

# 14-19 Education in Northern Ireland

FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES POSITION PAPER

Richard Armstrong, February 2020.

## CONTENTS

### Page

2	Introduction
4	Executive Summary
6	Further Education Sector
10	Essential Skills
11	Entitlement Framework Collaboration
14	Compulsory Education
16	Careers
17	Area Planning
19	Duplication
21	Recommendations and Key Challenges
23	Annexe1: FE Performance Statistics 2017/18
24	Annexe 2: NIEFQAN Summary 2019/20
25	Annexe 3: Year 12 Examination Performance in Post Primary Schools 2017/18
26	Annexe 4: Further Education Principals' Key Challenges Workshop November 2019
35	Annexe 5: Issues Requiring Policy Consideration

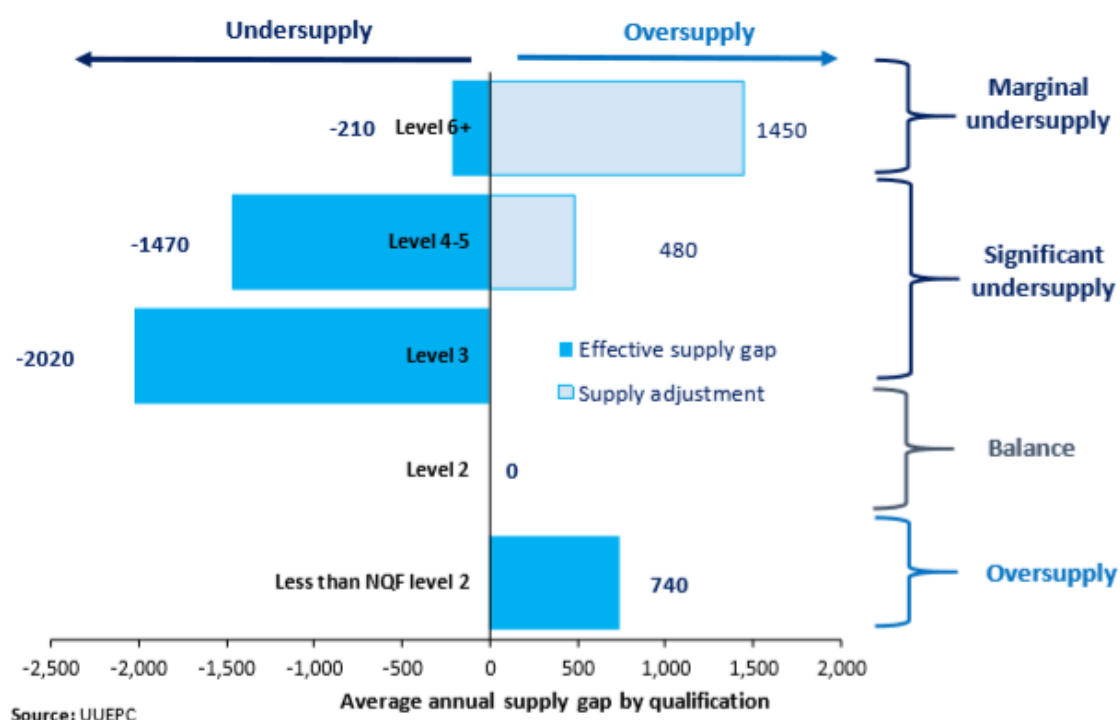
## 1. INTRODUCTION

There has been much debate about the purpose of education for many years and this situation is not unique to Northern Ireland. Former Education Secretary Lord Baker, in his foreword to the Edge Foundation's plan for 14-19 education in England<sup>1</sup>, stated that:

***“The primary purpose of education, particularly in the teenage years, has to be equipping young people with the skills and knowledge they need to reach their full potential in their working and broader lives.”***

Lord Baker went on to state that whilst education has an important role in promoting the joy of learning, supporting social cohesion and developing the next generation of citizens, it is also vital that the UK economy nurtures the skilled and flexible labour it needs to power future economic growth. Traditionally, post primary education in the UK has followed more of an ‘education logic’ rather than an ‘employment logic’. This has also been true of Northern Ireland where the development of the highly skilled workforce of the future has been the main focus for Further Education (FE), with schools concentrating on ‘education.’

FE Means Success (2016)<sup>2</sup> identified the need to develop FE provision at level 3, in order to encourage progression to higher level professional and technical qualifications and address Northern Ireland's skills gaps at levels 4 & 5, as identified by the Northern Ireland Skills Barometer<sup>3</sup>. The Ulster University Economic Policy Centre's update of the skills barometer describes the current supply gaps at each qualification level as:



Average annual labour market supply gap (2018-28)

<sup>1</sup> Our Plan for Education (Edge Foundation 2017)

<sup>2</sup> Further Education Means Success (2016)

<sup>3</sup> Northern Ireland Skills Barometer (Ulster University Economic Policy Centre 2019)

Collaboration between the FE sector and post primary schools under the Entitlement Framework, has enabled school pupils to access Professional and Technical provision at 14-19 and raise awareness among school pupils (and parents) of the progression pathways available in further education. Partnerships between schools and colleges have declined in recent years, however, partly due to a combination of financial pressures on school budgets and the declining demographics which have led to an increase in delivery of this type of provision in-house and through school-to-school partnerships.

In 2009, Sir Reg Empey, then minister of Employment and Learning, in reference to the important progress made by DEL and DE jointly working on the implementation of the Vocational Enhancement Programme (which was the precursor to the Entitlement Framework) noted that a joint strategy on 14-19 provision would be available shortly. A Steering Group was established to progress the 14-19 strategy but by 2012 this work was stalled due to differing views about the role of FE Colleges in the delivery of the Entitlement Framework. In 2013, in response to correspondence from the Education Committee, DE stated that it did not consider it necessary to formalise joint 14-19 working in a written strategy.

There was little progress until 2016 when DEL Minister Stephen Farry, in an assembly question, asked the Education Minister to outline his plans to develop a 14-19 strategy to better co-ordinate the strengths of schools, FE and other youth training providers. This was in line with the policy commitments made in FE Means Success (2016) in regard to economic development, for FE colleges to focus on developing provision at level 3 and to encourage learner progression to higher levels “through the qualifications system, and through innovative delivery and clear pathways”. It was subsequently agreed by then DE and DfE ministers Peter Weir and Simon Hamilton, in 2017, that a coherent education policy for those in the 14-19 age group should be a priority for both departments.

The Education Skills & Employability Steering Group, jointly chaired by Grade 3s from DE and DfE, was subsequently established in April 2017. Working groups were set up to take forward a number of key themes for strategic development, which culminated in an Innovation Lab involving key stakeholders, in August 2018. Following this, discussions took place on the establishment of the Transition of Young People into Careers (14-19) Project, which began in January 2019.

The agreed workstreams for the 14-19 project currently in progress are:

1. Funding
2. Progression and Pathways
3. Post -16 Education
4. Curriculum Delivery
5. Careers

The immediate priority is to produce a Strategic Outline Case and a draft high level 14-19 Strategy by March 2020.

A list of fully-costed options together with an action plan for implementation is targeted for October 2020, for consideration by both the Minister for the Economy and the Minister for Education, in order to agree how to progress the joint strategy.

## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the Innovation Lab in August 2018 the Transition of Young People into Careers (14-19) Project was established and commenced work in January 2019. The remit of the project is to explore the strengths and weaknesses of 14-19 provision in Northern Ireland in order to produce a joint DE/DfE strategy and action plan.

The body of this report sets out the current provision, difficulties and duplication across the Further Education and Post-Primary Sectors, from the perspective of the FE colleges.

In summary:

- FE develops Professional and Technical Knowledge and Skills. It is an equally valuable, if more industrially relevant, pathway with students provided with skills which equip them for work or further study.
- In 2017/2018 the achievement rate for FE students in NI i.e. those who obtained their qualification, was 81.4%.
- FE also provides a second chance for those who leave school without many qualifications and provides opportunities for individuals to restart their education, enhance their qualifications, or refresh their skillset.
- FE provides support to employers to innovate and grow their business and upskill their employees.

### Compulsory Education

- Children must attend school until 30<sup>th</sup> June of the school year in which their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday falls. Department of Education is responsible for Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 4. Key stage 4 (14-16) is focussed on achievement of qualifications.
- Achievement rate for schools at Key Stage 4 is measured by the proportion of pupils achieving 5 GCSE grades A\*-C including English and Maths. In 2017/2018, 71.8% achieved 5 GCSEs Grades A\*-C.
- While progression to A-level study in sixth form is permitted with non-GCSE qualifications this may not be the most suitable progression pathway for pupils who are more suited to the experiential learning styles associated with professional and technical qualifications.
- There is no Sixth Form Policy for schools in Northern Ireland.

### Entitlement Framework

- The Entitlement Framework was established to support a more diverse and applied curriculum towards addressing economic relevancy and educational disadvantage. Whilst collaboration between FE Colleges and schools has been effective, reduced funding for the Entitlement Framework and demographic change have driven the Post Primary sector to reduce participation in the FE Schools Partnership programmes.
- The achievement rates for FE Schools Partnership programmes over a five year period to 2016/2017 were 92% at KS4 and 99% at post 16. Despite this success, the reduction in the number of schools engaging with FE Colleges reported a downward trend in the number of 16 year old school leavers, who completed Entitlement Framework courses with FE Colleges in Year 12 progressing to full-time FE, training or apprenticeships.

- This reduces the opportunities for young people with learning styles more suited to non-GCSE provision to have meaningful encounters with Further Education colleges and explore pathways to training for the workplace.

## Careers

- There is a need to review the provision of Careers Advice and Guidance to ensure that all pupils understand the full range of learning opportunities that are available to them. This includes both academic and vocational routes and learning in schools, colleges, universities and in the workplace.
- A DE commissioned consultation with parents and young people about their experiences of careers education, noted that:  
*“Generally parents, young people and online respondents were unhappy with the level of support offered to them at this stage and were not aware of the various pathways that young people could take after completing their GCSEs”*
- Careers education is cited by stakeholders as a critical component of the 14-19 education system.

## Area Planning

- Area Planning needs to put the needs of young people at the forefront of decision making.
- The Independent Strategic Review of Education (Bain, 2006), noted there were too many schools in NI and it was recommended that both departments carry out a *“review of 14-19 provision, with particular reference to curriculum, funding, and planning of provision, and taking account of local and regional requirements, establish a common and coherent 14-19 education and training policy and strategy.”*
- While there is broad support within Further Education for the concept of area planning there is concern that it is being severely hampered by DE funding policy which encourages schools to retain pupils to maintain funding levels, where they could benefit from transferring to further education

## Duplication

Growing duplication of FE provision by the Post Primary Sector is evidenced by the number of professional and technical A level-equivalent courses delivered by schools.

Data provided from the 2017/18 Entitlement Framework Audit indicates that 31% of pupils enrolled on applied courses delivered by schools in sixth form, were following Professional and Technical qualifications (9,410 enrolments). This included 1,289 enrolments on Professional and Technical qualifications equivalent to two or more A-Levels, more traditionally associated with the FE colleges, such as BTEC Level 3 Diploma in Construction and CACHE Level 3 Extended Diploma in Children’s Care, Learning and Development.

The processes used by Awarding Organisations for endorsement of teaching centres does not include availability or assessment of specialist industry standard facilities and resources in schools, whether or not teaching staff have appropriate qualifications and industry experience and if programme content is based on selection of optional units are matched to the skills needs of industry and requirements for progression of learners.

### 3. FURTHER EDUCATION SECTOR

The vision for FE colleges to be recognised as providers of high quality economically relevant skills training, as set out in FE Means Success, is closely aligned to the draft Industrial Strategy which has identified six broad sectors of the economy, across both manufacturing and services, where Northern Ireland has world class capabilities. These are:

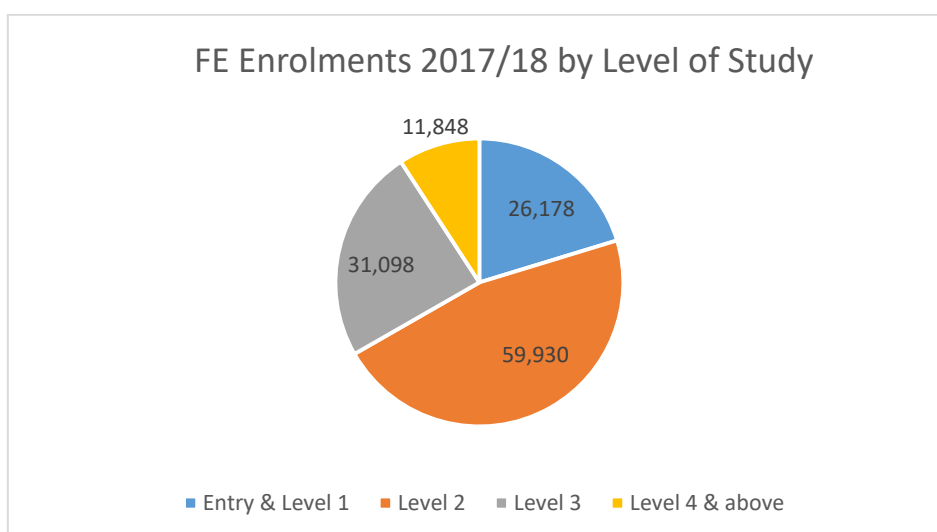
- Financial, Business and Professional Services;
- Digital and Creative Technologies;
- Advanced Manufacturing, Materials and Engineering;
- Life and Health Sciences;
- Agri-Food;
- Construction and Materials Handling.

The FE sector is a provider of post 16 education. Pupils must be 16 on or before 1<sup>st</sup> July, in order to enrol on a full-time further education course the following September.

#### 3.1 Curriculum/Programmes of Study

Professional and technical qualifications are certified by a range of awarding organisations, such as, BTEC, OCR, CACHE, etc. Further Education courses enable learners to develop the professional and technical skills and knowledge, which are relevant to the chosen industry sector. FE colleges also embed employability and enterprise skills into the curriculum, as identified in FE Means Success. Where possible, learners are provided with opportunities to complete practical challenges based on real-life work situations. This will help them to develop the employability skills and knowledge they will require in the work environment when progressing to employment regionally, nationally and internationally. In addition to this project-based, work-related approach to learning, opportunities are also provided for students to apply their skills and knowledge to real-life situations through work experience, field trips, industry visits and volunteering, all of which help to develop confidence for progressing to employment or higher education.

The chart below shows a breakdown of all enrolments for the FE sector, by level of study, for the 2017/18 academic year.



### 3.2 Entry and Level 1

School leavers who do not meet the entry requirements for Level 2 provision in FE or training can access programmes at entry level and level 1.

- Job Club: A further-education funded programme for learners with moderate to severe special educational needs which enables young people to develop their personal and employability skills and provides opportunities to gain work experience. Learners attend colleges 18 hrs per week for up to 3 years
- Skills for Your Life – to address the personal and development needs of young people who have disengaged from learning and/or have significant barriers to education, training or employment including Essential Skills needs. It is designed to address the need for more focused provision for the significant minority of young people for whom Skills for Work is not suitable.
- Skills for Work Level 1 – to help young people gain skills and qualifications at Level 1, to be able to gain employment, to progress to Skills for Work Level 2 or Apprenticeships NI or further education programmes at Level 2.

Entry level and level 1 provision is currently being reviewed by DfE (as part of a separate project) in order to align with the New NI Level 2 Traineeship to be introduced in 2020. Young people who have not yet reached the full standard of achievement at Level 1 will have the opportunity to access new programmes at entry level and level 1, in order develop the skills to progress to the next level in the youth training system.

### 3.3 Level 2

Much of the focus at Level 2 and below is on addressing the challenges of educational disadvantage and social inclusion, in order to ensure appropriate and relevant progression pathways for students. At Level 2, there were 53,627 final year enrolments in 2017/18 with an achievement rate of 85.8% (Annexe 1). FE students at Level 2 focus on a single curriculum area, such as BTEC L2 Engineering or CACHE Level 2 Children's Care Learning and Development .

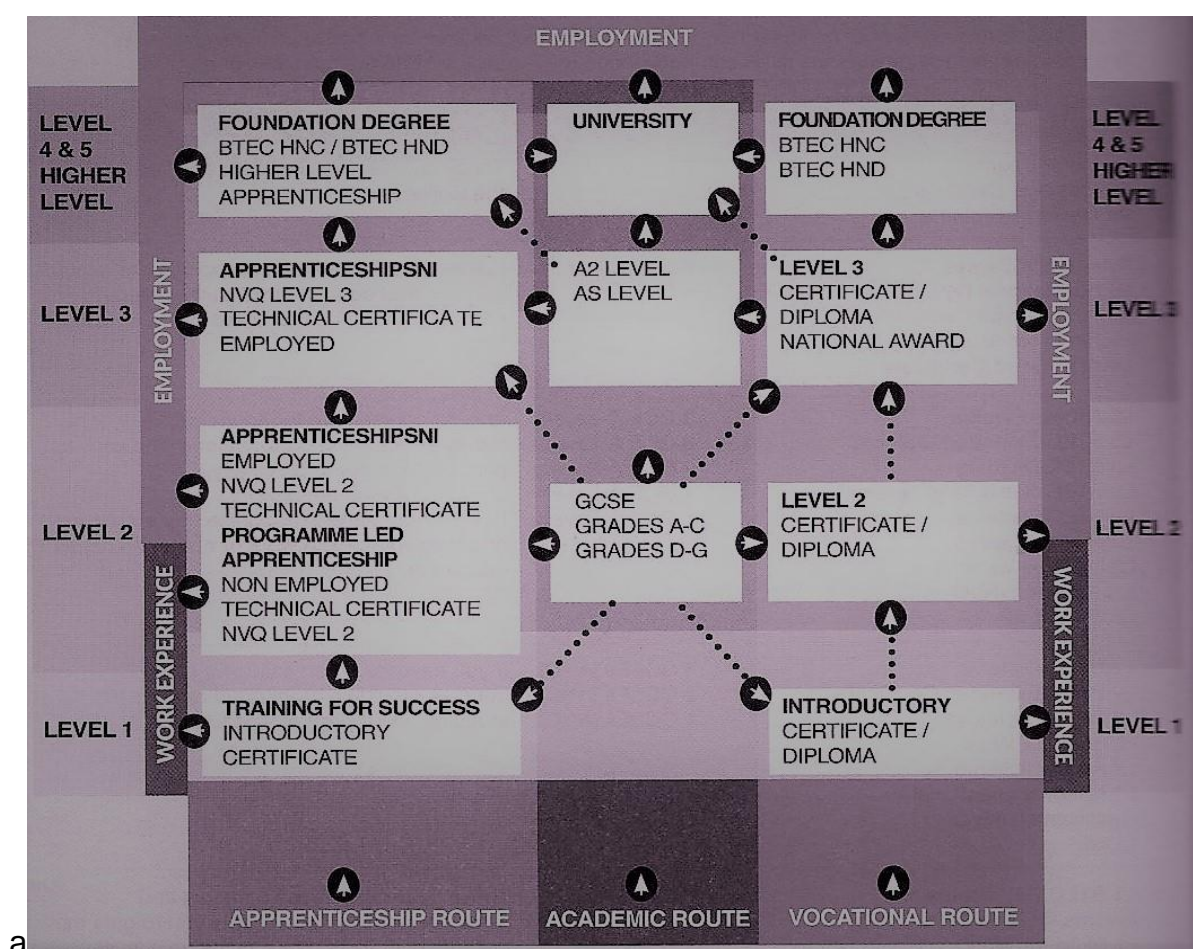
The current curriculum offer at in FE at Level 2 consists of two main routes:

1. Traineeships and apprenticeships: trainees are defined as having non-employed status; apprentices have employed status. The directed training (time spent in college) is common to both and leads to NVQ Level 2 and a technical certificate appropriate to the particular occupational area. Trainees receive their work-related training through work placement or industry-relevant projects; apprentices must be employed for a minimum of 21 hours per week to receive their work-based training.
2. The Professional and Technical route which consists of Level 2 Certificates/Diplomas such as BTEC, OCR, CACHE, which can be offered as to 2, 3 or 4 GCSE- equivalents in terms of size and when combined with Essential Skills, can be tailored to individual students'



The new NI Traineeship Programme which is being phased in from September 2020 will provide a broad-based, innovative system which aims to provide a solid foundation to help young people progress to employment or further learning. Entrants to the new Level 2 traineeship will be expected to have a full level 1, which is defined as 4 GCSEs at grades A-G, including English and Mathematics. Those young people who have not yet achieved the full Level 1 will have the opportunity to access programmes at entry level and level 1, in order to develop the skills to progress to the next level. Successful completion of the new Level 2 training programme, will enable students to progress via the employed route to Apprenticeships, or access pathways to Level 3 Further Education qualifications, such as BTEC National Diplomas.

The progression pathways currently available through the FE Sector are illustrated below, along with the traditional academic route, for comparison.



### 3.4 Level 3

There were 20,684 final year Level 3 enrolments in the FE sector in 2017/18, with an achievement rate of 89.3% (Annexe 1). This compares to 98.3% of Year 14 pupils in post-primary schools who achieved 2 or more A levels grades A\*-E (including equivalents), however, it is noted that 4.6% of the cohort were excluded from the SAER<sup>4</sup> return. Pupils in

<sup>4</sup>DE Statistical Bulletin 8/2018

sixth form, complete 3 or 4 GCE A level-equivalent qualifications but DE statistics reflect the performance rates of pupils who sit exams at the end of Year 14. There are also agreed circumstances in which individual pupils can be excluded from the statistics<sup>5</sup>.

The FE achievement rate is the percentage of students who achieve their qualification out of the number who complete their final year. There are no exclusions from the FE statistics. In the non-grammar sector the achievement rate was 96.4%, in 2017/18, with 7.8% of exam entrants excluded from the statistics.

Level 3 programmes are based on professional and technical qualifications which are equivalent to 2 or 3 GCE A Levels.

The programme of study at Level 3 may also include:

- Work ready skills including personal development;
- Essential Skills in Communication, Application of Number and ICT

Although the Professional and Technical Qualifications gained by FE students are the outcomes measured in terms of system performance it is the overall quality of the learning experience gained through project based learning and the development of these work ready skills, blended with the technical skills required for each of the industry sectors, which prepares them for future employment opportunities identified by the Skills Barometer.

### 3.5 Historical Comparison of FE Enrolments

The table below contains the number of regulated enrolments to FE colleges from Entry and Level 1 Level through to Level 4 and above, in the five years up to 2017/18. Almost 80% of full-time enrolments are in the 16-19 age group.

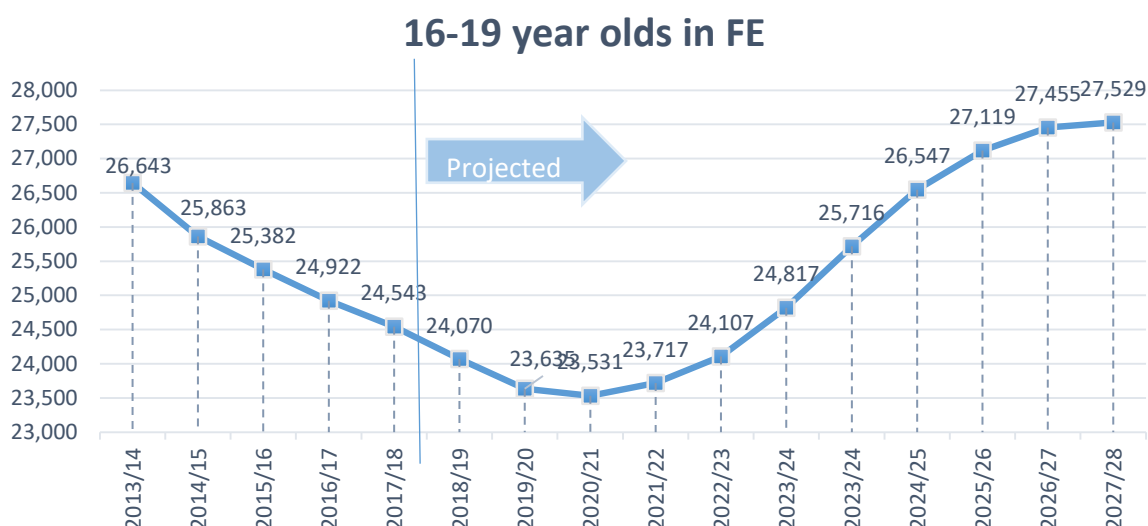
FE College	Level of Study	Academic Year				
		2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
FE Sector Total	Entry & Level 1	31,597	30,053	27,806	27,758	26,178
	Level 2	65,252	64,806	57,408	58,435	59,930
	Level 3	32,550	33,207	32,104	31,261	31,098
	Level 4 & above	11,576	11,722	11,631	11,175	11,848
	Unknown	803	349	325	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>141,778</b>	<b>140,137</b>	<b>129,274</b>	<b>128,629</b>	<b>129,054</b>

**Source: DfE Consolidated Data Return (CDR)**

FE enrolments have shown an overall decline across the 5-year period up until 2017/18. Level 2 enrolments have shown a slight uplift in the last two years whilst Entry and Level 1 enrolments have continued to fall. Students enrolled at Level 2 or below represented 67% of regulated enrolments in the FE sector, in 2017/18.

<sup>5</sup>An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Examination Practice and Policy in Post-primary schools (ETI 2017)  
February 2020

Level 3 enrolments in FE have declined by 4.5% in the period up to 2017/18, although it should be noted that the number of pupils in Year 13 and Year 14 in schools has dropped from 30,318 to 28,483 in the same period (6.0%).



Projected figures from 2018/19 show that these numbers might be expected to further drop until 2021/22, after which the number of 16-19 year olds enrolled in FE colleges is predicted to rise until 2027. These projections are based on the actual participation rate of 16-19 year olds in 2017/18 (26.3%) multiplied by the NISRA Northern Ireland population projections for this age group.

### 3.6 Essential Skills

Essential Skills qualifications are important in helping students to develop the ability to read, write, speak, listen, solve problems and apply numerical skills and technology, at a level which is necessary to progress in their education, the workplace and society in general. Applicants admitted to a full-time further education programme of study without a Grade C or higher in English Language or Mathematics, are required to take Essential Skills in Literacy and Numeracy. Those who have achieved a Grade D will also have the opportunity to repeat GCSE English Language and/or Mathematics.

There were 19,120 enrolments of students aged 16-19 on Essential Skills Literacy and Numeracy courses at FE Colleges, in the three years from 2015/16 to 2017/18, at a cost of £8.8m to the sector. In 2017/18, more than half (55%) of enrolments in the 16-19 age group were at Entry and Level 1. If Essential Skills was provided to pupils at KS4 it could ease progression routes and remove barriers for many pupils leaving school after year 12.

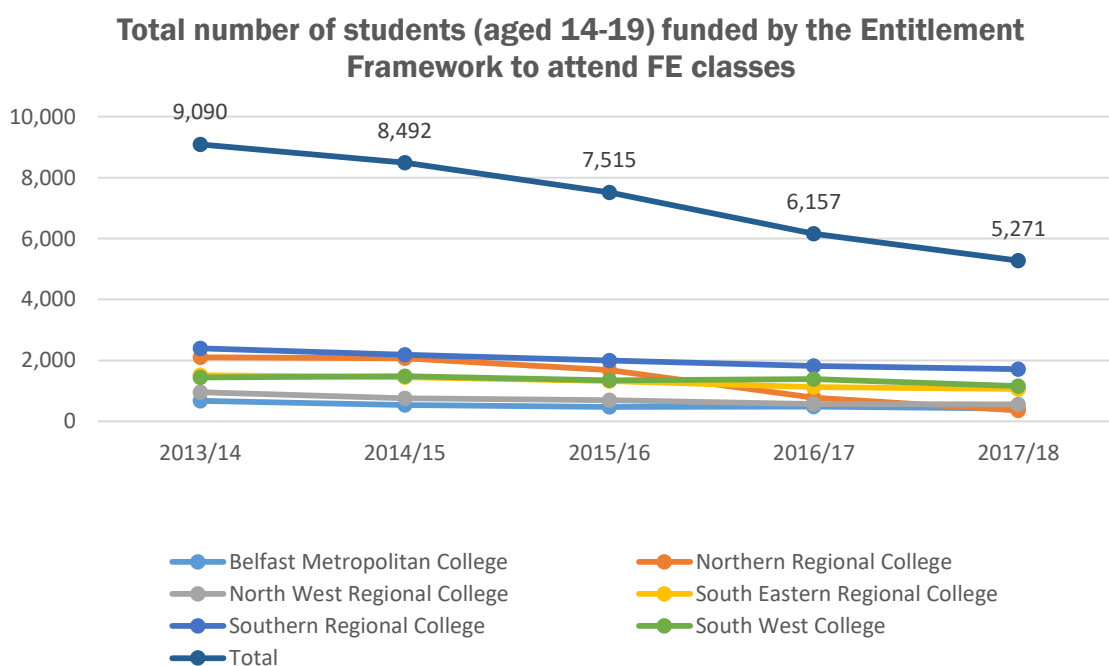
FE students continue to develop their literacy skills throughout their time in college through the written assessment and presentations required for coursework units and the work ready skills of communication and working with others, which are embedded across all programmes of study. Some Level 3 courses such as Engineering will also have specialist Mathematics units embedded into the qualification which must be successfully completed in order to gain the full award.

#### 4. ENTITLEMENT FRAMEWORK COLLABORATION WITH SCHOOLS

The Education (NI) Order 2006 (Articles 18-22) enabled DE to introduce the Entitlement Framework (EF) which encouraged schools to move towards a more applied curriculum in order to address some of the issues of economic relevance and educational disadvantage. The EF aimed to provide young people in 14-19 education with greater choice and flexibility in the qualifications offered. Under Entitlement Framework legislation, schools are required to provide all pupils with access to a minimum of 21 courses at Key Stage 4 (KS4) and a minimum of 21 courses at post-16, with the caveat that at least one-third of the courses must be general qualifications and at least one-third applied qualifications. The Entitlement Framework also aimed to build capacity in terms of whole school and area based planning, to ensure effective use of resources within local area partnerships and avoid duplication in schools and FE Colleges. To help achieve this goal, schools were funded to access professional and technical GCSE and GCE-equivalent qualifications at 14-19, through collaboration with the regional FE Colleges.

Area Learning Communities (ALCs) were established to facilitate effective long term planning of the EF curriculum. FE colleges have been active participants in ALCs, delivering a pre-vocational sampling experience and improved outcomes at KS4, as well as developing applied, work-related provision at post 16, helping sixth formers to progress to higher education at university or HE in FE. The average achievement rates for FE Schools Partnership programmes over the five year period up until 2016/17 were: 92% at KS4; 99% at post 16. (Source: FE Schools Collaboration Managers Working Group).

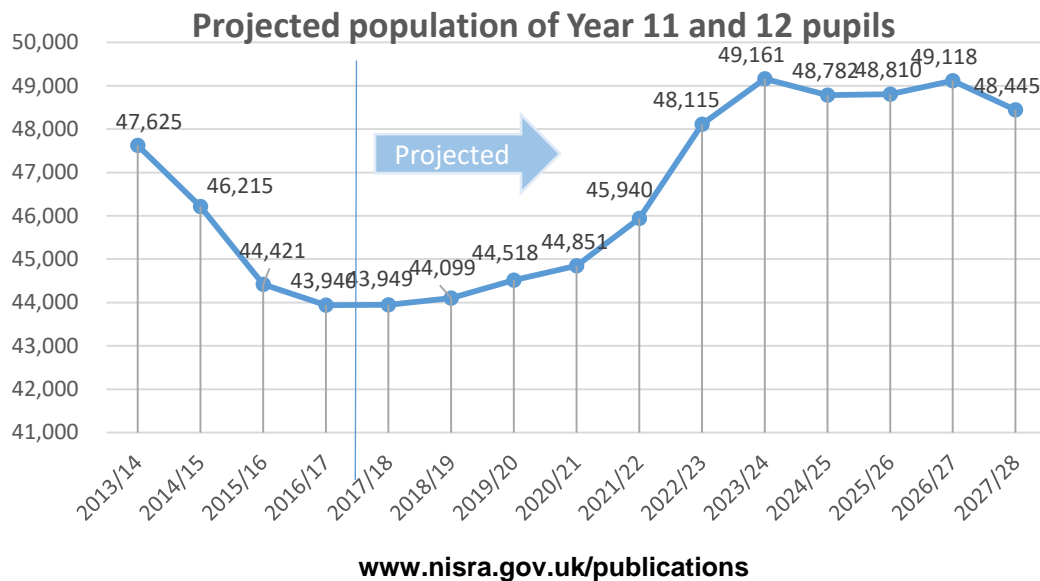
EF Funding for schools to cover the cost of collaboration with FE has been reduced in recent years and the number of school pupils attending colleges for professional and technical provision under the Entitlement Framework has declined by 42% between 2013/14 and 2017/18 (compared to a 6% decline in sixth form enrolments across the same period).<sup>6</sup>



**Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)**

February 2020

There are many examples of schools working together in ALCs, in collaboration with colleges, maximising efficiency in terms of value for money and increasing choices available to learners but ALC engagement with FE colleges has not been consistent across NI. The 43% cut in EF funding in 2017 caused many schools to cease collaboration with FE due to financial pressure. The long-term situation in regard to resourcing school-to-college collaboration remains uncertain and schools, ALCs and FE colleges, remain highly concerned about the impact further reduction in funding may have on the good relationships which have been built up across the two sectors and on the many positive benefits which collaboration brings to young people at Key Stage 4, particularly those who are educationally or socially disadvantaged.



At the meeting in the Titanic Quarter (BMC), in January 2018, in preparation for the Education Skills and Employability Steering Group, concerns were raised by FE leaders about duplication of provision across the two sectors. Due to funding pressures, demographic changes in the 16/17 age group and the drive towards sustainable sixth forms, many schools have moved towards delivery of professional and technical provision in-house (or through school to school collaboration) rather than through collaboration with colleges.

Data provided by CCEA has confirmed that candidate registrations for Occupational Studies (OS) have increased from 14,485 to 17,590 between 2014 and 2019, a rise of 21%. The percentage of the OS programme taught in schools has gone up by 58% in this period, whilst delivery off-site (including FE) has declined by 19%. Further analysis of the registration and delivery trends for individual OS units is required, in order to assess the impact on the number of KS4 pupils who get to experience the more technical units such as Plumbing, Electrical, Brickwork, Motor Vehicle and Sheet Metal Engineering in an industry-standard setting and how this may influence future progression to training and apprenticeships.

FE has previously highlighted the number of A Level-equivalent Professional and Technical courses delivered by schools (Position Paper on Future College-School Collaboration 2016) which are more appropriate to the specialist resources and staffing expertise of colleges. School-based delivery of large size Professional and Technical qualifications has also become a major issue as this duplicates full-time provision in FE. The Northern Ireland Entitlement Framework qualification approval number file (NIEFQAN) contains the list of

applied and general qualifications approved for delivery by schools. Analysis of the 2019/20 NIEFQAN<sup>6</sup> file reveals there are 31 Professional and Technical qualifications approved which are Diplomas and Extended Diplomas approved list for schools to offer to pupils (Annexe 2). These qualifications are traditionally expected to be delivered in a Further Education setting where students are taught in state of the art facilities, by staff with appropriately qualified staff with the qualifications and professional expertise in the

The regulation of professional and technical provision requiring specialist industry standard resources and appropriately qualified staff may need to be reviewed in Northern Ireland. Access to verified data from the Entitlement Framework Audit Data for 2018/19 would be required in order to ascertain the true level of duplication across the two sectors. This could help inform a future 14-19 strategy.

The success of EF collaboration with schools at KS4 has led to more pupils achieving the entry requirements to sixth form, however, it is clear that qualifications such as Occupational Studies and BTEC Level 2 are more appropriate for progression to FE and training as opposed to A Levels. Whilst acknowledging the pressures on schools to achieve sustainable numbers in sixth form, the FE principals' view is that professional and technical education should be available to 14 -19 year olds in a strategic fashion, and that FE has a crucial role to play in this phase of education. At 14-16, if opportunities for sampling professional and technical provision through Occupational Studies collaboration with regional colleges continues to decline consideration should be given to piloting pre-apprenticeship provision for 14/15 year olds, similar to the models currently being tried in Scotland and Wales.

---

<sup>6</sup> NIEFQAN 2019/20



## 5. COMPULSORY EDUCATION

The Department of Education (DE) is responsible for compulsory education from Key Stage 1 (KS1) to KS4. Children must attend school until 30<sup>th</sup> June of the school year in which their 16th birthday falls (1<sup>st</sup> September to 31<sup>st</sup> August). There is a common curriculum, which is based on development of wider skills up until Key Stage 3 but at Key Stage 4 schools become much more focussed on achievement of qualifications. Compulsory school attendance ends at age 16 and there is currently no Sixth Form Policy for schools in Northern Ireland.

### 5.1 KS4

Schools provide a range of GCSE-equivalent qualifications as part of the revised curriculum at Key Stage 4. Entitlement Framework legislation requires each school to offer a minimum of 21 subjects: one third must be designated as applied; one third general. DE in consultation with CCEA determine which qualifications are approved for delivery and these are listed in the NIEFQAN file.

Annexe 3 contains performance statistics for pupils completing year 12 in post primary schools in 2017/18. The Key Performance measure for schools is the percentage of pupils achieving 5 GCSE grades A\*-C including English & mathematics (71.8% in 2017/18)<sup>7</sup>. This figure has been improving. Since this performance indicator was introduced in 2008/09, the rate of increase in achieving this benchmark has been greater in the non-grammar sector but it should be noted that statistics for schools at KS4 include outcomes from a range of applied non-GCSE qualifications which are designated as GCSE-equivalents (EF Audit data 2017/18). Consideration should also be given to the high number of pupils achieving 5 GCSEs grades A-G (98%), in the non-grammar sector and the educational journey taken by pupils to reach this level, however, the progression routes taken by this subset of the cohort after completion of year 12 requires further investigation.

Comparison of the entry profiles of learners progressing to sixth form and those who progress to level 3 provision in FE and training may be required, in order to evaluate the currency and effectiveness of non-GCSE qualifications and their appropriateness for progression to each particular pathway. The Education Authority has acknowledged the existence of unofficial 'transition year' arrangements in Sixth Form and ETI have reported on this in a recent post-primary inspection. OECD<sup>8</sup> have highlighted the negative consequences of grade repetition, with a recycling of students undertaking multiple courses without moving up the ladder.

The vast range of GCSE-equivalent qualifications offered (as evidenced by the NIEFQAN file) indicates how increasingly complex the situation has become in 14-19 education and further scrutiny is required to ascertain the appropriateness of certain non-GCSE qualifications delivered in schools and how they impact on progression opportunities. What may be more useful in future could be an additional measure which focuses on destinations after KS4, in order to help identify and address potential barriers to progression across all the available pathways

The NI School Census figures in the table, below show that whilst less than 50% of non-grammar pupils stay on at school into Year 13 (49.5% of the 2017/18 cohort) only three-

<sup>7</sup> Statistical Bulletin 8/2018

<sup>8</sup> OECD (2012) Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools  
February 2020

quarters stay on until Year 14 (74.2% in 2018/19). This compares with an 86.9% retention from Year 13 to 14 for the same cohort in the grammar sector.

<b>Northern Ireland level - Staying on rates - 2012/13 - 2018/19</b>						
	<b>NI</b>		<b>Non grammar</b>		<b>Grammar</b>	
<b>Year</b>	<b>% pupils staying on to Y13</b>	<b>% pupils staying on to Y14</b>	<b>% pupils staying on to Y13</b>	<b>% pupils staying on to Y14</b>	<b>% pupils staying on to Y13</b>	<b>% pupils staying on to Y14</b>
2012/13	64.0	83.6	47.8	74.2	89.4	90.6
2013/14	62.9	81.0	46.9	70.1	89.1	89.8
2014/15	63.5	82.9	47.7	75.5	88.6	89.0
2015/16	64.0	83.0	48.2	75.8	88.6	88.8
2016/17	64.2	81.3	48.4	75.2	86.3	87.2
2017/18	64.7	82.0	49.5	74.2	85.3	88.0
2018/19	64.2	81.4	48.7	74.2	84.7	86.9
Source: NI school census						

Although the improvement in the 5 GCSE A\*-C outcomes may have increased the progression of pupils from year 12 into sixth form, the figures relating to those staying on to Year 14 indicate that many pupils may be making the wrong choices at post 16. Obtaining reliable evidence to support this is hampered by the lack of data on qualifications gained and subsequent progression of each cohort of school leavers at ages 16, 17, 18 and 19. It is very important, however, that clear impartial careers advice about the full range of progression routes available, including professional and technical pathways, should be available to all young people at the key transition points of ages 14 and 16. This should include visits and sampling experiences with FE colleges and other providers.

## 5.2 Post 16

School sixth forms in Northern Ireland have traditionally offered A Level provision with the majority of pupils undertaking 3 or 4 subjects in Sixth Form. Under Entitlement Framework legislation each school with a sixth form must offer a minimum of 21 subjects: one third must be designated as applied; one third general. (The list of approved sixth form qualifications is also contained in the NIEFQAN file).

Information about schools' performance is reported in the Summary of Annual Examination Results (SAER) which is published on the DE website. The SAER collates summary school level examinations data and validates it with schools. Key statistics on the performance of pupils in the final year of A-level equivalent courses in 2017/18 are listed below:

- 70.2% of year 14 pupils achieved 3 or more A levels (including equivalents) at grades A\*-C. This compares with 69.0% in 2016/17.
- 90.24% of year 14 pupils achieved 2 or more A levels (including equivalents) at grades A\*-C. This is the first year this data has been collected.
- 98.3% of year 14 pupils achieved 2 or more A levels (including equivalents) at grades A\*-E. This is a decrease on the 2016/17 figure (98.7%).



- 99.7% of year 14 pupils achieved 1 or more A levels (including equivalents) at grades A\*-E (see Table 5). There was a small difference in grammar and non-grammar performance in this indicator. 99.4% of non-grammar school pupils achieved this standard compared with 99.9% of grammar school pupils.

It should be noted that SAER statistics do not include all of the pupils who sit exams at the end of each year. In 2017/18, 7.8% of the Year 14 cohort were ineligible for inclusion in these statistics. (In August 2017, ETI published a report on the practice of excluding pupils from performance statistics: “An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Examination Entry and Practice and Policy in Post Primary Schools”).

## 6. CAREERS

Colleges have raised issues about accessing schools to provide careers information and the lack of awareness amongst pupils (and parents) of the professional and technical pathways provided by FE.

Further investigation of the factors influencing subject choices made by pupils at the key transition points of age 14 and age 16, is required. In 2015, in their annual Education and Skills Survey, the CBI listed a number of benchmarks for good careers advice which included the following:

***“Encounters with further and higher education: all pupils should understand the full range of learning opportunities available to them, including both academic and vocational routes.”***

In order to help inform the ‘Innovation Lab’ on 14-19 education and training, which took place in August 2018, the Department of Education commissioned a consultation with parents and young people, about their experiences of careers education. The consultation exercise, carried out by Parenting NI, consisted of focus groups with parents and with young people, one to one interviews and an on-line survey of parents and young people. The consultation was focussed mainly on the support young people received at the key transition stages at age 14 and age 16. At the Year 10 to Year 11 transition point (age 14) the report stated that parents and young people were not particularly happy with their GCSE choices and found the support provided to be unhelpful. In regards to enabling young people and parents to make informed choices at post 16, the following finding was reported:

***“Generally parents, young people and online respondents were unhappy with the level of support offered to them at this stage and were not aware of the various pathways that young people could take after completing their GCSE’s.”***

Careers education instruction and guidance (CEIAG) is cited by stakeholders as a critical component of 14-19 education and training. The importance of ensuring learners are aware of all options including pathways to further education, training and Higher Education in FE has been highlighted.

The Skills Barometer (2019)<sup>9</sup> highlights the issue of young people making career decisions related to tertiary level education and their lack of knowledge of the economic benefits of each pathway. The report stresses the importance of developing higher level professional and technical skills, from an economic point of view: *“In most other OECD countries a much higher proportion of students enrol on these type of courses compared to NI, and they are valued by firms and students as highly as university qualifications.”* Changing perceptions amongst parents, teachers and students (in NI and GB) that professional and technical qualifications have inferior status to university degrees is a major challenge to be overcome, if mid-level skills shortages are to be addressed for the developing economy.

## 7. AREA PLANNING

Area Planning is the process by which the Department of Education, the Education Authority and the managing agents for each of the schools’ sectors have been working towards improving efficiency and effectiveness in the education system by creating a network of sustainable schools. The Bain Report<sup>10</sup>, in 2006, stated that due to falling pupil numbers and the number of education sectors involved, there were too many schools in Northern Ireland. It was recommended that in order to be sustainable, post-primary schools should have a minimum of 500 pupils in years 8 to 12; for schools with sixth forms, a minimum of 100 enrolments at post 16 was recommended. Area planning statistics for 2017/18, published by DE, show that 38.7% of post primary schools fail to reach the year 8 to 12 threshold, whilst 28.2% remain below the post 16 target<sup>11</sup>.

FE colleges have had limited input to area planning as much of the focus to date has been about addressing the situation in primary schools, whereas transition at the age of 16 is more relevant to the FE sector. In the post-primary context, discussions have focused on school sustainability when the focus needs to shift towards a shared curriculum offer for each local area, which is in the best interests of pupils and aligned to the Bain recommendations and the original aims of Entitlement Framework legislation.

The failure to address the structure of education in Northern Ireland has been identified as one of the factors which has led to increased strain on the education budget in recent years. In 2019, the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (NIAC)<sup>12</sup> report on education funding in Northern Ireland, stated that:

*“During our inquiry we frequently heard that there were too many schools in Northern Ireland and that this led to duplication of provision and an inefficient use of resources.”*

The Permanent Secretary of the Department of Education, Derek Baker, reporting to the NIAC review of education funding, stated that:

*“Were we starting afresh with a blank page, we would not have the estate that we currently have for schools. We have too many small schools - we probably have too many small primary schools, and probably too many small sixth forms.”*

---

<sup>9</sup> Northern Ireland Skills Barometer Summary Report 2019

<sup>10</sup> Independent Strategic Review of Education (Bain 2006)

<sup>11</sup> DE Area Planning Statistics

<sup>12</sup> Education funding in Northern Ireland (House of Commons NI Affairs Committee 2019)

New sixth forms continue to be established in schools which were previously approved as providers of 11 to 16 education only. In 2006, it was reported by Colleges NI, that 74% of secondary schools had sixth forms; 25% of which were below the sustainability threshold of 100 enrolments. DE Area Planning Statistics for 2018/19 show that 82% of post primary schools now have sixth forms, of which 25% are below the sustainability threshold. (It should be noted that, due to mergers and closures, the total number of post-primary schools has declined from 201 to 196 in the same period).

The growth in sixth form provision in schools appears to have been incentivised by enhanced funding for post 16 provision, the drive for schools to meet sustainability targets and the statutory obligation to deliver the Entitlement Framework. This has had unintended consequences for recruitment by Further Education Colleges. The demographic decrease in the 16-19 age group, has also exacerbated the negative impact on numbers progressing to FE and training at the age of 16, which could impact on the future skills pipeline.

Since the Entitlement Framework was introduced in 2008, the percentage of pupils aged 16 staying on at school to sixth form, has increased from 52.70% (2008/09) to 63.00% (2018/19).

<b><u>DE Statistics:</u></b>	<b>2008/9</b>	<b>2018/19</b>
Pupils in 6 <sup>th</sup> form	27,113	28,072
NI 16-17 population est.	51,460	44,560
% staying on to 6th form	52.70%	63.00%

Looking back to when the Vocational Enhancement Programme (VEP) began in 2003/04, the percentage of pupils aged 16/17 staying in school for sixth form provision was 45.6%.

As new sixth forms have become established and existing post 16 provision has developed in schools to meet Entitlement Framework targets, competition for recruitment at post 16 has also increased between schools. This is counter to one of the original aims of the Entitlement Framework which sought to:

*“Build capacity in terms of whole school and area based planning, ensure effective use of resources within a local area partnership/community and avoid duplication in schools and FE Colleges<sup>13</sup>.”*

The NICA report from July 2019, stated that the funding pressures on schools are exacerbated by the complex structure of the education system in NI, which has meant that money is not being spent in the most efficient way. Within the schools' system there are five competing sectors, which despite the best efforts of Area Learning Communities to encourage collaboration under the Entitlement Framework, still leads to considerable duplication of provision, lack of co-ordination and a system which is unsustainable in the longer term.

---

<sup>13</sup> Source: DE Circular 2008/1

Sir Robert Salisbury, Chair of the 2013 review of the Common Funding Formula for schools, stated to the NIPA that:

*“We felt that there was clearly enough money in the system [ ... ] but because of the nature of the schools in Northern Ireland and the historic structure, the money is spread too thinly.”*

It is vitally important that any future DE/DfE 14-19 strategy sets out a clearly differentiated role for both schools and colleges, which is based on a shared understanding of roles, delivered through meaningful partnership and embedded within a system of accountability and scrutiny.

FE Colleges support the inclusion of appropriate professional and technical qualifications as part of the statutory curriculum entitlement at KS4 and post 16 and remain committed to providing solutions in the most effective and efficient manner, minimising the duplication of provision delivered across sectors and contributing to a curriculum offer that is in the best interests of all young people in 14-19 education, rather than the interests of individual institutions.

## 8. DUPLICATION

The Northern Ireland Entitlement Framework Qualification Approval file (NIEFQAN) lists all the qualifications which have been approved for delivery in schools at 14-19. A summary analysis of the NIEFQAN file for 2019/20, in Annexe 2, shows the number of Applied and General GCSE and GCE-equivalent qualifications which are approved for funding and contribute towards Entitlement Framework targets. This includes 27 double award and 4 treble award qualifications are more appropriate for delivery in FE, due to the state of the art facilities, equipment and resources, including professionally qualified staff with industry experience. It could also be argued that providing pupils with the option to take one larger size qualification in sixth form, runs counter to the aim of the Entitlement Framework, which is to offer a combination of individual applied and general subjects, in order to keep a range of pathways open to pupils.

Duplication of provision which is more appropriate to delivery in an FE setting is also evident in the number of professional and technical single A Level-equivalent courses delivered by schools, such as, Engineering, Construction, Health & Social Care, etc. How these single award professional and technical qualifications are combined with other A Level choices can have negative implications for the progression opportunities available to young people, in terms of pathways to higher education and employment. The combinations of units delivered within professional and technical qualifications will have a bearing on whether higher education institutions will accept pupils onto degree courses, as well as restricting the opportunity for development of technical skills relevant to industry. Where schools limit qualifications based on what staff are qualified to deliver (or the physical resources and facilities available to the school) they may be creating barriers to future progression). Data provided from the 2017/18 Entitlement Framework Audit indicated that 31% of enrolments on applied courses delivered by schools in sixth form, were for pupils following Professional and Technical qualifications (9,410 enrolments). There were also 1,289 enrolments (4.2%) on Professional and Technical qualifications equivalent to two or more A-Levels, which are more traditionally associated with the role of FE colleges. (The 14-19 project team has requested

updated reports from the 2018/19 EF Audit Database in order to get an accurate picture of the current level of duplication across the two sectors).

The processes used by Awarding Organisations for endorsement of teaching centres fails to identify the lack of specialist industry standard facilities and resources in schools, teaching staff with inappropriate qualifications and industry experience, and programme content based on selection of optional units which are easy to resource and deliver, rather than matched to the skills needs of industry and requirements for progression to higher education institutions.

The Department of Education has no Sixth Form Policy. Although almost all schools are now compliant with the Entitlement Framework targets at KS4 and post 16, the range and type of qualifications provided in schools varies greatly and there are also inconsistencies in the grade profiles required to enter sixth forms. There is no agreed minimum standard in relation to GCSE English and Mathematics grades on entry and the situation in regard to acceptability of Essential Skills is complex and requires clarification. The appropriateness of non-GCSE qualifications for progression to A Level study in sixth form (e.g. CCEA Occupational Studies, Princes' Trust, Certificate of Personal Effectiveness) needs to be reviewed.

Duplication of educational provision is not simply an issue for schools and FE colleges but as referred to in the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (NIAC) report on Education funding, is also a major concern across the schools' sector. One of the conclusions of the NIAC report on education funding is that there is widespread agreement that "*education in Northern Ireland does not make the best use of resources.*" Furthermore, the NIAC goes on to recommend that the schools' estate should be consolidated in order to concentrate resources in fewer schools.

In order to address duplication and make more efficient use of available resources in each local area, it is necessary to review all aspects of delivery of education in schools, FE Colleges, CAFRE and the community sector, to create an environment where educational providers complement rather than compete with each other, to ensure young people and their parents receive clear, impartial information about all the progression pathways available.

## 9. KEY CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Engagement with all of the relevant stakeholders in the education and training system in Northern Ireland, is vitally important in the process of identifying constructive, creative and innovative solutions to the key challenges at 14-19, many of which have been identified in this position paper. The Transition of Young People into Careers (14-19) Project Team facilitated a workshop in Adelaide House, on 14 November 2019, in order to consult with key personnel from the Further Education sector. A short summary of the key issues was circulated to participants prior to the meeting and all of the responses collated from this event, have been included in Annex 4.

The main recommendations which have emerged from this consultation process and the research evidence contained in this paper, which could help inform the development of a joint DfE/DE 14-19 strategy are summarised below:

1. Seek creative solutions which allow for innovative restructuring of the education system which provide clarity of the roles of providers of 14-19 education, including schools, FE Colleges, Training Organisations and other providers, that compliment rather than compete with one and other and improve access to seamless progression pathways, which can be accessed by each pupil at the time and place which is most appropriate to the needs of each individual.
2. Review the funding mechanisms across the education and training system in order to maximise the efficient use of public finances whilst protecting the interests of young people against the unintended consequences of financial pressures, sustainability issues and changing demographics.
3. Seek to develop a sustainable funding model for Entitlement Framework collaboration in order to encourage schools and FE Colleges to maintain the strong collaborative links which have been established over the last decade and seek to develop efficient models for shared curriculum planning across Area Learning Communities. The potential for early engagement with regional colleges for young people at KS4, to ease progression to the new traineeships at year 11 and 12, should be explored.
4. Investigate and review the quality of careers advice and guidance to young people in compulsory education and seek to ensure that all pupils (and their parents) receive clear, timely, impartial information about all the pathways available to them, ensuring the principles of parity of esteem across all sectors, close alignment with the needs of employers and the identification and elimination of potential barriers to progression after leaving school ,or completing further or higher education.
5. Review the range and quality of qualifications offered in schools, colleges and other providers in order to strengthen and safeguard the existing principles for approval of

qualifications, with due regard to appropriate setting for delivery, quality of resources and guidance regarding entry requirements

6. Work with all local stakeholders to ensure that qualifications which have been approved are maintained and reviewed on a regular basis in order to ensure that all Awarding Organisations conform to published guidance in relation to centre approval, so that curriculum planning decisions are made in the best interests of all our young people.

As both sectors work towards the longer term aim of an agreed 14-19 strategy a number of issues of immediate concern to the Further Education sector have been raised by College Principals, which it is hoped could be addressed in the more immediate future including:

- There was a wish to see the Department of Education take greater control of what schools deliver, aligned to the Programme for Government and the emerging Skills Strategy
- There is an urgent need to clarify the roles of FE Colleges and schools at post 16, in particular that of sixth forms in the non-selective sector. There is a need for a DE Sixth Form policy which recognises and complements the role of the Further Education colleges, reducing competition and duplication and increasing efficiency.
- There is a need to rationalise and reduce the plethora of qualifications delivered across all sectors of the education system
- There is a need for clear and simple information for young people and parents about the available pathways in 14-19 education and training. It is suggested that there is a need for immediate access to all Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 pupils for careers talks from Further Education Colleges.
- The reduction in Entitlement Framework funding has caused a decline in collaboration with colleges. There is a strong view that Entitlement Framework funding should be managed within FE to encourage the correct engagement at KS4 aligned to youth training and apprenticeship policies.
- Literacy and Numeracy should be a priority for schools. It was suggested that if schools delivered Essential Skills at Levels 1 and 2 it would ease progression routes and remove barriers for many pupils leaving school after year 12.

Annexe 5 contains a more detailed collation of all of the issues for policy consideration from the Further Education perspective, based on the research and review of literature relevant to this position paper.

**ANNEXE 1 – FE Performance Statistics by level of study 2017/18**

FE College	Level of Study	Final Year Enrolments	Final Year Completers	Retention Rate	Achievements	Achievement Rate	Success Rate
<b>Belfast Metropolitan College</b>	Entry & Level 1	4,976	4,279	86.0%	3,737	87.3%	75.1%
	Level 2	10,062	9,098	90.4%	8,038	88.3%	79.9%
	Level 3	5,455	4,863	89.1%	4,067	83.6%	74.6%
	Level 4 & above	1753	1700	97.0%	1615	95.0%	92.1%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>22,246</b>	<b>19,940</b>	<b>89.6%</b>	<b>17,457</b>	<b>87.5%</b>	<b>78.5%</b>
<b>Northern Regional College</b>	Entry & Level 1	4223	3476	82.3%	2692	77.4%	63.7%
	Level 2	7,298	6,243	85.5%	4,852	77.7%	66.5%
	Level 3	2,861	2,598	90.8%	2,312	89.0%	80.8%
	Level 4 & above	721	663	92.0%	587	88.5%	81.4%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>15,103</b>	<b>12,980</b>	<b>85.9%</b>	<b>10,443</b>	<b>80.5%</b>	<b>69.1%</b>
<b>North West Regional College</b>	Entry & Level 1	2139	1845	86.3%	1471	79.7%	68.8%
	Level 2	4,846	4,397	90.7%	3,553	80.8%	73.3%
	Level 3	3,692	3,254	88.1%	2,937	90.3%	79.6%
	Level 4 & above	843	796	94.4%	726	91.2%	86.1%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>11,520</b>	<b>10,292</b>	<b>89.3%</b>	<b>8,687</b>	<b>84.4%</b>	<b>75.4%</b>
<b>South Eastern Regional College</b>	Entry & Level 1	4413	3843	87.1%	3212	83.6%	72.8%
	Level 2	13,153	12,250	93.1%	10,901	89.0%	82.9%
	Level 3	3,852	3,513	91.2%	3,307	94.1%	85.9%
	Level 4 & above	810	776	95.8%	731	94.2%	90.2%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>22,228</b>	<b>20,382</b>	<b>91.7%</b>	<b>18,151</b>	<b>89.1%</b>	<b>81.7%</b>
<b>Southern Regional College</b>	Entry & Level 1	4,037	3,621	89.7%	2,700	74.6%	66.9%
	Level 2	13,111	12,155	92.7%	10,885	89.6%	83.0%
	Level 3	3,670	3,389	92.3%	3,127	92.3%	85.2%
	Level 4 & above	1951	1869	95.8%	1198	64.1%	61.4%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>22,769</b>	<b>21,034</b>	<b>92.4%</b>	<b>17,910</b>	<b>85.1%</b>	<b>78.7%</b>
<b>South West College</b>	Entry & Level 1	4,248	3,825	90.0%	2,961	77.4%	69.7%
	Level 2	5,157	4,711	91.4%	3,703	78.6%	71.8%
	Level 3	3,262	3,017	92.5%	2,672	88.6%	81.9%
	Level 4 & above	942	880	93.4%	786	89.3%	83.4%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>13,609</b>	<b>12,433</b>	<b>91.4%</b>	<b>10,122</b>	<b>81.4%</b>	<b>74.4%</b>
<b>FE Sector Total</b>	<b>Entry &amp; Level 1</b>	<b>24,036</b>	<b>20,889</b>	<b>86.9%</b>	<b>16,773</b>	<b>80.3%</b>	<b>69.8%</b>
	<b>Level 2</b>	<b>53,627</b>	<b>48,854</b>	<b>91.1%</b>	<b>41,932</b>	<b>85.8%</b>	<b>78.2%</b>
	<b>Level 3</b>	<b>22,792</b>	<b>20,634</b>	<b>90.5%</b>	<b>18,422</b>	<b>89.3%</b>	<b>80.8%</b>
	<b>Level 4 &amp; above</b>	<b>7,020</b>	<b>6,684</b>	<b>95.2%</b>	<b>5,643</b>	<b>84.4%</b>	<b>80.4%</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>107,475</b>	<b>97,061</b>	<b>90.3%</b>	<b>82,770</b>	<b>85.3%</b>	<b>77.0%</b>

Source: Consolidated Data Return (CDR)



## ANNEXE 2: NIEFQAN SUMMARY 2019/20

The NIEFQAN file contains the details of all qualifications which have been approved by DE for contributing to the Entitlement Framework targets and which are eligible for schools to draw down funding to support collaboration with FE Colleges. The Department of Education, in conjunction with CCEA, are responsible for deciding which qualifications are designated as applied and general.

### Level 1/Level 2

A breakdown of the number of approved GCSE and non-GCSE qualifications at Levels 1 and 2 is contained in the table below:

	<b>GCSE</b>	<b>Non-GCSE</b>	<b>Total</b>
General Subjects	118	7	125
Applied Subjects	57	154	211
<b>Totals</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>336</b>

### Level 3

A breakdown of the number of approved GCE and non-GCE qualifications which are equivalent to one, two and three A-levels is contained in the table below:

<b>1 GCE Equivalent</b>	<b>GCE</b>	<b>Non-GCE</b>	<b>Total</b>
General Subjects	142	0	142
Applied Subjects	75	44	119
Sub-total	217	44	261
<b>2 GCE Equivalent</b>	<b>GCE</b>	<b>Non-GCE</b>	<b>Total</b>
General Subjects	0	n/a	0
Applied Subjects	2	27	29
Sub-total	2	27	29
<b>3 GCE Equivalent</b>	<b>GCE</b>	<b>Non-GCE</b>	<b>Total</b>
General Subjects	n/a	n/a	0
Applied Subjects	0	4	4
Sub-total	0	4	4
<b>Total post 16</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>294</b>

The above information has been taken from the September release of the NIEFQAN file:

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/niefqan-201920>

### ANNEXE 3 Year 12 Examination Performance at Post-Primary Schools in Northern Ireland 2017-18

Table 2: Year 12 pupil performance by school type, 2008/09 - 2017/18

Performance Indicator (includes equivalents)	School Type	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
% achieving 5+ GCSEs A*-C	Non-Grammar	54.1	59.1	60.1	63.9	67.2	70.6	72.0	72.7	74.4	77.3
	Grammar	96.8	96.8	97.0	97.0	97.3	97.2	97.8	96.5	96.5	96.0
	Total	71.2	74.3	75.3	77.8	79.6	81.8	82.8	83.3	84.6	86.0
% achieving 5+ GCSEs A*-C including GCSE English and GCSE mathematics	Non-Grammar	32.9	34.9	36.4	36.2	37.7	44.0	46.8	47.0	49.9	52.4
	Grammar	93.8	93.5	93.9	92.9	94.0	94.5	95.0	94.1	94.1	94.0
	Total	57.3	58.6	60.1	60.1	60.9	65.2	67.0	67.9	70.3	71.8
% achieving 5+ GCSEs A*-G	Non-Grammar	87.6	92.8	94.6	95.8	96.2	97.1	97.4	97.6	97.5	98.0
	Grammar	99.3	99.7	99.8	99.9	99.9	99.8	99.9	99.8	99.8	99.7
	Total	92.3	95.6	96.7	97.5	97.7	98.2	98.4	98.6	98.6	98.8
% achieving 5+ GCSEs A*-G including GCSE English and GCSE mathematics	Non-Grammar	n/a	n/a	89.0	89.0	88.2	89.4	89.4	89.5	90.8	92.0
	Grammar	n/a	n/a	99.2	99.0	99.3	99.4	99.7	99.6	99.6	99.5
	Total	n/a	n/a	93.2	93.2	92.8	93.6	93.7	94.0	94.8	95.5
% achieving no GCSEs	Non-Grammar	1.8	1.2	0.7	#	#	#	#	0.1	0.2	#
	Grammar	0.1	0.1	0.1	*	*	*	*	0.1	0.1	*
	Total	1.1	0.7	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1

\* denotes a figure of less than 5 pupils

# figure not disclosed under rules of statistical suppression

Department of Education Statistical Bulletin 8/2018

[www.education-ni.gov.uk](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk)

## **ANNEXE 4: Further Education Principals' Key Challenges Workshop**

**14 November 2019**

### **Introduction**

As a key element of the stakeholder engagement phase of the Transition of Young People into Careers (14-19) Project, a workshop was held on 14 November 2019, with key personnel from the Further Education sector and the Department for the Economy (DfE). There were 17 attendees including Further Education College Principals, Vice-Principals and senior staff from the Further Education Division of DfE. A list of attendees is attached at **Annex A**.

Prior to the workshop a short position paper, developed by Richard Armstrong, was circulated (**Annex B**) outlining the background to the project, together with a progress update and a summary of key issues to be examined in taking forward the agreed workstreams:

- Strategy Development;
- Funding;
- Progression and Pathways;
- Post-16 Education;
- Curriculum Delivery; and
- Careers.

An introductory presentation by the Project Manager outlined the background to the Project and provided an overview of the progress to date. This was followed by structured group discussions based on the three key questions listed below. Opportunities to share views and provide feedback were facilitated through a plenary session.

### **Session One:**

What are the key challenges faced by Further Education Colleges in regard to 14-19 education?

### **Session Two:**

What do Further Education colleagues see as the priorities for a 14-19 Strategy?

### **Session Three:**

What do Further Education colleagues see as potential solutions to address the key challenges and ensure the best outcomes for our Young People?

This report provides a summary of the feedback obtained from these discussions, in the context of the Project work streams, together with a list of suggested priorities to be considered by the Project in the development of a draft 14-19 Strategy.

## SESSION ONE:

### ***What are the key challenges faced by Further Education Colleges in regard to 14-19 education?***

A number of common themes emerged from the group discussions in terms of the key challenges faced by Further Education Colleges in regard to 14-19 education. These included:

#### **Curriculum Delivery**

- There is a perceived poor educational achievement rate at Key Stage 4. DE stress the fact that 71.8% of school leavers achieve 5 A\*-C including English and maths. This is an average figure, however, for many non-selective schools less than 50% of pupils achieve this target. Whether this is a case of low achievement or underachievement, colleges find that many of the pupils in this category are poorly prepared for progression to Further Education and Training, due to issues such as poor Literacy and Numeracy and sub-optimal delivery of vocational subjects in schools.
- **Qualification Reform:** It was suggested there was a need to simplify the multiplicity of qualifications which exist in Northern Ireland. This may mean reducing the number of Awarding Organisations. Changes taking place in the review of qualifications such as the introduction of T- Levels and the introduction of the new RQF Level 3 qualifications (which have external exams) were also discussed. The need for a separate Awarding Organisation for Professional and Technical qualifications, under the direction of Further Education, was strongly articulated.
- **Duplication of provision:** Concerns regarding the growing level of duplication of provision were highlighted underlining the need for a Sixth Form policy. It was stated that schools will point to the large A Level cohort attending Belfast Metropolitan College however the college argue that they are servicing a demand for this provision driven by students recognising their reputation for success.
- Lack of appropriate and effective resources for the delivery of Professional and Technical qualifications in schools was also raised as a concern.

#### **Progression and Pathways**

- The general view was that the growth of Sixth Forms and the number of pupils repeating years 12, 13 and 14 indicates that many parents and pupils do not seem to have a clear understanding all of the available routes and alternative pathways available. There is a lack of awareness of Higher Education pathways in the Further Education sector which lead to direct entry to second year of degree study.

- It was suggested that there is an over-emphasis on A-levels and progression to degree level study as well as a lack of awareness of the employability value of many university courses.
- It was suggested that the choices made at age 14 are also a major issue, not just those made at Post-16. The decline in schools collaborating with Further Education at Key Stage 4 means less students are getting an opportunity to sample Occupational Studies in college. It was suggested that pre-apprenticeships models available in other jurisdictions should be explored. These proposals should take cognisance of the introduction of the new traineeship system.
- It was suggested that if schools delivered Essential Skills at Levels 1 and 2 it would ease progression routes and remove barriers for many pupils leaving school after year 12.

### **Post-16 Education**

- The need for clear agreement on the role and purpose of schools and Further Education Colleges was stressed. Concerns were raised in relation to the absence of a DE Policy on Sixth Form.
- It was noted that many Sixth Forms are unsustainable (threshold is 100 enrolments) and subject choices are limited by capacity.
- There was a view that DE policies have led to duplication and drive competition, although it was also acknowledged that this may be an unintended consequence.

### **Careers**

- It was emphasised that there is a need for good careers advice to start before GCSE options are selected at the age of 14. In addition, the requirement for neutrality in careers advice was stressed. It was noted that there was a need for the Further Education sector to improve marketing of their colleges to parents and young people however the Colleges face significant barriers when schools do not permit access to Key Stage 4 pupils.
- It was suggested that young people need to have better work experience placements to learn from hands-on business experiences. Engagement with employers through visits to industry and guest speakers is also important for young people but schools' staff often do not have the networks. It was suggested that improved school employer engagement would enhance outcomes for young people.
- There was a view that pupils often have limited access to all the available options at GCSE which can limit later subject options and pathways. It was suggested that subject choices at Post-16 and subsequent career pathways may be restricted as a

result. Partnership through school/college engagement at Key Stage 4 is very often limited to the less academically able thus devaluing vocational options.

- It was suggested that careers advice is not always linked with labour market information or projected skills deficits, for example, the question was posed as to why we keep turning out teachers when there is an oversupply? It was also noted that the numbers taking GCSE ICT are in decline, yet employment opportunities are increasing in this high growth sector.

## **Funding**

- It was suggested that the reduction in Entitlement Framework funding has caused a decline in collaboration with colleges. Although Entitlement Framework legislation is still in place, the targets have been reduced and the funding formula altered so that many schools have been forced to make decisions on financial as opposed to curriculum grounds.
- It was felt that the move to the 'purchaser provider' model and lack of long term planning through Area Learning Communities has led to a system where the risk of resources delivery is solely carried by Colleges. Should a school remove itself from provision this has implications for College resources including staffing but the purchaser provider model has shifted all risk to colleges.
- It was suggested that the annual changes to funding made collaboration challenging as college Principals must incorporate Entitlement Framework costs into three year plans without any long-term financial planning.
- There was a view that Further Education colleges are funding duplication of English/maths GCSE and Essential Skills Literacy and Numeracy despite 12 years of funding this provision in schools.
- It was noted that schools receive a higher premium for pupils to enter Sixth Form and it was suggested that the unintended consequence of this funding model is incentivising Sixth Form recruitment. It was suggested that many pupils drop out in Year 13, unable to cope with A Levels, and are subsequently re-educated through vocational courses in Further Education, at an estimated cost of £9m per year. This £9m refers to the cost of Essential Skills in Further Education only. An additional cost of at least £11m has been incurred in respect of those who have left school after repeating GCSE/AS and before the A2 year. It was suggested that this includes approximately 2500 pupils per year. It was suggested that clarification as to whether Year 13 dropouts are funded for 1 or 2 years would be helpful.
- The general perception was that there are no controls over failing schools and a lack of strategic governance.

- It was suggested that any joint DE/DfE strategy should re-examine funding policy in order to address the negative consequences of duplication and competition.

## **SESSION TWO:**

### ***What do Further Education colleagues see as the priorities for a 14-19 Strategy?***

There was a wide-ranging discussion on the priorities for a draft 14-19 Strategy. A number of priority areas for consideration in the development of a 14-19 Strategy were suggested by Further Education colleagues. These included:

#### **Curriculum Delivery**

- Development of a 14-19 policy which is focused on the needs of the learner rather than the needs of the institution.
- A reform of the Area Planning Process to ensure there is no duplication of provision in local areas. There was a view that the current process focusses on school enrolments and financial viability but does take into consideration curriculum provision in Further Education colleges situated in close proximity to schools to ensure the quality of the learning experience and appropriate resourcing, nor does it factor in investment in new College campuses.
- Literacy and Numeracy should be a priority for schools. It was suggested that primary schools are judged against top 10 countries in Europe/World and there is a clear issue once young people reach the Post Primary phase of education.
- It was suggested that a review of the current curriculum assessment methodologies, which lead to a situation where 53% of 16 year olds cannot achieve grade C or higher in GCSE English and maths, is required.
- There is a need to rationalise and reduce the plethora of qualifications delivered across all sectors of the education system.

#### **Progression and Pathways**

- It was suggested that there is a need for immediate access to all Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 pupils for careers talks from Further Education Colleges.
- There was a wish to see the Department of Education take greater control of what schools deliver, aligned to the Programme for Government and the emerging Skills Strategy.
- There was suggestion that addressing the inconsistencies in GCSE assessment, where the benchmark for achieving a particular grade can fluctuate depending on the cohort, against that of Essential Skills where it was a straight pass or fail, should be addressed as a priority.

- It was suggested that the reform of Essential Skills has made the qualification more demanding than GCSEs in English and maths. The view was that this defeats the purpose of Essential Skills and is setting many young people up for failure rather than developing appropriate, contextualised literacy and numeracy skills.
- The need for the creation of a Professional and Technical awarding body as part of a joined-up skills ecosystem aligned with industry and the Programme for Government was suggested as a priority.
- It was suggested that Area Learning Communities are no longer fit for purpose and need to be urgently reviewed. There is an apparent disconnect between schools, councils and the economy. The possibility of linking Area Learning Communities into councils as part of the community planning process could be explored as part of a review.

## **Post-16 Education**

- There is an urgent need to clarify the role of schools and sixth forms particularly in the non-selective sector. There is a need for a DE Sixth Form policy which complements the role of the Further Education colleges, reducing competition and duplication and increasing efficiency.

## **Careers**

- It was suggested that the creation of a Careers Service system which provides impartial advice to schools, colleges, DfE and DE should be progressed. The careers programme available to young people should be experiential with opportunities to engage in experiences such as careers fairs, job sampling and employer engagement. In addition, it was suggested that the communication of all available career pathways to parents as well as young people to enable informed choices to be made about future progression is crucial.
- Furthermore, there was a view that it should be a statutory requirement for young people to have access to open and neutral careers advice from appropriately qualified providers who should be externally quality assured to Matrix standards (Kitemark).
- It was suggested that the Entitlement Framework policy should be reviewed particularly in relation to collaboration between Schools and Colleges in order to sustain sampling of college provision at Key Stage 4.

## **Funding**

- It was suggested that the model for Entitlement Framework funding for school to



- college collaboration needs to be urgently reviewed as the existing purchaser/provider model is not fit for purpose.
- It was suggested that there was a need to remove the incentives for maintaining unsustainable Sixth Form provision which impacts negatively on Entitlement Framework collaboration with colleges.
- There was a strong view that the Entitlement Framework needs to mandate the collaboration with FE to drive sectors together.
- There was a clear view that duplication of provision across all sectors should be addressed through the Area Planning Process. The current process does not facilitate discussion on curricular issues and links with the Further Education sector are poor.
- It was suggested that the Project should explore models from other jurisdictions, for example, Wales has a joined up Post-16 funding agency aligned to the Welsh Assembly's PfG indicators.

### **SESSION THREE:**

#### ***What do Further Education colleagues see as potential solutions to address the key challenges and ensure the best outcomes for our Young People?***

The final session sought initial views on what Further Education colleagues see as the potential solutions to address the key challenges identified and ensure the best outcomes for our Young People. Again there was a wide ranging discussion with a number of suggestions including;

- The development of a 14-19 Education & Skills Policy for Northern Ireland which is clearly aligned to the Programme for Government and the Skills Strategy.
- Greater alignment between Department of Education and Department for the Economy policies linked to Programme for Government outcomes.
- Clarification and simplification of the role and purpose of the Further Education sector and schools with agreement on who should deliver vocational and academic courses.
- The need for clear and simple information for young people and parents in the available pathways in 14-19 education and training.
- Collaborative partnerships between Schools & Colleges should be encouraged/mandatory to give pupils access to vocational sampling at Key Stage 4 aligned to new youth training provision at Post-16.

- Greater control over the regulation of qualifications is required.
- The provision of 14-19 education and training needs to be considered on an area basis and reviewed in terms of Quality Assurance and outcomes.
- The role of the Area Learning Communities needs to be reformed.
- There is a need to review the Department of Education's policy on GCSEs for all learners and those exiting school with low attainment.
- The Further Education Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 should be amended to allow Further Education to be awarding bodies and develop Professional and Technical qualifications with industry.
- Create a comprehensive and independent careers programme which is experiential and involves earlier engagement with young people and employers.
- Measure engagement with young people from careers service.
- Introduce legislative change to enable Further Education colleges to take in young people from 14 years old so they get the skills they require to progress on to careers/pathways.
- Introduce a legal framework around the Entitlement Framework with clear demarcation around who delivers, incorporating clear mechanisms for ensuring accountability and quality.

## List of FE Principals' Workshop Attendees

### TABLE 1

Richard Armstrong - Table Lead (Project Team)

Beverly Harrison - DfE

Carol Kennedy - DfE

Jonathan Hegarty - Curriculum Director BMC

Brian Doran - Principal SRC

### TABLE 2

Claire McClelland - Table Lead (14-19 Project Manager)

Donna Blaney - DfE

Marie Therese McGivern - Principal BMC

Leo Murphy – Principal NWRC

Terri Scott - Principal NRC

Carol Viney - Curriculum Director SWC

### TABLE 3

Susan Logan - Table Lead (Project Team)

Keith Kilpatrick - Curriculum Director BMC

Michael McAlister - Principal SWC

Dorothy McElwee - Curriculum Director NWRC

Ken Webb - Principal SERC

Tricia Lavery, Facilitator (Project Team)

Gary Noble, Administration Support (\*Project Team)

## **ANNEXE 5: Issues Requiring Policy Consideration**

### **1. FUNDING**

- 1.1 Do the differences in budgetary approach across government departments in the funding of 16-19 education make it difficult to achieve a level playing field across all strands of post 16 education provided by DE, DfE and DEARA?
  - i. Sixth form
  - ii. Full-time FE
  - iii. Training
  - iv. Apprenticeships
- 1.2 The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (NIAC) report on Education funding (July 2019) states that “the education budget is not sufficient to meet rising pressures on schools while the system remains in its current form.”
- 1.3 The NIAC also reported that although the level of education funding was insufficient, the education budget has been protected from direct reductions.
- 1.4 Sir Robert Salisbury suggests that the structure of the education system in NI contributes significantly to the strain on education and if the system was organised differently it ought to be able to properly resource education at current funding levels
- 1.5 The Integrated Education Fund made a similar case to the NIAC:
 

“Throwing more money at the financial problems facing our schools would only temporarily mask and perpetuate the structural inefficiencies underlying these problems.”
- 1.6 The 2019 Skills Barometer update, highlights that although 70% of school leavers achieve NQF Level 2 including English and maths the relatively high enrolments in low-level courses in FE as a result of this ‘underachievement’ places a high fiscal burden on the DfE/FE budget.
- 1.7 A recent report by OECD concluded that “the economic gains that would accrue solely from eliminating extreme underperformance in high-income OECD countries by 2030 would be sufficient to pay for the primary and secondary education of all students.”
- 1.8 In order to reduce duplication of provision across the two sectors, consideration should be given to repositioning Entitlement Framework collaboration with FE Colleges as the sole vehicle for accessing Professional and Technical provision in schools; schools’ delivery in sixth form would be restricted to applied A Level and general A level courses.

### **2. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS**

- 2.1 Marketing managers in the FE Colleges report a lack of awareness among 14-19

learners (and their parents) of the progression pathways to further education, training and apprenticeships.

- 2.2 The dominant perception in Northern Ireland society appears to be that the direct route, via GCSE and A level, to Degree study at University is still the best guarantee of better employment and future prosperity.
- 2.3 The advice given to 14-19 learners is not always aligned with the opportunities highlighted by the Northern Ireland Skills Barometer and the skills gaps identified by industry.
- 2.4 There needs to be a greater awareness of all the alternative pathways available to young people in order for them to make informed choices about the best route to employment which matches their education, skills, aptitudes, interests and abilities.
- 2.5 The recommendation made by the Confederation of British Industry in the publication “Inspiring Growth (2015)” was that *“all pupils should understand the full range of learning opportunities available to them, including both academic and vocational routes.”* This needs to be an essential plank of our careers advice and enshrined in legislation, similar to the situation which has been in existence in England since 2018.
- 2.6 Potential barriers to progression, such as, lack of Level 2 Literacy and Numeracy qualifications, Vocational qualifications delivered at KS4, may require further investigation.

### **3. Post 16 Education**

- 3.1 Is the fragmented system of education in Northern Ireland too costly and is it sustainable even in the short-term? 38.7% of post primary schools are below the sustainability threshold of 500 enrolments at ages 11 to16; 28.2% fail to meet the threshold of 100 sixth form enrolments. The NIAC report has recommended that the schools’ estate should be consolidated in order to concentrate resources in fewer schools
- 3.2 DE have acknowledged that there are too many schools and in particular too many small sixth forms which causes unnecessary competition and duplication across the sectors.
- 3.3 The impact of this is that the system is unable to make the necessary efficiency gains to release the money required to create a network of viable schools. This in turn drives a culture based on recruitment at all costs (especially at post 16) which runs counter to the pupil-centred approach which all providers should be working towards.

### **4. CURRICULUM**

- 4.1 The debate about the purpose of education is not solely confined to Northern Ireland“. The Edge Foundation’s “Our plan for 14-19 Education” (2017) states that secondary

education can follow an 'education logic' or an 'employment logic.' In the Northern Ireland context, it could be said that the former description is more associated with the schools sector; the latter with the Further Education sector.

- 4.2 Although the NI school curriculum from Key Stages 1 to 3 enables learners to develop wider skills, after the age of 14 the focus is more on academic achievement and examination outcomes. The system measures at KS4 and post 16 are, respectively, the attainment of 5 GCSEs at Grade C (including Eng and maths) and 3 GCE A levels grades A\*-C at post 16.
- 4.3 Performance measures also exist in the FE sector but colleges are heavily focussed on progression to employment and there is a strong emphasis on developing employability skills and engagement with industry, in order to prepare young people for the world of work.
- 4.4 There is a lack of clarity around how many pupils are actually in year 13 and how many are sitting A Levels over 3 years; how many pupils are effectively enrolled in a 'transition year' to repeat GCSEs; and the various models schools use to resource this provision. Is all this activity accurately reflected in school performance statistics?
- 4.5 Research evidence has highlighted the negative consequences of grade repetition in schools (OECD 2012) yet this practice is widespread in sixth forms in Northern Ireland. The new sixth form policy currently being developed by DE needs to address this issue and implement the necessary curriculum reform at post 16. The Skills Barometer reports that this practice also exists to some extent in FE, with students repeating programmes at Level 2. The implementation of the new Youth Training System, in 2020, should go some way to addressing this.
- 4.6 Qualifications are the currency which enables learners to progress to the next stage in their education and ultimately to employment. Parents, young people and the general public, understand traditional GCSE and GCE qualifications and what they represent. Professional and technical qualifications, especially those which are required for employment in specific sectors of industry, are not as widely understood or held in the same esteem as academic qualifications, in Northern Ireland (Skills Barometer 2019).
- 4.7 School performance statistics measure achievement of GCSEs and GCSE-equivalents, as the GCSE brand is more readily understood by the public than occupationally relevant qualifications. There appears to be a lack of transparency around the GCSE-equivalent qualifications actually offered to learners and the value of certain combinations of awards, in terms of progression to the next NQF level or to employment.
- 4.8 Is the right data available in sufficient detail & flexible enough to provide the full picture in relation to qualifications and destinations at all key transition points in 14-19? The 2019 Skills Barometer suggests that in developing policy, better use could be made of longitudinal data to provide clarity on the usefulness of courses i.e. tracking the education journey of learners through all stages of the education system.

- 4.9 T-level qualifications are being developed as a vehicle for apprenticeships in England but in NI it is the schools sector that appears to be pursuing these qualifications. There is a need for more robust evidence to link these qualifications with future employment opportunities before introducing the curriculum.

## **5.0 CAREERS**

- 5.1 The Northern Ireland Skills Barometer, updated in July 2019, refers to the long tail of underachievement of school leavers and raises concerns about the consequences for many young people in deprived communities, in terms of their long-term employment prospects.
- 5.2 The Skills Barometer also highlights the NQF profile of qualifiers in FE colleges, pointing to the fact that only 10% have qualifications higher than Level 3 despite the significant undersupply of mid-tier skills (NQF Levels 4-5).
- 5.3 Most other OECD countries have a much higher proportion of students enrolling in these types of courses than Northern Ireland, and they are valued by firms and students as highly as university qualifications.
- 5.4 It is clear that greater efforts are required to make young people aware of the higher-level options available to them in the post-secondary education and training infrastructure, and the potential economic returns associated with each course offering.
- 5.5 The 2019 Skills Barometer states that there is very little data on the long-term returns to qualifications obtained in FE colleges. The report suggests that tracking earnings in the years following successful completion of FE courses could provide valuable data that would help change perceptions amongst parents and students regarding FE.