the additional steps required by each WDF to develop the capacity to achieve the stated aims of the Terms of Reference (outlined in Section 2.2).
- Working with each of the WDF Chairs to develop a clear strategy for the identification of key local skills needs and to identify the steps and stakeholders required to develop a strategic response.
- Working collectively with all six WDF Chairs to ensure a coherent and coordinated approach to the future development of the work of the WDF initiative.

In addition to meeting these requirements, PA was also asked to make recommendations, as appropriate, on how to improve the future role of the WDF within the overall strategies for understanding the demand for skills within Northern Ireland businesses.

## 1.3 Methodology Deployed

The assignment has focused on building up an understanding of the development and operation of individual WDFs in each area, then taking that learning to derive findings and propose recommendations with regard to the overall WDF initiative. The methodology deployed over the course of the assignment has involved the following discrete tasks:

- Review of all background material with regard to the overall WDF initiative.
- Engagement with WDF Chairs and to gain buy-in into the strategic development process.
- Examination of all local level material of relevance to the activities of each Forum since establishment.
- Working sessions with each WDF Chair to build up strategic overview as follows:
  - Understanding of the role of the Forum and vision for its development.
  - Organisation, structure and objectives of the Forum.
  - Review of activities of the Forum since establishment
  - Challenges to be addressed at local level to make the Forum more effective
  - Cross-NI challenges needing attention to make the WDFs more effective
- Development of a strategic overview (slide-pack) for each WDF summarising the outcome of these sessions.
- Meetings with Bill McGinnis (NI Skills Commissioner / Adviser) and key internal DEL stakeholders to discuss WDFs' current and future role in skills advisory infrastructure.
- Presentation of emerging findings and workshop with 6 WDF Chairs and Department for Employment and Learning to agree on way forward for overall WDF initiative.

This report draws together the findings from all of this analysis and sets out a clear recommended pathway in order to ensure that the effectiveness of the WDF initiative is maximised moving forward. It also includes, as Appendix A, Guidelines for the Future Delivery of WDFs in response to a request from the Chairs at the workshop referenced above. Following acceptance of this report by the Department, the assignment will be concluded with a phase of work with each WDF to produce a one-year action plan, then bringing the Chairs together for a collective working session that will establish clear parameters for future development.

## 1.4 Remainder of this Report

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 considers the rationale behind establishment of the WDFs, their original terms of reference and membership structure.
- Section 3 examines progress made by the WDFs and identifies good practice and commonality in delivery of the initiative.

- Section 4 discusses key themes on which action must focus in order to make the WDFs more effective in the future.
- Section 5 draws together the main findings from the assignments and proposes a series of recommendations to move the initiative forward.

Appendix A provides guidelines for the delivery of a Workforce Development Forum in the future.



## 2 Establishment of the Workforce Development Forum Initiative

In this section we examine the establishment of the Workforce Development Forum initiative, highlighting the strategic rationale for its introduction and the basis for defining the catchment area of each Forum. The original terms of reference are detailed, together with the envisaged membership structure.

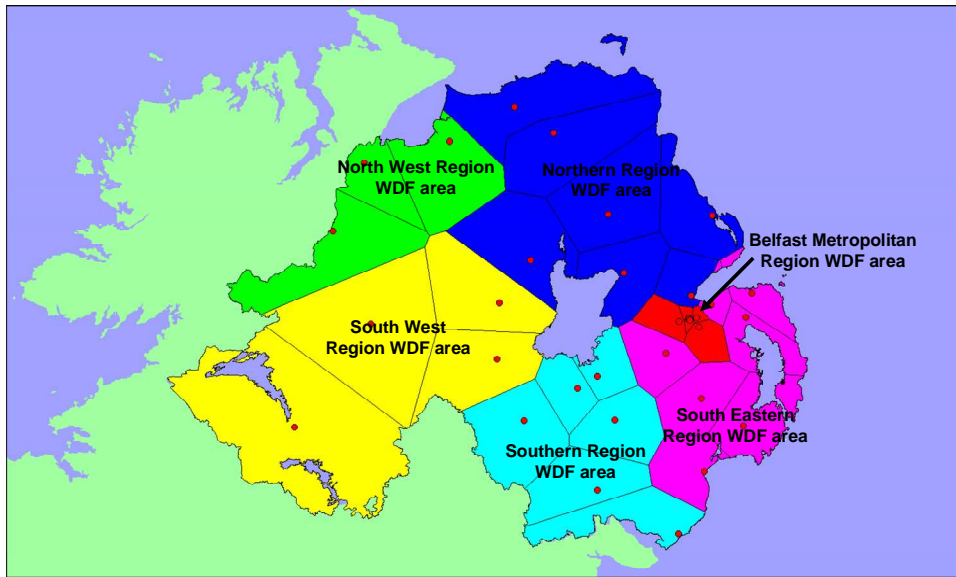
### 2.1 Establishment of the WDFs

'Success through Skills: the Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland', launched in February 2006, sets out the rationale for putting in place an overarching framework for the development of skills. The strategy includes a vision for skills that underlines the commitment to an employer-led approach. It envisages a future scenario that includes:

- a much better understanding of the current and future demand for skills
- employers anticipating and articulating their future skill needs and finding that their skill needs are more easily met
- the skills needed for innovation and enterprise are better understood and embedded in the education system
- a sector working in a more collaborative manner, with appropriate partnerships between colleges, schools, Higher Education Institutions, employers, private sector training organisations, and the community and voluntary sector

In delivering the vision, the strategy identified the establishment of employer-led sub-regional Workforce Development Fora as a key action, focusing on this more collaborative approach to understanding and responding to demand for skills. The restructuring of the further education sector had established regional colleges across 6 distinct areas in NI and offered a natural catchment area for each Forum. As a result, the Department for Employment and Learning established 6 Workforce Development Forums alongside a cross-NI Skills Expert Group to promote effective employer engagement in the employment and skills systems. Each forum and the area it covers is highlighted in Figure 2.1.

**Figure 2.1: Workforce Development Fora and Respective Areas Served**



## 2.2 Terms of Reference for the WDFs

The role of the Workforce Development Forum was *to identify and articulate the skills needs for the local economy and encourage and promote a strategic response to those needs from existing local public and private sector training providers*. The following terms of reference were defined to frame the activities of each forum:

- provide an analysis of the short, mid and long-term needs of the local economy in the area and identify the potential growth sectors;
- define the immediate and mid-term areas of skills priority for the public, private and social sectors in the local area;
- in conjunction with all major stakeholders, develop a local strategy to ensure the most appropriate response to the identified skills needs of the area;
- monitor progress with the implementation of those strategic recommendations making specific proposals where appropriate;
- advise on how the recommendations of the Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland may be most effectively implemented at local level;
- advise DEL of the strategic implications of education and training policies on the provision of skills at a local level.
- liaise and co-operate with the DEL Skills Expert Group (SEG) to develop and define the Regional Employment and Skills Action Plan;

Although these terms provided an operating framework from which each WDF could then develop, a conscious effort was made not to impose any further prescriptive requirements on the Forum. It was intended to allow each WDF the flexibility to then set their own agenda and develop their own working dynamics, in keeping with the nature of an independent, employer led structure.

## 2.3 Membership of the WDFs

Each forum was to be chaired by a local employer representative with administrative and secretariat support provided by the local FE college. Meetings were to be held on a quarterly basis and it was suggested that representatives from the following bodies might be considered as members of the forum:

- Institute of Directors
- Chambers of Commerce
- Confederation of British Industry
- Trade Unions
- Local District Councils
- Further Education Colleges
- Local Training Organisations
- Universities (where appropriate)
- Invest NI – local offices
- Careers Service – local offices

The choice of Chair was considered to be a key component in the success of the initiative and care was taken to select well-respected business leaders that could be identified with the particular area. Initial appointments were made for 5 of the WDFs, with difficulties in selecting an appropriate Chair in the Southern Region leading to the Director of the College taking on this role on a temporary basis. Now all 6 Chairs are in place as follows:

- Bro McFerran, Allstate - Belfast Metropolitan WDF
- John Spangler, Seagate - North West Region WDF
- Graham Whitehurst, Michelin - Northern Region WDF
- Cathy Taggart, HCL - Southern Region WDF
- John Toner, Hastings Hotels Group - South East Region WDF
- Donald Hackett, Classic Marble - South West Region WDF



## 3 Progress and Effectiveness of the WDF Initiative

Given the strategic rationale, terms of reference and membership structure defined for the WDFs, we examine the progress that has been made since their establishment. In this section we consider the specific activities across the WDFs and establish where common factors and good practice exist that can be built upon as we move forward.

### 3.1 Activities across the WDFs

A mixed pattern of development has been apparent within the WDFs since their establishment. There was significant initial activity across all areas as the WDF sought to establish a 'footprint' but momentum has been varied and a lack of concrete actions as a result of Forum intervention is apparent. The WDFs have developed at different paces, with unique dynamics and development paths and with the result that delivery of the initiative across NI is inconsistent. Differences in levels of employer engagement, in structure and membership and even understanding of the overall purpose of the WDF have been apparent. Nevertheless there are pockets of good practice and continued recognition of the potential value of the initiative if delivered effectively.

#### 3.1.1 Levels of employer engagement

The level of business engagement is critical to the success of the WDF concept and must be sufficient to allow local and sub-regional skills needs to be identified. However the degree to which employers have participated in the WDF has varied significantly from area to area. In terms of membership, WDFs have tended to concentrate on ensuring buy-in from key employers in 5/6 key local industries. This process has been assisted significantly by the FE colleges, which have access to a wide base of industry contacts as a result of their own increasing focus on a demand-led provision system. A key challenge has emerged in securing buy-in from employers across the overall WDF catchment area. The 'regions' that were created with the restructuring of the FE sector are not based on any previous area identity and have quite wide geographical coverage. Therefore while clusters of businesses have been engaged around a particular location, achieving widespread distribution across the catchment area has proven more complex.

While a core base of 5-6 employers have tended to be involved directly in the WDFs at some point over their lifetime, sustaining interest and involvement had been a major challenge and impediment to the ongoing effectiveness of the Forum. In some cases the WDFs had not met for over 6 months and individual employers that had been involved in the initial stages had lost enthusiasm for continued involvement due to a lack of perceived impact. A number of Initiatives to stimulate employer engagement have proved successful, such as the employer roadshow events held by the South West Region WDF and Northern Region WDF. However while these were effective in generating initial interest among employers, in the former case further progress was constrained by an inability to 'follow through' with the employer contacts established at this roadshow event and work together to establish responses to their skills needs.

#### Engaging Employers via Roadshow Events held by South West Region WDF

One of the first challenges recognised by South West Region WDF was the need to make local employers aware of their existence and the potential assistance that could be provided. It was therefore decided to hold a series of roadshow style information events in different locations around the catchment area. Each event was targeted on a specific sector which had been identified by the WDF as a key sub-regional priority. The Department for Employment and Learning, Invest NI and the relevant SSC were in attendance each time and made presentations regarding their roles and the support that was available. Three events have been held to date:

- Engineering (Dungannon)
- Construction (Omagh)
- Tourism (Enniskillen)

Further events are planned to tie in with the other priority sectors identified (food production, food processing, retailing). The events have been successful with a significant base of employers in each sector attending. The idea was for each of these events to be followed up with a series of more detailed engagements to understand skills needs and this in turn would result in the development of detailed action plans at a sector level. However the WDF currently lacks the resources to deliver on this objective.

When 'Success through Skills' was published, the WDFs were viewed as one of two key employer-led mechanisms to ensure that skills needs were being identified and met across NI, with the other being the Sector Skills Councils. While the WDFs were to provide the local and sub-regional perspective in this regard, the SSCs were to offer the sector-specific expertise at a NI level. Hence significant synergy and joint-working was envisaged between the two structures. However there is concern at the resources that have been available from SSCs and at the lack of robust information in some sectors at NI level and absence of such information at a more local level. There have been more encouraging signs over the last 6 months, with some WDFs engaging much more significantly with individual SSCs and clear benefits resulting from the working partnerships established:

- A range of SSCs, corresponding to priority sectors identified by Northern Region WDF, were involved in the planning and delivery of the WDF's recent roadshow event in Ballymena.

- South East Region WDF has adopted a practice of ring-fencing an amount of time at every meeting to focus on a specific sector, inviting the relevant SSC representative to discuss needs and responses within that sector.
- North West WDF has held 5 sector specific meetings focusing on ICT; hospitality and tourism; construction; retail; and financial services.

### Joint Working with Sector Skills Councils in the South Eastern WDF

South Eastern Region WDF have worked proactively with SSCs in order to inform their understanding of skills needs in particular sectors. The SSCs are represented directly on the Forum via the Skills for Business network and time is set aside at each WDF meeting to focus on a particular sectoral theme. A presentation is made by the relevant SSC which typically covers their role and remit, recent activities and the skills needs identified within the WDF catchment area (as far as this can be ascertained). There then follows a structured discussion which facilitates exchange of insight between the SSC and WDF members with regard to the nature of the sector locally, articulation of the key skills priorities and examination of potential responses to meet local skills needs. There is a strong focus on identifying actions that can then be progressed via the SSC or WDF. To date, the specific sectors that have been covered have included:

- Construction (with presentation from ConstructionSkills)
- Hospitality and tourism (with presentation from People 1st)
- ICT (with presentations in from representatives from ICT Action Group)

The action that flowed from the focus on the hospitality and tourism sector as a result of close working with People 1st included development of masterclasses for chefs, the holding of roadshow events and employers' evenings and putting in place an employers' 'panel'.

### 3.1.2 Structure, membership and roles in the WDFs

The structure and membership of each Forum also differed across the WDFs. When operating effectively, all had a core base of 6-7 core employers from a cross-section of different industries. These industries typically represented what were considered to be priority sectors within the WDF's catchment area. Figure 3.1 highlights the priority sectors identified by each WDF.

**Figure 3.1: Priority Sectors Identified by the WDFs**

Although Construction, ICT and Financial Services have received particular attention Belfast has the widest mix of sectors and specific priorities have not been set at this point.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ICT</li> <li>• Financial services</li> <li>• Construction</li> <li>• Hospitality &amp; tourism</li> <li>• Manufacturing</li> <li>• Retail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hospitality &amp; tourism</li> <li>• Creative industries</li> <li>• IT</li> <li>• Financial services</li> <li>• Retail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction</li> <li>• Healthcare</li> <li>• Hospitality</li> <li>• Engineering</li> <li>• Retail</li> <li>• Crafts</li> <li>• ICT/Software</li> <li>• Manufacturing</li> <li>• Financial services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engineering</li> <li>• Construction</li> <li>• Tourism</li> <li>• Food production</li> <li>• Food processing</li> <li>• Retail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ICT/Software</li> <li>• Business &amp; financial services</li> <li>• Manufacturing engineering</li> <li>• Motor vehicles</li> <li>• Hospitality &amp; tourism</li> <li>• Applied science/ pharmaceuticals</li> </ul>
Belfast Metropolitan WDF	Northern Region WDF	North West Region WDF	South Eastern Region WDF	South West Region WDF	Southern Region WDF

The prioritisation of sectors reflects to some extent the key sectors that have been identified across NI. However a notable feature is the prominence given to the retail industry in the WDFs, while local specialisms are also apparent in areas such as creative industries,

The base of employers on each Forum was supplemented by representatives from the college, including the business development/employer engagement function in all cases and more specific specialist teaching resources in some of the Fora. The Department for Employment and Learning were also represented at every WDF meeting. These were the core participants across the initiative, although as noted in Section 2 a much wider range of stakeholders were identified as potential members of the WDF. The degree of representation of these stakeholders varied, but involvement of particular representatives was apparent in the following WDF areas:

- Local authorities represented on South East, North, North West and Belfast.
- Invest NI regional executives in the North, South and Belfast.
- Recruitment agencies in the South East.
- Chamber of Commerce on North West and Local Business Centre in the South East
- Representatives from relevant agencies from the Republic of Ireland (FAS, IDA, Institute of Technology, local authorities) in the North West.

#### **Cross-border Approach by North West Region WDF**

In the North-West an opportunity was identified to use the Forum as a mechanism to facilitate a more strategic approach to cross-border employment and skills issues. It was recognised that many of these issues were common on both sides of the border and as such a range of relevant stakeholders from the Republic of Ireland were invited to participate in the WDF. This included IDA Ireland, FAS, Letterkenny Institute of Technology and Donegal County Council. As a consequence there was a strong cross-border focus to the activities. This has included an analysis of cross-border employment and skills initiatives and of existing employer needs. The findings included:

- Existence of a wide range of initiatives focused on skills development and stimulating economic activity.
- Employers still identify skills shortages;
- Employers request, but cannot fund, company specific training;
- Uptake of priority skills training places is below the maximum number of places available;
- Either school-leavers are inadequately trained for entry to the world of work or employers' expectations are unrealistic;
- Despite numerous initiatives the economically disengaged remains as a large percentage of the economically active.

None of the WDFs have chosen to draw members from the CBI, trade unions or universities to date, although it is not clear if such organisations would have a sufficiently local perspective to add value to the work of the Forum.

In addition to the overall membership structure, the role of the FE college within that structure was pivotal to driving the agenda of each Forum. In the absence of any other resources, the college served in a limited capacity as the means of progressing actions and coordinating activities between the formal WDF meetings. It was also able to dovetail some of the WDF initiatives with that of its wider demand-led remit which required significant employer engagement. There were also good examples of where the role of the college extended beyond that of secretariat and put mechanisms in place to deliver effective sector-specific responses to meet particular sub-regional needs.

### Sector Specific Sub-Groups Established by Southern Region WDF

The role of the college has been extremely important in driving the work of the Southern Region WDF, particularly in the absence of an employer representative as Chair until recently. This not only involved coordinating the activities of the WDF, but establishing sub-groups that linked specialist teaching resources within the college to employers within the relevant sector. For example, a Business and Financial Services sub-group was set up that brought together the School of Business and Financial Services (represented by the Head of School), local industry representatives and the Financial Services Sector Skills Council, with coordination support provided by the college's Business Support Unit. Similar arrangements were put in place for hospitality and tourism; motor vehicles; ICT and software; engineering; and applied sciences. This allowed a small and focused specialist group to consider particular sectoral skills issues in greater depth and propose related actions to the wider WDF. The objectives for each sub-group in this regard were defined by the WDF as follows:

- Examine local labour market skills needs and report back to main Forum
- Develop proposals to deal with identified local skills shortages
- Review of existing delivery mechanisms used by the College and other TOs
- Review existing provision (level 1 – 5) delivered locally
- Recommend new areas of development
- Recommend and support marketing strategies
- Contribute to development of new curriculum provision at level 5/6
- Advise college on capital investment on relevant technology

### 3.1.3 Practical WDF actions and initiatives

As noted above, there has been some loss of momentum in WDFs with employer engagement dwindling and a need for a renewed stimulus to get the initiative back on track. This is further exemplified by the experiences of those WDFs that have managed to retain a significant level of employer buy-in. Their approaches have been characterised by an increasingly action-focused agenda, with progress apparent from meeting to meeting. A number of practical projects have been developed to meet specific industry needs while the WDFs have played a role in identifying particular skills issues and needs within their catchment areas. Table 3.1 provides some practical examples of skills issues highlighted and responses proposed or developed by individual WDFs.

**Table 3.1: Skills Issues Identified by WDFs**

Workforce Development Forum	Skills Issues Identified and Responses Proposed
Belfast Metropolitan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for .NET provision (ICT/software)</li> <li>• More flexible management training</li> <li>• Language difficulties for migrant workers,</li> <li>• Lack of job readiness/employability skills</li> <li>• Weaknesses in careers advice</li> </ul>
Northern Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for up-skilling of existing employees in manufacturing engineering - led to Adult Apprenticeship initiative</li> <li>• Gap in provision of Business Improvement Techniques NVQ training - National Skills academy initiative being developed</li> <li>• Skills needs in hospitality around chefs, customer service, language skills</li> </ul>
North West Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employability skills in construction sector</li> <li>• Creative writing skills (creative industries)</li> <li>• Brokered provision of Autocad training (ICT/software)</li> </ul>
Southern Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding and capturing SME needs</li> </ul>
South East Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identified need for and developed masterclasses for chefs (hospitality)</li> <li>• Hospitality proposal</li> <li>• Construction proposal</li> </ul>
South West Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to develop detailed sector specific skills action plans</li> </ul>

While the WDFs have made progress in identification of the skills issues above, it was noted by the Chairs that there was now a need to build on this by demonstrating 'quick wins' in terms of practical responses to meet these needs. This is viewed as essential in order to demonstrate the credibility of the WDF to the employer base in the area. By demonstrating clear outputs and benefits from WDF intervention, this should then stimulate further employer engagement and drive momentum in each case. This has been evident in the experience of Northern Region WDF, which has been able to progress an Adult Apprenticeship initiative that established a clear 'footprint' for the WDF within the area. It has built on this success with an employer roadshow event in Ballymena and in the establishment of a WDF website which allows companies to identify particular employment and skills issues, with the promise of follow-up contact to discuss the progression of appropriate responses.

#### **.NET skills within the Belfast WDF**

Within the Belfast WDF there is recognition amongst several of the IT businesses in the Belfast region that .NET skills are a significant gap and there is a desire across several businesses to access specific training on .NET as a key development framework to support development of web applications. A proposal has been developed by the forum, led by the Chair and is currently being considered by the Department for funding. This illustrates the ability of the forum to aggregate demand amongst local businesses and establish a case for specific skills provision.

## Adult Apprenticeship Initiative by Northern Region WDF

Northern Region WDF developed the first Adult Apprenticeship initiative in Northern Ireland in partnership with Northern Regional College and the SSC SEMTA. The programme was launched on 1st September 2008 after a significant development process. With a need for skills in maintenance engineering identified by the WDF, the Engineering Training Council undertook more formal research to detail and articulate the extent of this need. The WDF then worked with SEMTA to develop a 2 year programme to create NVQ3 trained maintenance engineers. The Forum then worked proactively with local employers to encourage them to allow their employees to participate in the programme, with the critical mass generated in terms of demand that then allowed the initiative to proceed. With evidence of need and demand established, funding was sought and obtained from the Department for Employment and Learning to deliver the programme. In total, 6 companies signed up for the initiative with 12 employees put forward for the training programme.

## 3.2 Commonality and good practice

From the analysis of the WDF initiative above, it is clear that there was a mixed pattern of development across the different fora. As the concept of the WDFs was that they act as independent, employer-led bodies, there was limited activity at Department level in terms of prescribing the ways in which they should operate beyond the original terms of reference. This led to some confusion around the purpose and focus of the WDFs and the nature of activities that should be progressed, but allowing each forum to develop naturally did not prevent a significant level of commonality and good cross-fora practice to become evident. These themes are further explored in the sections below.

### 3.2.1 Purpose and focus of the WDFs

The working sessions with the WDF Chairs revealed some uncertainty around the overall purpose of the forum. Although objectives had been defined within its terms of reference, it was unclear how these could be realised via practical action given the non-executive nature of the Forum and other responsibilities of WDF members. The terms of reference were viewed as very broad and it was not clear, for example, how exactly short-medium and long-term skills needs were to be defined, how a local strategy was to be developed, or how they could advise DEL on skills strategy. Nevertheless there was clarity and agreement on the primary activities which the WDFs were expected to deliver: one focused on identifying and advising on what local skills needs were, and the other on proposing and developing solutions to meet these skills needs. As the WDFs developed, it became clear that there were two key areas of Forum focus:

- As an **advisor** – articulating local and sub-regional employment and skills needs to ensure that appropriate responses are planned and delivered across NI;
- As a **broker** - identifying short-term skills needs (12-18 months) in the private sector and brokering local responses to meet these needs.

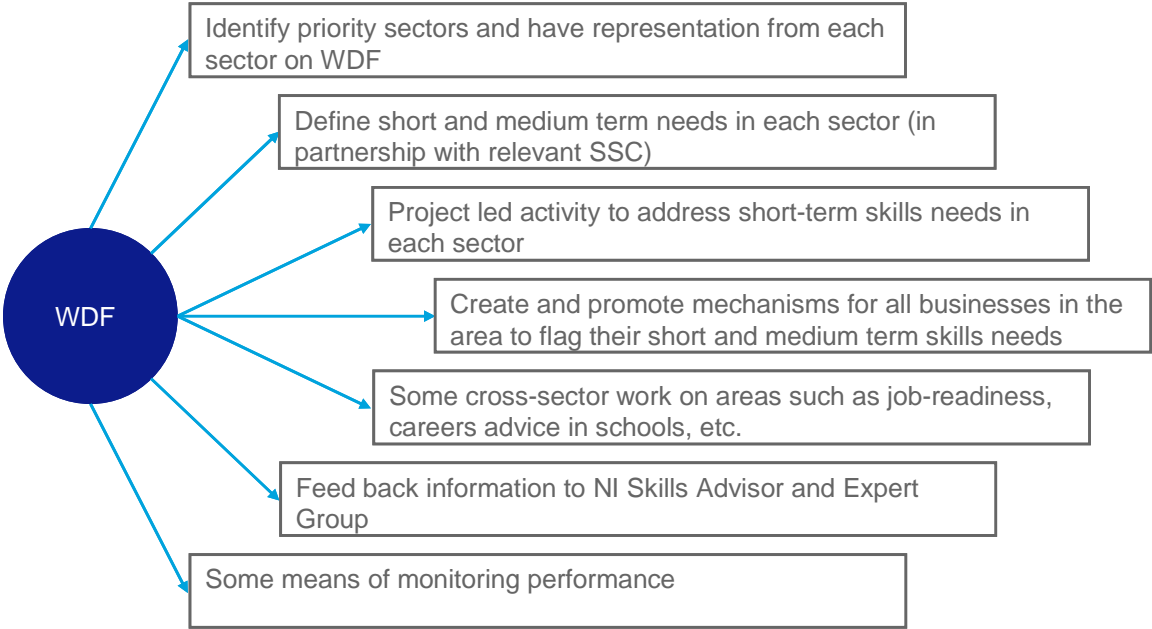
If the WDFs were to prove effective, it would be through concentrating on these two simple roles and linking them to practical action on an ongoing basis. There are a number of key common activities on which the fora must focus in this regard. These are further discussed below.

### 3.2.2 Key activities in delivering on their remit

As the WDFs have developed, a number of common activities have emerged that appear central to fulfilling the advisory and brokerage role identified above. We have noted how the WDFs identified the key sectors and attempted, wherever possible, to have employer representation from these sectors on the Forum. There has been an increasing trend of joint-working between the WDFs and SSCs to identify sub-regional skills needs within particular sectors. Other cross-sectoral issues such as job readiness and careers guidance should also represent a focus of activities given the cross-sectoral knowledge base on the Forum. It is acknowledged by the Chairs that it is only by delivering specific projects addressing skills needs that the WDF can begin to build the credibility with local industry required to effectively deliver on its remit. This has been illustrated by the practical action that has been developed to date. Credibility with local industry must also be linked to mechanisms that allow employers of all sizes to input into the process of identifying skills needs. When skills needs are identified, direct links must be in place with wider advisory infrastructure to ensure that there is a cross-NI response developed to meet these needs wherever appropriate.

Figure 3.2 summarises the key common activities that are recognised as being critical to the future effectiveness of the WDF initiative.

**Figure 3.2: Key Activities in Delivering on the WDF Remit**





## 4 Moving the WDF Initiative Forward

Having considered progress of each of the 6 WDFs, it is important that the experiences of each are used to define the way in which the initiative should develop in future. In this section we consider the continued relevance and value of the overall WDF concept, how WDF potential should be fulfilled and how the initiative needs to be resourced to achieve this.

### 4.1 The overall WDF concept

To move the WDF initiative forward, it is important to consider its continued relevance and value in addressing skills needs across NI and determine whether this could be further improved. From our work with the individual WDFs and in considering wider developments in policy and in skills advisory infrastructure, we feel that the overall concept behind the initiative remains valid. If it is delivered correctly, it offers mechanisms that could yield significant benefits in terms of addressing local skills needs. However a simpler, more streamlined model needs to be implemented around the idea that the WDF acts as a broker and advisor, as discussed in Section 3. Although the WDFs can provide an important "sounding board" on long term needs in the NI economy, its primary focus must be on a more niche role in meeting local short-term skills needs.

This is particularly pertinent given the employer-led model of the WDF and the time constraints placed on members by their existing day-jobs. It means a primary focus on the core functions of identifying short-term skills needs and developing and delivering responses to meet these needs. This must be linked to facilitating better coordination between FE colleges and employers to ensure that provision meets needs of local economy and identifying any gaps in provision that need to be met via other sources or additional funding.

Moving forward, there is a lot of positive sentiment, both in the business community and other relevant stakeholders, to make the WDFs **work**. There is widespread recognition of the need for a local-level employer driven mechanism to meet demand for skills. There exists a significant opportunity to build on this positive sentiment and put the conditions in place to deliver effective local skills solutions via the WDF initiative. The challenge will lie in putting in place the conditions that will allow such potential to be fulfilled.

### 4.2 Fulfilling WDF Potential

Fulfilling WDF potential will involve putting in place a clear model for delivery of the advisory and brokerage remit of each forum.

## 4.2.1 Delivering the advisory function

The remit of the WDFs places them as a critical component of overall skills advisory infrastructure<sup>1</sup> alongside the Sector Skills Councils. If operating effectively, there should be clear synergy between them with:

- WDFs providing the local and sub-regional dimension on identifying skills needs
- SSCs providing the sectoral dimension on identifying skills needs

As we move forward, there is an opportunity to draw on the significant knowledge base in each WDF to identify short, medium and long-term skills issues. The WDFs have Chairs and members drawn from leading businesses across NI and as such they offer unique insight into emerging employment and skills needs.

The membership structure of the WDFs and the role of the FE college as the secretariat on each forum has naturally led to a focus on identifying skills needs where there is a direct further education response. The link to FE provision is a distinct asset of the Forum and the college should be the first port of call when considering if skills needs can be met. However there is a need for WDFs to also focus on all local/sub-regional skills needs not just FE skills needs. In some sectors, most notably ICT, employers have identified needs in terms of HE qualified graduates and there must be scope within the Forum to identify, articulate and advise on such needs via this structure.

The appointment of the Northern Ireland Employment and Skills Adviser provides a natural focal point through which the advice of the WDFs can now flow. The adviser will be able to raise any issues at NI level and influence the Minister and the Department for Employment and Learning on appropriate responses. An Advisory Group is to be created by the Adviser on which the WDFs will have representation and the intention is to establish an ongoing working relationship which will allow direct access to the Adviser by the Chairs whenever appropriate.

While this relationship with the Adviser is crucial, it will also be important that a direct relationship is maintained with DEL itself. The WDFs should be identifying particular issues and advising on relevant responses to the Department, particularly where there are clear gaps in provision in terms of meeting skills needs and further support is required. Initiatives such as the potential Skills Solution project<sup>2</sup>, currently under consideration within DEL, could also play a pivotal role in delivering on WDF-identified requirements and strong forum-departmental links will be essential in the future. This should be facilitated by the continuation of the practice of DEL attending each WDF meeting, ensuring a two-way information process by which the Forum is made aware of developments at department level and can raise emerging employment and skills issues with an appropriate department representative.

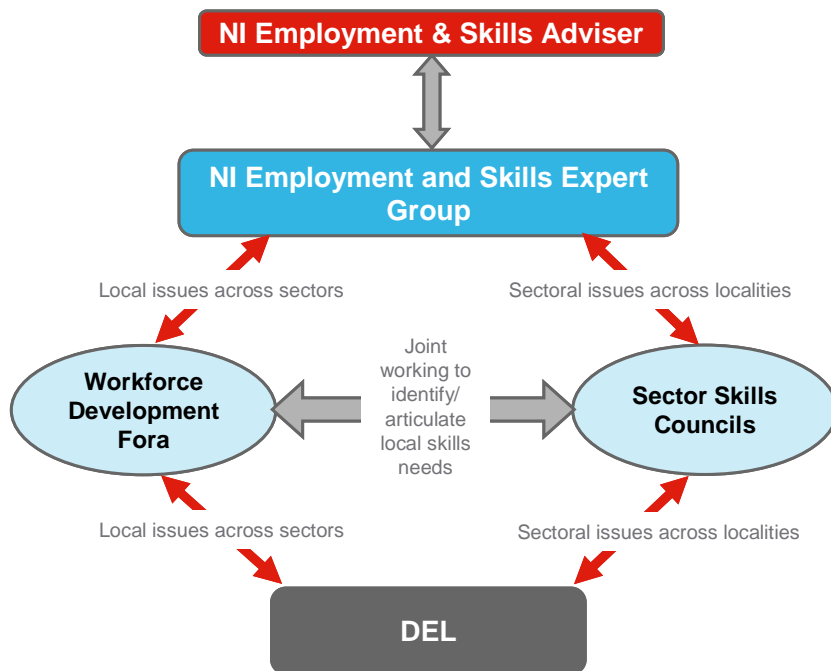
Figure 4.1 highlights how this advisory relationship must operate in order for an effective sectorally and locally focused system to be implemented.

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<sup>1</sup> The Skills Advisory Infrastructure in Northern Ireland is currently under review by the recently established office of the NI Skills Commissioner.

<sup>2</sup> The Department for Employment and Learning is currently considering the case for a specific intervention with existing businesses in NI to assess their skills needs and deliver specialist support to address these needs.

**Figure 4.1: The WDF Role in Overall Skills Advisory Infrastructure**



### 4.2.2 Delivering the brokerage function

In delivering on the brokerage function, a clear process has emerged which should be replicated by each Forum as we move forward. This process begins with the identification of a particular skills issue by the WDFs. The issue might be raised directly by the members of the forum given their industry insight, via mechanisms to engage with the wider employer base in the area (e.g. roadshow events, websites) or via some third party source where there is clear evidence of local need (e.g. a specific piece of research).

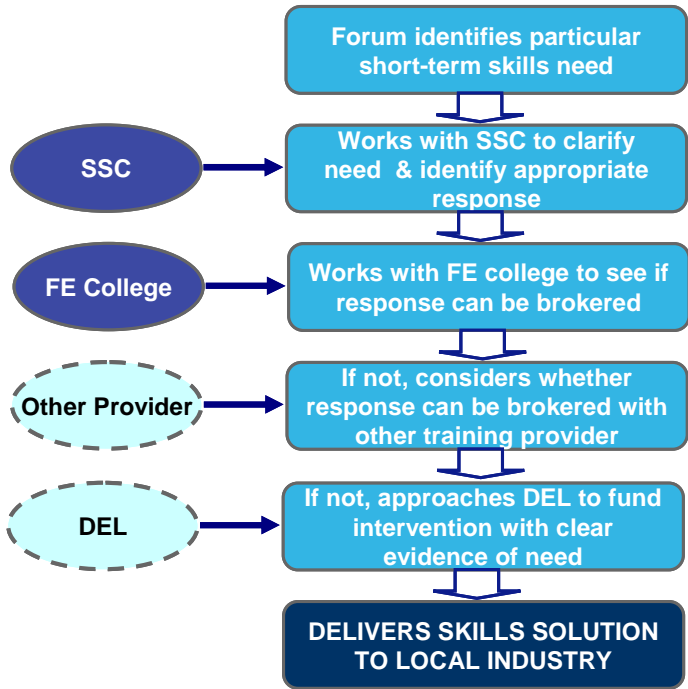
The next step should then involve engaging with the appropriate SSCs to identify and articulate the detailed skills needs. This will confirm that the need is consistent with wider issues identified in the sector. Discussions can then be progressed with regard to the most appropriate responses to meet these needs.

The close links between the WDF and the FE sector mean that the first port of call after defining the required response is the college. A full examination of whether needs can be met from existing provision must then be undertaken, including consideration of whether existing provision can be adapted in order to meet these needs. If this is not possible, meeting the needs via alternative training providers must be explored. This will require mechanisms to be in place to engage with private sector providers or higher education institutes if appropriate.

If it remains the case that no solution can be found locally then the WDF should approach the Department for Employment and Learning with clear evidence of need and the proposed response. There will be a standard format for such a submission and this will be issued by DEL in due course (see Section 5 for recommended actions). A further departmental solution may lie in the ongoing development of a Skills Solution service, which will help to broker solutions via existing provision and potentially offer funding for skills interventions where no provision currently exists. It remains to be seen if this initiative develops as currently envisaged but, if it does, there is scope for strong links between it and the WDFs.

The overall process for a WDF delivering on its brokerage role is encapsulated in the diagram in Figure 4.2.

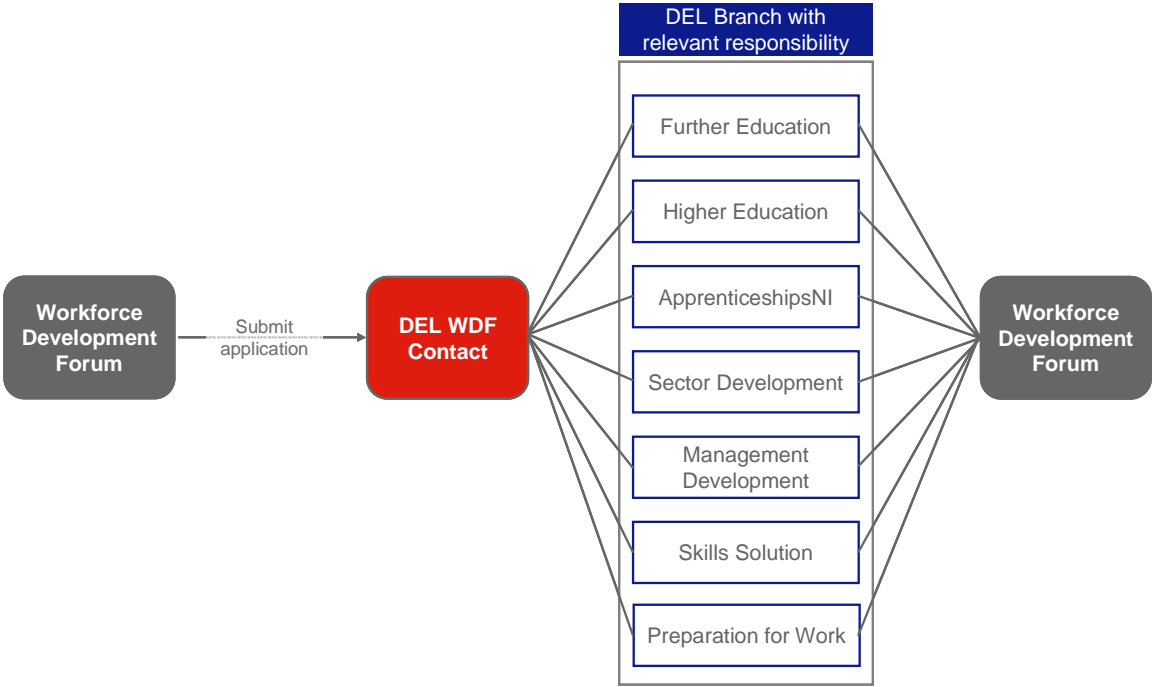
**Figure 4.2: The WDF Role in Delivering on its Brokerage Function**



A key aspect of this process is the nature of engagement with DEL if a local response cannot be brokered via existing or adapted provision. Resource issues in this regard are further detailed in Section 4.3, but it is also important that a transparent process is put in place around the how WDF/DEL engagement is structured and how decisions are made on the support that can be offered.

The natural starting point for such a process is a clearly communicated format for making an application for support from DEL to address an identified skill need. The Department has developed an application form for this purpose (included as Appendix C) which asks the WDF to answer a series of questions that together help develop an understanding of the business case for the proposal. It also requires evidence of support from the relevant SSC to further demonstrate need. Once applications are submitted by the WDF, it is essential that these are handled in a timely and consistent manner within the department. There should be a single point of contact for submission of the application form within DEL, who will then have responsibility for brokering the involvement of the appropriate branch within the department given the nature of the proposal. This might involve a response in relation to FE or apprenticeships with the branches responsible for these areas engaged, or require assistance from the proposed new skills solution service. It may be relevant to the support that is currently offered to SSCs from the Sector Development branch, or may involve a management development issue that requires intervention from this branch. Given the current challenging economic environment, it may even involve the Preparation for Work division if the need is more related to employment rather than skills concerns. In this way the process will then facilitate the establishment of a direct relationship between the appropriate branch and the WDF and provide access to the support required. The process of engagement with DEL is illustrated in Figure 4.3.

**Figure 4.3: WDF Engagement with DEL to Assist in Meeting Identified Skills Needs**



**4.2.3 Other factors in delivering on WDF potential**

In addition to the requirements from each WDF in delivering on their roles as advisors and brokers, a number of other factors were identified during the course of our work that merit attention in order to ensure that their full potential is realised.

**Communicating Role and Impact of WDFs:** Communicating the role, remit and benefits of the WDF initiative to as wide an audience as possible must be a critical objective moving forward. There is concern that the current 'footprint' of the WDFs is confined to a small group of employers that have directly interacted with the fora, with the wider business base possessing little knowledge about what each WDF is trying to achieve. There is an immediate need to get the message out there to business that there is a WDF mechanism that can develop responses to local employers needs. While promotional and engagement activities will be important in this regard, the main means by which the WDFs can secure significant penetration into the local employer base will be on demonstrating successful outcomes and impacts from their interventions. There is thus a need to focus on quick wins to establish the WDFs in each sub-region. This will highlight to local business that WDFs can facilitate practical solutions to short-term skills issues and that there is value in engaging with the initiative to solve their own particular employment and skills issues.

**SME Engagement Mechanisms:** If raising the profile of WDFs is to prove effective however, there must exist a user-friendly means of allowing SMEs that lack time to participate in WDF to communicate their skills needs. In this regard mechanisms such as roadshow events, employer surveys or direct one-to-one engagement might be considered. The latter task is constrained by resources at present but the need for an additional resource focusing on engaging with a wider base of employers is further explored in Section 4.3 below. There is also potential for development of WDF website, with the work in establishing such a tool for Northern Region WDF providing a platform by which this could be rolled out across all of the WDFs.

**Action Planning and Monitoring:** Finally, while there is an acceptance among the Chairs that a more action-focused approach must be put in place in each WDF, including a system of action planning and some monitoring of performance, there is concern at introducing prescriptive requirements on the fora (e.g. detailed strategies and plans, monitoring reports). The main asset of the WDFs lies in their nature as locally focused employer-led bodies. If they are to work they must be based on a simple, well-defined role and given the flexibility they need to act quickly. To introduce detailed and time-consuming prescriptive requirements would put at risk the level of business engagement within the fora.

## 4.3 Resourcing the WDFs

While there is agreement across the WDFs on how their advisory and brokerage roles should develop, there remains a significant resource barrier to progressing with this agenda. At present there is a significant reliance on the FE college to support the work of the WDF. Any actions that are progressed between meetings are typically undertaken by college personnel, often linking into the wider work of their business development or employer engagement functions. There was a strong view expressed by the Chairs that this was neither sustainable (given the other work commitments of such personnel) nor desirable (given the lack of independence in a college driving the WDF agenda). With the Chairs themselves only able to give a limited time to the initiative, an urgent need was identified for some type of support resource that could help the WDFs to engage with a wider base of businesses and deliver on their remit.

This resource should involve a minimum of 2 executives covering 3 WDFs each. Both should be linked within some type of secretariat as a major benefit of this function would be the sharing of information across the WDFs. The functions of such a resource would be expected to include:

- assistance in the engagement of business in each area,
- progression of actions identified by each Forum
- liaison with the Department for Employment and Learning, Sector Skills Councils, Office of the Northern Ireland Employment and Skills Adviser and other relevant components of the skills advisory infrastructure
- coordination of activities and sharing of best practice across WDFs
- raising awareness with regard to the individual WDFs and the WDF initiative as a whole

A suggested job description for this resource, termed a WDF Development Executive, is provided as Appendix B.

For the resource to be effective, it is essential that access to the Executive and the scale of support that can be offered is made clear to each WDF. It is suggested that each Executive offers a guaranteed resource to each individual WDF of 5 days a month. The work for the individual WDFs will account for around three-quarters of the Executive's time, with the remainder set aside for collective working and activities related to the wider delivery of the WDF initiative (e.g. website development, liaison with key stakeholders, promotion of the WDF 'brand'). Having a discrete period of time available to deliver activity on behalf of the forum will allow each WDF to plan use of this resource accordingly and should facilitate a flow of continuous action to move things forward in each area.

The Executive will be expected to develop good working relationships with the 3 WDF Chairs, the secretariats within the 3 associated FE colleges and within DEL. They will also be expected to engage with key business leaders in each area to link additional employers into the activities of the fora. Hence it is critical that they are drawn from a relevant skills base and possess an appropriate level of seniority, appointed at DP level given the specific skills required. In this regard, the person appointed must be highly self-motivated. Because of the shared nature of the resource, it is essential that the Executive has good management and resource planning skills, with the ability to deliver on a complex portfolio in a coordinated and efficient manner. Excellent communication skills, both written and oral, will be essential, as a key aspect of activities will involve the articulation of needs identified by the WDFs and liaison with a wide range of different stakeholders. Private sector experience will also be desirable, given the need to be able to work with business to understand their employment and skills needs and identify appropriate solutions (in partnership with other stakeholders) to meet these needs.

In addition to the need for human resource deployment to support the work of the WDFs, there was also concern and lack of understanding around how skills needs and proposed responses should be communicated to DEL and the process for accessing additional funding from the Department. While it is accepted that evidence must be formally provided on existence of skills gaps and of the inability of existing provision to fill these gaps to justify additional funding, there is a need for greater clarity on how such evidence should be expressed and what funding is available when applications are made. A clear funding stream to address skills needs that can be accessed by WDFs should be established, with a transparent application and decision making process. We have indicated how this process should work in section 4.2.3, with a standard application form (included as Appendix C) to be filled out and submitted to a central contact point within DEL and an appropriate response then brokered within the department. It is also anticipated that if the WDF Development Executives are appointed as envisaged above, they will play an important intermediary role in ensuring that needs are fully articulated in applications and that the required information is provided to the department to allow them to draw down the support required in a timely fashion.

Finally, there was also a need identified for assistance for ad hoc initiatives to support the further development of the initiative as a whole. The establishment of a WDF website or campaigns around identification of skills needs of a wider base of employers were areas that required further attention but for which there was no provision for support. Consideration should therefore be given to how such activity is resourced in future.

If they are to function effectively, the WDFs must be backed by sufficient commitment and resources and this will require further investment from the Department in supporting the initiative in line with the needs expressed above. In this regard, there is a need for 3 distinct types of resources to support the work of the WDFs:

- A dedicated support resource that would help the Forum to function better.
- Funding to allow appropriate responses to be delivered when a Forum identifies skill needs.
- Resources that can be accessed on a once-off basis in order to progress particular initiatives (e.g. website)

Resourcing the WDFs sufficiently in this manner is critical to the further progress of the initiative and should represent a key short-term priority of the Department for Employment and Learning.



## 5 Conclusions & Recommendations

In this section we draw the main conclusions from our work with the WDFs. We also set out a series of recommendations in order to ensure that the initiative progresses in a more consistent and effective manner in the future and reinforces the role of the WDFs as an integral part of NI employment and skills advisory infrastructure.

### 5.1 Conclusions

The analysis of the WDF initiative to date reveals a strong belief in the importance and value of the WDFs but a mixed pattern of development across the fora. Differences have been apparent in the levels of employer engagement, structure of membership and nature of actions progressed. Despite this, examples of good practice have emerged including:

- matching employers and technical FE teaching expertise within specific sectors,
- joint-working with the SSCs on identification of need and development of sector-specific responses
- holding of roadshow events attracting significant levels of employer buy-in
- cross-border working to address common skills needs
- new and additional training interventions to meet identified skills gaps

There has also been a high degree of commonality around the purpose and approach of the WDFs, with two areas of focus emerging as the initiative developed:

- As an advisor – articulating local and sub-regional employment and skills needs to ensure that appropriate responses are planned and delivered across NI;
- As a broker - identifying short-term skills needs (12-18 months) in the private sector and brokering local responses to meet these needs.

The concept of the WDF is valid if it concentrates on a simple niche role in relation to these two functions. A clear process has been established with regard to each that should now form the basis of their activities. If this is followed, WDFs can still fulfil their potential if they can secure the required level of business engagement and are backed by sufficient commitment and resources. The key priorities in this regard must be putting in place mechanisms to facilitate higher levels of employer engagement and a resourcing plan that will meet the needs of the WDFs if they are to deliver on their remit.

### 5.2 Recommendations

Given the conclusions and the work with the individual WDF Chairs to develop a strategic approach to future delivery, we would propose the following recommendations:

1. The guidelines set out in Appendix A should be finalised and issue to WDFs to frame their delivery moving forward.
2. Each WDF should develop and commit to a one-year action plan outlining activities over the next twelve months. This should then become an ongoing annual process. Performance of the WDFs should be monitored against achievement of this action plan.
3. Formal links should be established as soon as possible between the WDFs and the Northern Ireland Employment and Skills Adviser.
4. A mechanism for sharing learning and best practice and developing common approaches across the WDFs should be put in place, facilitating regular interaction between the Chairs.
5. A staffing support resource should be introduced involving 2 executives covering 3 WDFs each, with each individual WDF receiving a minimum of 5 days assistance from this resource each month. The functions of such a resource would be expected to include: assistance in the engagement of business in each area; progression of actions identified by each Forum; liaison with skills advisory infrastructure; and coordination of activities and sharing of best practice across WDFs. The appointments should be made at DP level as a minimum.
6. Funding resources should be made available that allow appropriate responses to be delivered when a Forum identifies skill needs and that can be accessed on a once-off basis in order to progress particular initiatives (e.g. website).
7. A format for requesting additional investment from the Department presenting clear evidence that existing provision cannot meet a skills needs identified should be communicated to the WDFs (see Appendix C). A transparent decision-making process with regard to such proposals should also be made clear.



# Appendix A: Guidelines for the Delivery of WDFs

## A.1 Core functions of the WDFs

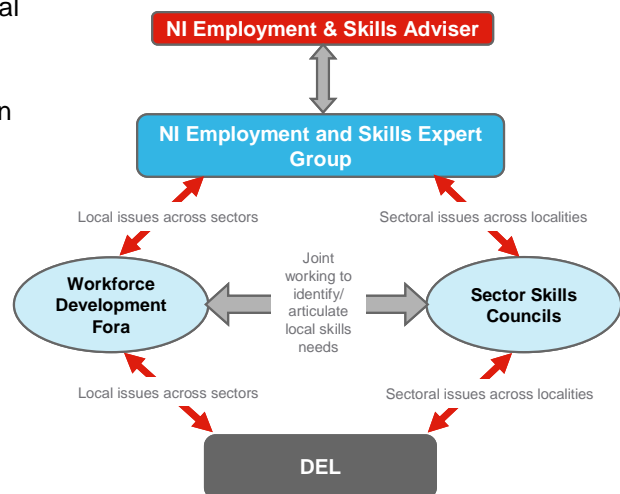
The WDF should concentrate on two key functions as follows:

- As an **advisor** – articulating local and sub-regional employment and skills needs to ensure that appropriate responses are planned and delivered across NI;
- As a **broker** - identifying short-term skills needs (12-18 months) in the private sector and brokering local responses to meet these needs.

### Operating Arrangements as an Adviser

WDFs are a critical component of overall skills advisory infrastructure alongside the SSCs:

- WDFs should provide the local and sub-regional dimension on identifying skills needs
- SSCs should provide the sectoral dimension on identifying skills needs

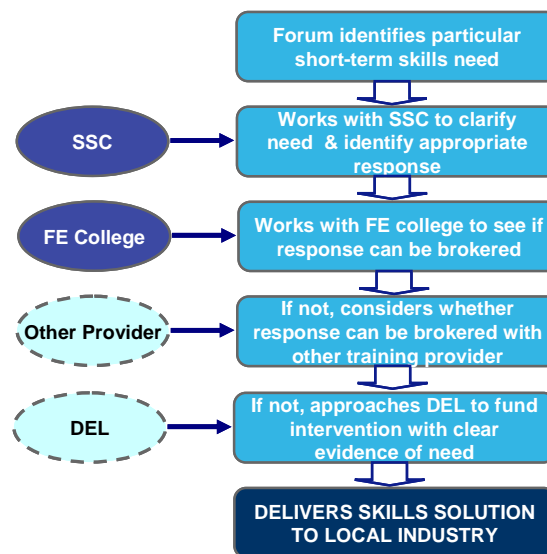


The WDF should draw on the significant knowledge held by its members to flag short, medium and long-term skills issues. It should focus on all local/sub-regional skills needs, not just skills needs that can be met by further education provision. The WDF will link to the NI Employment and Skills Adviser via direct contact with its Chair and representation on the Employment and Skills Advisory Group currently being established. Skills issues should also be communicated to the Department for Employment and Learning wherever appropriate. This can be done via WDF meetings (at which Departmental representatives will attend), by making formal written submissions to DEL or requesting meetings with appropriate personnel.

## Operating Arrangements as Broker

In delivering on its brokerage role, the WDF should adopt the following process:

- Identify particular skills issue via Forum
- Work with SSCs to identify and articulate needs;
- Consider if FE college can meet needs via existing provision or if provision can be adapted to meet these needs
- Have mechanisms in place to engage with private sector providers or higher education institutes if appropriate
- If no solution can be found locally then go to Department with evidence of need and proposed response in a format agreed by DEL.



## A.2 Structure and Meeting Arrangements

### Membership Structure

Each WDF has the flexibility to include any representatives deemed appropriate to inform the identification of skills needs in NI. However as a minimum, the WDF should include the following core members:

- A minimum of 5 employer representatives that reflect the priority sectors of the WDF.
- Representatives from the FE college that reflect not only the employer engagement function but also specific sectoral expertise within the college.
- An appropriate regional representative from Invest NI.
- Appropriate local authority representation.

A representative from the Department for Employment and Learning will also attend each WDF meeting.

### WDF Meetings

WDF meetings should be held on at least a quarterly basis, although a clear programme of activities should be progressed between these meetings.

A suggested core agenda for each WDF meeting would include:

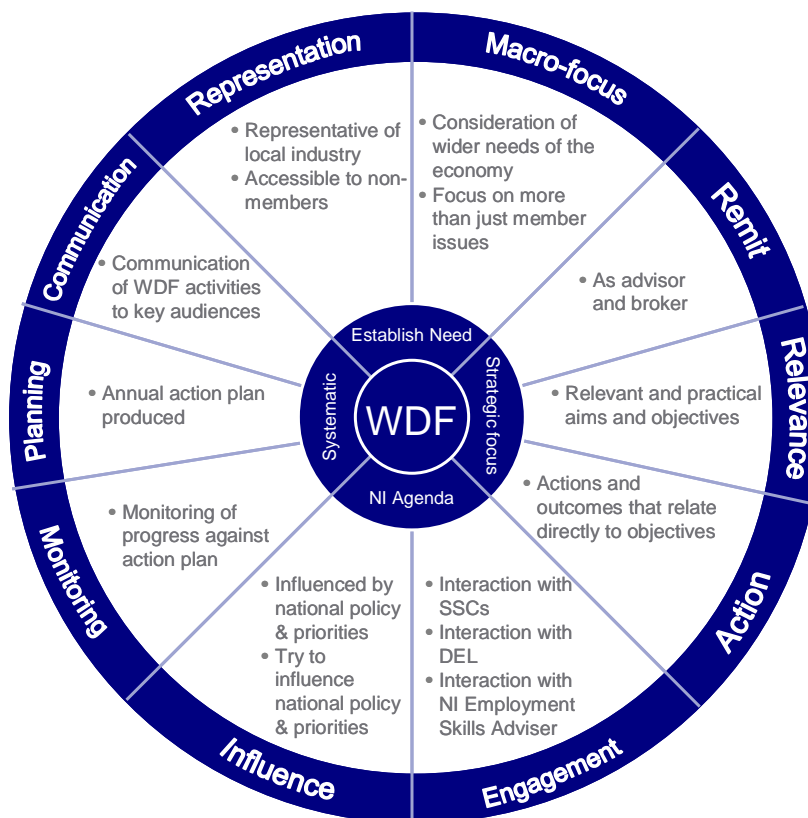
- Progress since last meeting
- Emerging skills issues

- Existing levels of employer engagement
- Focus on a specific sector
- Engagement with NI skills advisory infrastructure
- Actions to be progressed before next meeting

## A.3 Strategic Framework and Action Planning

### Overarching Strategic Framework

The activities delivered by each WDF should be underpinned by the following overarching framework:



In this regard each WDF should ensure that it has in place:

- Mechanisms and representation in place to establish local needs
- Clear strategic vision about WDF role and how this can be delivered
- Systems in place that will allow effective responses to local skills needs to be developed
- Understanding of the NI agenda to ensure synergy between local and national priorities

### Action Planning

An annual action plan should be produced by the WDF and approved by its members. This should be submitted to the Department for Employment and Learning at the start of each year. It should set out actions to be delivered over the course of the 12 month period, the persons and organisations responsible for delivering each action and the timeframe for delivery in each case. Actions should be split within the plan into **core activities** - those which should be undertaken as part of the WDF remit every year on an ongoing basis - and **annual priorities** - those that relate to the specific WDF agenda for the year ahead. An indication of the type of actions that might be proposed in this regard are provided below.

Components of the WDF Annual Action Plan	
Core activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 WDF meetings</li> <li>• Setting of priority sectors for the year</li> <li>• Representation on skills advisory infrastructure</li> <li>• Employer engagement mechanisms and events</li> <li>• Joint meetings with other WDFs</li> </ul>
Annual priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actions to increase levels of employer engagement</li> <li>• Actions to identify local skills needs</li> <li>• Actions to develop and deliver responses to local skills needs</li> <li>• Actions to work with other components of NI skills advisory infrastructure</li> <li>• Actions to raise awareness of the WDF</li> <li>• Actions focusing on specific sectors</li> <li>• Actions focusing on cross-sectoral issues (e.g. job readiness, careers guidance)</li> </ul>

A report should be admitted at the end of each annual planning period summarising progress against actions identified at the start of the year. This should be submitted to the Department for Employment and Learning for monitoring purposes.

### A.4 Process for Applying for Funding to Address Skills Needs

If an identified skills need cannot be met by brokering a local solution from existing or adapted provision, the WDFs will be able to apply for assistance from DEL directly. A standard format has been developed to frame such an application from a WDF, highlighted in Appendix C of this report. This requires that applications are able to build the 'business case' for the intervention by covering the following areas:

- objectives of the project
- local (sub regional) evidence of need for this project

- fit with local needs and priorities, demonstration of good value for money and evidence that project cannot be accommodated within existing resources
- Details of costs and estimate of tangible benefits
- Monitoring and evaluation arrangements and targets to be established for the project
- Other sources of funding that can contribute to and/or support the project
- Impact of the project not being progressed

The application will be submitted to a central contact within the department. It will then be the responsibility of that contact to refer the application to the appropriate branch within DEL, providing any background information required. While there will be a standard format for application and approval of each funding proposal, it is anticipated that the introduction of WDF Development Executives will allow them to serve as a key intermediaries in the process, ensuring that applications meet the needs of the department and that WDFs making applications are kept fully informed of the current status with regard to the application and the stage at which it sits in the overall decision-making process.



# Appendix B: Job Description for WDF Development Exec

## Key Skills Requirements

- A self-starter and highly self-motivated
- Good management and resource planning skills, with the ability to deliver on a complex portfolio in a coordinated and efficient manner
- Excellent communication skills, both written and oral, are essential
- Private sector experience is also be desirable, with an ability to understand business needs and identify appropriate responses to these needs

## Overall role

- assistance in the engagement of business in each area
- progression of actions identified by each Forum
- liaison with the Department for Employment and Learning, Sector Skills Councils, Office of the Northern Ireland Employment and Skills Adviser and other relevant components of skills advisory infrastructure
- coordination of activities and sharing of best practice across WDFs
- raising awareness with regard to the individual WDFs and the WDF initiative as a whole

## Main Activities

### *Engaging Business*

- to engage with employers identified by the WDF in order to identify their employment and skills needs (in partnership with the SSCs)
- to articulate the skills needs identified by employers to the WDF Chair
- to plan and coordinate employer engagement activities such as roadshows, employer surveys, visits to Chambers of Commerce, industry bodies, etc
- to encourage participation by employers in the WDF or relevant sub-structures

### ***Progression of WDF Actions***

- to coordinate and assist the progression of actions identified at WDF meetings
- to report on the progress of actions at WDF meetings
- to meet with the Chair and Secretariat (FE college) on regular basis between meetings
- to prepare, in consultation with WDF, an annual action plan to frame activities
- to monitor progress against annual WDF action plan

### ***Liaison with Skills Advisory Infrastructure***

- to liaise with the NI Employment and Skills Adviser and his office to provide a WDF perspective on particular skills issues
- to work with relevant SSCs to examine sector-specific skills areas within the WDF catchment area
- to liaise with the Department for Employment and Learning to examine
- to prepare submissions in response to policy, strategy and other relevant development in relation to employment and skills in NI
- to provide research and policy analysis support to the WDF Chair in his role on the NI Skills Advisory Group (or equivalent structure)

### ***Coordination and Sharing of Best Practice***

- to prepare, in partnership with the other WDF Development Executive, an e-newsletter on recent developments across the WDF
- to coordinate and prepare material for joint-meetings between WDF Chairs.
- to highlight good practice in individual WDFs to all other fora
- to support development of common ideas and initiatives across the WDFs to address employment and skills issues in NI

### ***Raising Awareness***

- to promote the role and remit of the WDF initiative to as wide an audience as possible
- to communicate WDF successes to business and other key stakeholders
- to develop and update the WDF websites to serve as tools for raising awareness and engaging employers



# Appendix C: Funding Application for WDF Assistance

## Workforce Development Forum - Funding Application

**WDF:**

**Chair's Address:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Project Title:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone:**

-----

**SSC Contact:**

-----

(where appropriate)

**Email Address:**

-----

*This application should be accompanied by evidence supporting the need for the project.*

**Signed:**

**Name:**

**Position in WDF:**

-----

**Date:**

-----

**Forms should be returned to:**

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Lesley Buildings,

61 Fountain Street,

Belfast BT1 5EX

Tel: 028

**Office Use:**

Date Received

-----

Passed to

-----

RECEIVED STAMP

1) Please state clearly the objective(s) of the project and detail the local (sub regional) evidence you have obtained which supports the need for this project (i.e. qualitative or quantitative data that supports a need for this intervention in your area ).

2) Please state how this application meets the following criteria:

- Project meets local needs and priorities.
- Project demonstrates good value for money.
- Project cannot be accommodated within existing resources

3) Please provide broad details of costs and an estimate of tangible benefits e.g. qualifications gained; demand/supply gap analysis; improved productivity; increased stakeholder credibility.

4) How will the project be evaluated? What review mechanisms will be put in place? Please ensure that you identify/specify measurable outcomes and also relevant milestones, where appropriate, (particularly if project is to last more than one year).

5) What other sources of funding are available to contribute to and/or support this project? Please make specific reference employer contribution.

6) What would be the effect of the project not being accepted?