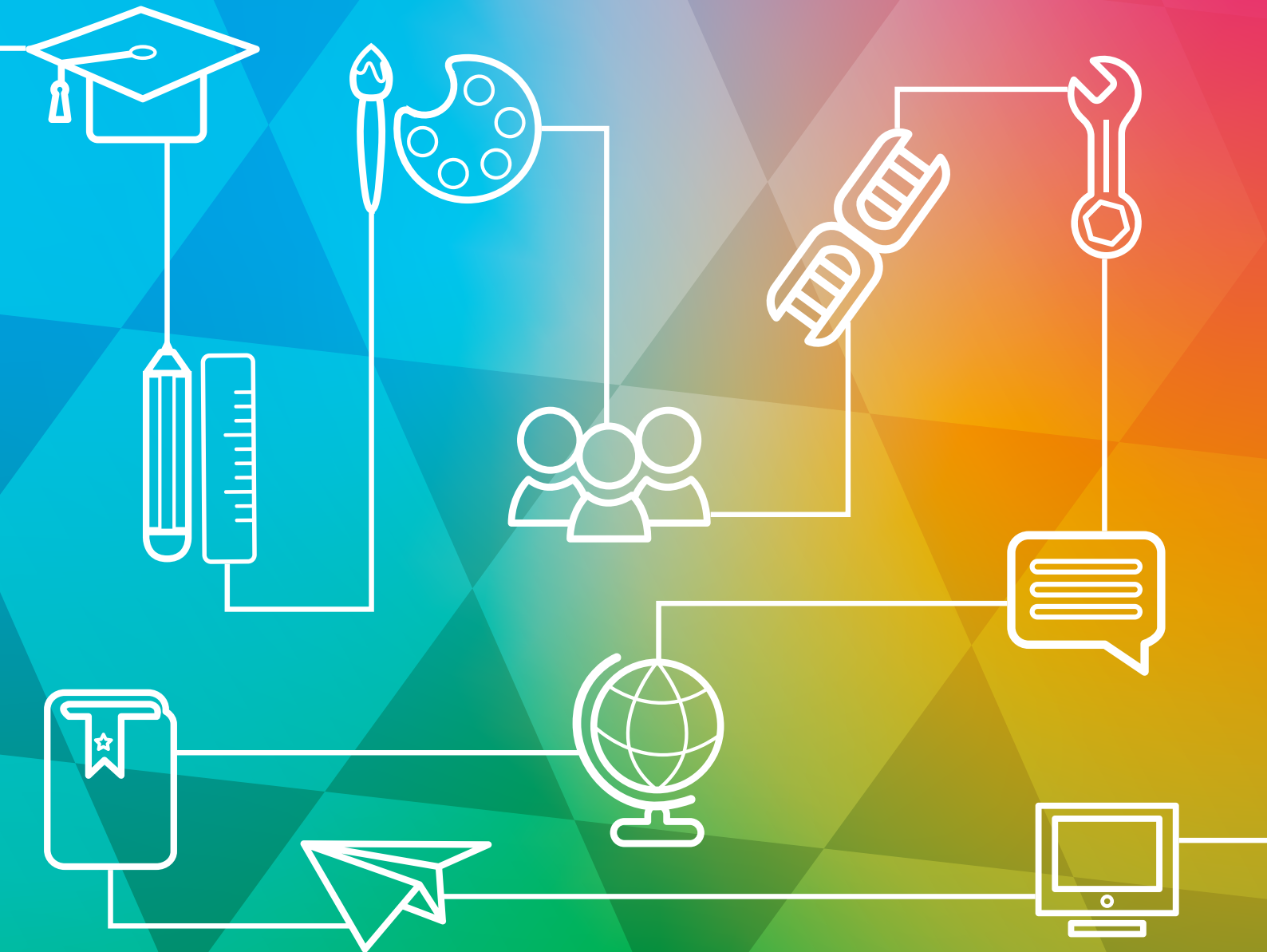




DEVELOPING A MORE STRATEGIC APPROACH TO 14-19 EDUCATION AND TRAINING:

A FRAMEWORK TO TRANSFORM 14-19 EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVISION



Educating all of our young people to develop their knowledge and skills, enabling them to fulfil their potential and contribute to society, the economy and the environment

MINISTERIAL FOREWORD

The 14-19 phase of education and training is crucial for all young people. Every young person should be enabled to fulfil their potential, and be supported to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for adult life. This includes preparation for work to which they are well-suited, development of positive attitudes to continue learning and active participation within the economy and their community.

Flexibility, information-handling skills, knowing where work is available, and a commitment to lifelong learning are now essential requirements for entering the world of work in the twenty first century.

Young people entering the 14-19 phase of education and training face a series of fundamental milestones in this brief period of their lives. This begins with having to make subject choices at the age of 14 which may steer them towards a specific pathway or career. At age 16, further and more definite decisions about what to study and also where and how are made. A small number of young people may choose to leave education and training at this point. For those who remain in the education and training system, at age 18 onwards, decisions are made on continuation of a programme of study or entering employment.

It is important that the education and training sectors are equipped with the resources, policies and practices to ensure young people have clear pathways transitioning them between education, training and the world of work. It is also critically important that our young people are empowered to make informed decisions about the choices they will make and, ultimately, the pathways they will take.

Both the Department of Education and the Department for the Economy have worked in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders to establish a basis on which to drive forward a more strategic approach to 14-19 education and training with the aim of ensuring that each young person can become a successful contributor to both society and the economy. It is important that this collaboration continues through the implementation of this Framework.

The implementation of this Framework will be central to the delivery of 'a 10x Economy', in delivering the policy objectives set out in the Skills Strategy, and in fulfilling Fair Start commitments. It is also a key element of the Executive's *Building Forward: Consolidated NI COVID Recovery Plan* and a first step in addressing some of the challenges raised in the recently published Independent Review of Careers.

The actions set out in this Framework will help one of the most important sections of society, our young people, understand and achieve their own potential as they move through their individual educational and vocational experience.

We are confident that this joint Framework will help encourage a much closer integration between education and training, and economic policies. It will provide a pathway to help strengthen existing collaborative approaches to the 14-19 phase of education and training to ensure our young people have the skills and knowledge to enable them to succeed as individuals, and to inspire them to become vital contributors to society and to the Northern Ireland economy.

Michelle McIlveen

MICHELLE MCILVEEN MLA
MINISTER OF EDUCATION



GORDON LYONS MLA
MINISTER FOR THE ECONOMY

STAKEHOLDER COMMENTS

On behalf of the Post Primary Principals' Group, we would like to register our resounding endorsement of this 14-19 Framework. This long overdue strategy provides a comprehensive framework which, we believe, should be implemented in full, as soon as possible.

As leaders of Post Primary schools, we will play a pivotal role in delivering on key objectives within the proposed strategy. We are keen to strengthen existing partnerships and explore new opportunities to enable a more collaborative approach to delivering on the priorities outlined within the document.

It is incumbent upon us as educators to ensure that our young people are accessing the necessary and ever-changing skills for transitioning to higher level study and the world of work. We also must ensure that the qualifications and pathways which we are offering are flexible, innovative, and responsive to the changing needs of the labour market. We also support the goal to enhance the transition process between schools and tertiary level providers and have highlighted the need for this more joined up approach for many years.

This Framework offers a vehicle for delivering on a range of very important issues and as such it is welcomed by all members of our team who are keen to see the vision realised in full.

Post Primary Principals' Group

We welcome the publication of the 14-19 framework document. This represents an important foundation stone underpinning greater collaborative working between schools and Further Education Colleges to support the development of educational and skills pathways for our young people. Equipping our young people and helping them navigate the myriad of choices they face is a team effort. The 14-19 Framework has rightly placed the learner at the centre of all that we do. Further Education Colleges will play a full part, working with others, in the implementation of the framework to enable all our young people to flourish in an education and skills ecosystem fit for their future.

Further Education Principals' Group

Our young people, particularly between the ages of 14-19 are faced with many challenges and choices, some of them with lifelong implications. It is critically important that we as educators and policy makers, provide them with suitable support and guidance, to ensure they are enabled to make well informed and responsible decisions throughout this phase of their education, training or employment. The extensive stakeholder engagement and input that has taken place to facilitate the formulation of this framework gives us confidence that we are well placed to maximise the impacts of the actions that are being proposed in the best interests of our young people.

Opportunities now exist for all stakeholders to become involved in making these actions happen. Crucially, the outworking of this framework provides a great opportunity to ensure our young people are fully aware of the range and the intrinsic value of the progressive pathways that are available to them. Through a more strategic and integrated approach between education, training and the wider economic environment, we can ensure that our young people have access to a curriculum and range of pathways that meet more fully, their personal, inter-personal and career needs and aspirations. Consequently they will become increasingly informed, effective and engaged contributors to our society, economy and environment.

Peter Friel, 14-19 Project Board and Principal, St Pius X College
Tony Scullion, Education Adviser, CCMS
Michael Keenan, Director of Education, CCMS

I have been delighted to work in partnership with colleagues across the education sector in Northern Ireland. This framework seeks to transform the education provision and landscape for all our 14-19 year olds. It is vital that our young people have access to the support, guidance and education programmes which develop skills and competencies to allow them to pursue their chosen career. This framework and action plan is ambitious and challenges us all to work collaboratively with the interests of our young people at its heart. No matter how challenging this is, the investment will be worthwhile, benefiting our wider society and economy and most importantly giving our young people the best chance to succeed, flourish and be the best that they can be.

Martin McKendry, Director, College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE)

In *A Fair Start*, the final report and action plan of the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement in Northern Ireland, we highlighted the urgency of making progress on a more strategic approach to 14-19 education and training for the benefit of *all* learners. We also recognised the importance of developing a common, coherent Sixth Form Policy (with a focus on skills development) and stressed the vital role of Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance to provide comprehensive support to young people as they seek to make key decisions around future study and/or employment opportunities. We also noted the need for a mind shift in how vocational qualifications are valued across our education system and called for young people's needs to be prioritised over those of any organisation or institution.

As chair of the Expert Panel which developed the 47 actions across 8 Key Areas in '*A Fair Start*', I wholeheartedly welcome the publication of this eagerly awaited 14-19 Framework which addresses many of the concerns raised in our action plan and provides a valuable foundation upon which the agreed strategic actions can be taken forward. This is however very much phase one. In the subsequent and challenging phase of detailed planning and implementation, I would urge all stakeholders to engage in a genuine spirit of collaboration to create the world-class education and training system that our 14-19 learners deserve, and that will allow them to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to make a positive contribution to our society and economy.

Dr Noel Purdy, Stranmillis University College, Belfast
Chair of Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement in Northern Ireland

Every young person deserves a great education and it is crucial that we ensure all learners have the opportunity to fulfil their potential. As a member of the Transition of Young People into Careers (14-19) Project Board, I welcome the publication of this comprehensive Framework.

It is clear that the skills and talents of our young people will be the future of our economic, social and environmental wellbeing. There are many choices and challenges facing our young people and this Framework provides the opportunity to build on the strengths of our current system and ensure our young people have access to a range of high quality pathways, with appropriate careers information, advice and guidance.

The extensive engagement in the development of the Framework recognised the challenges facing education and training providers. This Framework is the initial stage and I would encourage colleagues and stakeholders to engage in taking forward the actions outlined in the Framework. The vision of the Framework provides an opportunity for education, training and employers to collaborate and work together cohesively to ensure we meet the needs of our young people and indeed our future economy and society.

Robin McLoughlin OBE, 14-19 Project Board and Principal, Banbridge Academy

The Education Authority welcomes the publication of the 14 -19 Framework with its appropriately ambitious aims and supporting actions. Making a positive difference to learners through ensuring equity of access to a relevant, responsive, flexible, high quality curricular experience is a key priority for the Education Authority and our educational partners. We believe that the Framework will facilitate the strategic partnership working required to realise this priority.

We endorse, and have been delighted to contribute to, the development of an overarching strategy which supports the transition of young people into careers by enhancing the 14-19 education and training landscape. We recognise that the Framework will strengthen the development of a culture of aspiration which will support and challenge all young people to realise and further grow their potential.

Education Authority

As Chair of the Careers Advisory Forum, I am pleased to see the publication of this important Framework. It is essential to ensure our young people have access to sound careers advice, and education and skills provision to help them fulfil their potential, making their contribution to society and a thriving NI economy. The Careers Advisory Forum, comprising leading employers, educationalists and third sector organisations, has been involved in the development of these proposals from the outset and we look forward to continuing working with both Departments to realise the vision outlined in the Framework.

Judith Gillespie CBE, Chair, Careers Advisory Forum

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INTRODUCTION

1. We need to give our children and young people the best start in life, providing an educational experience that equips every individual with the knowledge and skills needed to fulfil their potential. With rapid change taking place in the labour market, driven by technological advance and global economic activity, this has never been more important. The demands of working life are changing. Young people leaving school, college or university face challenges and choices that are, in many ways, very different from those faced by previous generations. Flexibility, information-handling skills, knowing where work is available, and a commitment to lifelong learning are now essential requirements for entering the world of work today. We also cannot underestimate the important links between 14-19 education and training and a young person's contribution to society.
2. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) *Skills Strategy Northern Ireland Assessment and Recommendations*¹ report noted that the skills of young people in Northern Ireland have been increasing in recent decades and are now above the OECD average in reading, mathematics and science. It states that according to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study, these skills are being developed inclusively, and young people are improving their skill sets, in line with the OECD average. More students are graduating with a better set of General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSEs), and more students are staying in education after the age of 16 (when compulsory education ends) to achieve at least three A levels. In 2016/17, 70% of children left school with five or more GCSEs (A*-C) or equivalent including English and mathematics, compared to 53% in 2005/06, and 40% left with three or more A levels (A*-C) or equivalent, compared to 29% a decade earlier. The report highlights that these are positive developments that bode well for the future of Northern Ireland's skills system. With higher levels of skills, young people are in a better position to take advantage of good quality jobs in the labour market.
3. The 14-19 phase of education and training is central to delivering the *Vision for a 10x Economy*², in delivering the policy objectives set out in the *Skills Strategy*³, in helping achieve the goals of the *2020-2030 Children and Young People's Strategy*⁴ by improving outcomes for children and young people, ensuring that they grow up in a society which provides the support they need to achieve their potential and in fulfilling *Fair Start*⁵ commitments. It is also a key element of the Executive's *Building Forward: Consolidated NI COVID Recovery Plan*⁶.

1 [OECD Skills Strategy Northern Ireland Assessment and Recommendations, p.21](#)

2 [DfE 10X Economy - an economic vision for a decade of innovation](#)

3 [A Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland - Skills for a 10x Economy](#)

4 [Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030](#)

5 [A Fair Start - Final Report and Action Plan](#)

6 [Building Forward: Consolidated Covid-19 Recovery Plan](#)

We need to ensure our young people have the skills and knowledge to enable them to succeed as individuals, as contributors to society and as contributors to the Northern Ireland economy.

4. We need to ensure our young people have the skills and knowledge to enable them to succeed as individuals, as contributors to society and as contributors to the Northern Ireland economy. That is why the Department of Education and the Department for the Economy have worked in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders to develop this Framework which sets out the vision and a pathway to transform our 14-19 education and training system.
5. Established in 2019, the 'Transition of Young People into Careers (14-19) Project' has been jointly funded by both Departments to produce an assessment of the current provision across schools, colleges and other providers and to identify actions to develop a more strategic approach to 14-19 provision. The Project has worked extensively with stakeholders across all sectors to capture the key challenges and seek a consensus on the way forward. Throughout this extensive engagement, the focus has been on five key areas.

A FOCUS ON FIVE KEY AREAS:

**PROGRESSION
AND
PATHWAYS**

POST-16

**CURRICULUM
DELIVERY**

CAREERS

FUNDING

6. Having been involved through every stage of the process, stakeholders are in broad agreement that the actions in this Framework, coupled with the other activities ongoing across the Department of Education, the Department for the Economy and beyond, provide the stepping stones to improve the 14-19 education and training landscape for the benefit of each of our young people.

THE 14-19 LANDSCAPE – THE CURRENT CONTEXT

The Strategic Context

7. There are a significant number of policies and strategies already in place that impact on different elements of the 14-19 education and training landscape.
8. The *Children’s Services Co-operation Act (NI) 2015* (CSCA)⁷ places a duty on the Northern Ireland Executive to adopt a strategy to improve the well-being of children and young people, and requires that for the purpose of determining children’s well-being, regard is to be had to the relevant provision of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Subsequently, the *Children and Young People’s Strategy*⁸ which was adopted by the Northern Ireland Executive in December 2020, aims to improve the well-being of all children and young people living in Northern Ireland. It recognises that improving the lives of our children and young people will take consistent and sustained action over a long period of time and seeks to outline how the Executive will promote co-operation amongst Departments, agencies and other service deliverers to ensure a real impact on the lives of our children and young people. Furthermore, the draft *Programme for Government*⁹ (PfG) identifies key desired outcomes, two of which are intrinsically linked to what this Framework seeks to achieve - “our children and young people have the best start in life” and “everyone can reach their full potential”.
9. Within the Department of Education, a number of key policies and pieces of legislation provide a high level framework for the current provision of statutory education for the 14-19 age group. This includes the *Northern Ireland Curriculum*¹⁰, which sets in legislation the legal minimum content to be taught in schools and aims to empower young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives. The *Entitlement Framework*¹¹ aims to provide young people at Key Stage 4 and post-16 with access to a broad and balanced curriculum, regardless of where they live or which school they attend. Other relevant policies and strategies include *Schools for the future – a policy for sustainable schools*¹² and *Every School a Good School*¹³.

7 [Children’s Services Co-operation Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2015](#)

8 [Children and Young People’s Strategy 2020-2030](#)

9 [Programme for Government](#)

10 [Northern Ireland Curriculum](#)

11 [Entitlement Framework](#)

12 [Schools for the future – a policy for sustainable schools](#)

13 [Every School a Good School \(ESaGS\)](#)

10. The Department for the Economy's *Vision for a 10x Economy*¹⁴ - a transformative economy based on innovation with benefits for all our people - will require transformation in our skills system. The recently launched Skills Strategy¹⁵, '*Skills for a 10x economy*' places skills and talents as vital for economic success. The Skills Strategy draws out the benefits of more cohesive approaches to economic, innovation and skills policy; to ensure benefits and employability policy are directly linked to an economically relevant skills agenda and to provide clear pathways from compulsory education through to third level provision and onward to fulfilling and rewarding jobs. The Framework will play a fundamental role in the delivery of the Vision for a 10x Economy. Collaboration and a joined-up approach between the Department of Education, Department for the Economy and other government departments are imperative to facilitate a consistent and synchronised approach in these key pieces of work.
11. The joint Department of Education and Department for the Economy Careers Strategy, *Preparing for Success 2015-2020: A Strategy for Careers Education and Guidance*¹⁶, is currently being reviewed by both Departments, supported by ETI. A refreshed strategy will be developed during 2022/23 and will take into account the Vision for a 10x Economy, this Framework and the recently published Independent Review of Careers Guidance commissioned by the Department for the Economy.
12. Continued and enhanced collaboration with colleagues in the Department for Communities to help to address barriers to employment and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs through the auspices of the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) to promote the agri-food industry as a potential pathway and career will also be a central element of this Framework. CAFRE are already implementing and developing tailored solutions to several of the challenges identified in this Framework. More can be done to contextualise learning to its relevance to various aspects of work and different sectors. This would also help to raise awareness of occupationally-specific further education and work-based learning opportunities.

We cannot underestimate the important links between 14-19 education and training and a young person's contribution to society.

13. Finally, in setting the strategic context, we cannot underestimate the important links between 14-19 education and training and a young person's contribution to society. It is widely recognised that disengagement and poor educational attainment can underpin many of the societal challenges present in some of our most deprived communities and through this Framework there is an opportunity to forge new partnerships and collaborations with communities.

14 [DfE 10X Economy - an economic vision for a decade of innovation](#)

15 [A Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland – Skills for a 10x Economy](#)

16 [Preparing for Success 2015-2020: A Strategy for Careers Education and Guidance](#)

14. In May 2021, the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement published “*A Fair Start*”- *Final Report and Action Plan*¹⁷. The panel was established to examine and address links between persistent educational underachievement and socio-economic background. Some of the recommendations made by the Expert Panel correspond to the actions set out in this Framework therefore, it will be important to ensure alignment in the implementation of these.
15. Programmes such as the Executive’s *‘Together: Building a United Communities (T:BUC)’*¹⁸ strategy and the *Tackling Paramilitarism, Organised Crime and Criminality Programme*¹⁹ (Tackling Paramilitarism Programme) are further examples of government departments working collaboratively to resolve a common societal issue and much can be learned from the approaches taken. For example, in taking forward the United Youth Programme which is a key commitment in the *‘Together: Building a United Community’* strategy, the Department for the Economy has focused on delivering 10,000 places on a programme to offer young people, who are not in education, employment or training, structured employment, work experience, volunteer and leisure opportunities along with a dedicated programme designed to foster good relations and a shared future. Delivered via the cross-border Peace4Youth programme, it aims to enhance the capacity of young people aged 14-24 to form positive and effective relationships with others of a different background and make a positive contribution to building a cohesive society. The impact of these programmes cannot be underestimated. An independent evaluation showed that of the participants surveyed, 87% achieved at least one qualification in areas such as personal development, good relations, citizenship and essential skills. For many of the young people, this may be the first recognised qualification they have achieved. When asked about their future plans, beyond completion of the programme, 79% of young people indicated that they intended to progress to a positive destination including, education, training, employment or voluntary/community work.
16. These cross-cutting programmes necessitate much closer integration between education and economic policies. Therefore, there has to be an emphasis on the *interconnectedness* between these significant pieces of work. This will, in turn improve the shared benefits that can flow from linkages between education, economy and other key policy areas.

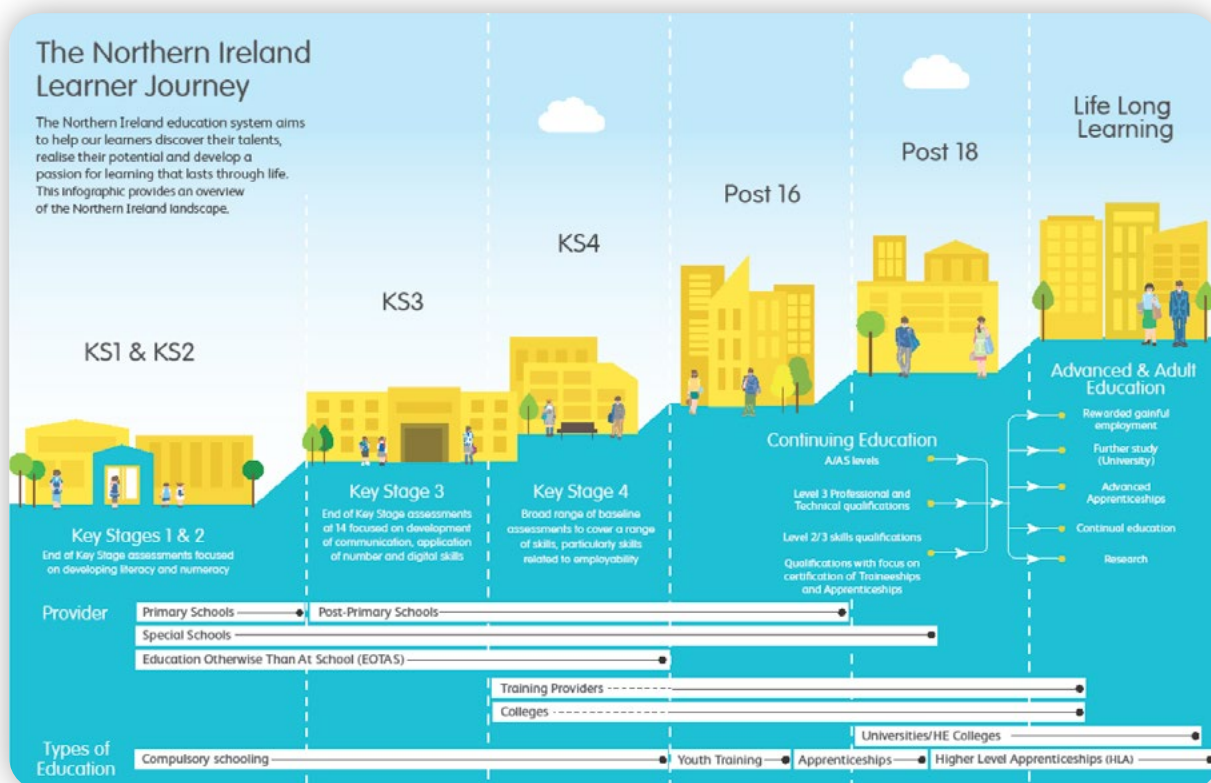
17 [A Fair Start - Final Report and Action Plan](#)

18 [Together: Building a United Communities \(T:BUC\)](#)

19 [Tackling Paramilitarism, Organised Crime and Criminality Programme](#)

The 14-19 Landscape

17. In 2021, approximately 7.2%²⁰ of the estimated Northern Ireland population were aged between 14 and 19 years old. The majority of the young people in this age group will be attending a post-primary school however, after the age of 16, individuals will choose to follow one of several pathways. The Northern Ireland Learner Journey diagram below provides a visual overview of the landscape.



18. There is much to celebrate about our education and training system and there are many examples of good practice. This is reinforced by a range of evidence including the PISA²¹ study of educational achievement which showed that 15-year-old pupils in Northern Ireland performed significantly above the OECD average in reading. In addition, Northern Ireland scored significantly higher than 45 of the 76 reported countries in mathematics. The top performers in each subject remain largely composed of countries from East Asia. Furthermore, the Trends in International Maths and Science Study²² (TIMSS), assesses the knowledge and skills of pupils aged 9-10 (and ages 13-14, although Northern Ireland participated at the younger age range) in over 60 countries and provides data about trends in mathematics and science achievement over time. Fifty-eight countries participated in 2019 and Northern Ireland pupils were ranked seventh out of 58 countries and regions in mathematics and were ranked 26th in science.

20 [NISRA 2018 Population Projections](#)

21 [PISA 2018 Achievement of 15-year-olds](#)

22 [Trends in International Maths and Science \(TIMSS\) Study](#)

19. While there have been positive outcomes for the majority of learners in recent years, it is widely recognised that Northern Ireland's education and training system is complex with a range of challenges impacting on our young people, our economy and our society.

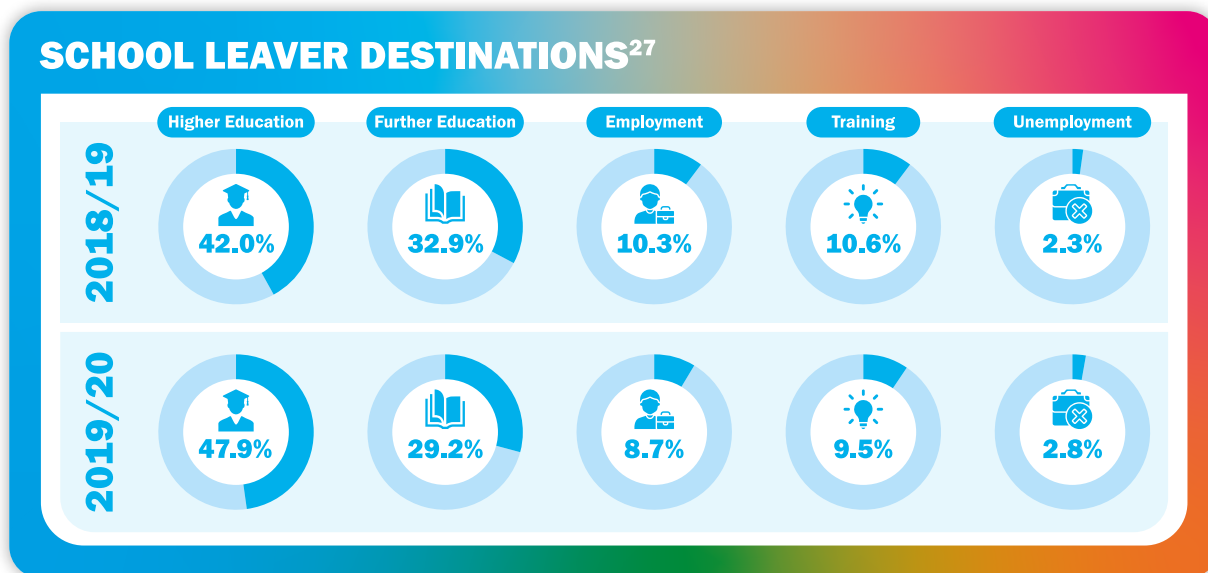
There is much to celebrate about our education and training system and there are many examples of good practice.

20. The 14-19 phase of education is crucial for all young people however, the breadth and complexity of the current 14-19 education and training landscape cannot be underestimated. A young person entering the 14-19 phase of education and training encounters a series of transition points in this five year period. This begins with having to make subject choices for their Key Stage 4 programme of study at the age of 14, which may steer them towards a specific pathway or career. At 16 years old, young people have to make further and more definite decisions not just about what they want to study but also where and how. Young people may choose to remain in school, attend one of six Further Education (FE) Colleges, attend the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE), undertake an Apprenticeship (or Higher Level Apprenticeship), take part in a training programme or enter employment. Some young people will be identified as Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) or may be taking part in one of several European Social Fund (ESF) projects or United Youth.
21. The Department of Education publishes an annual statistical bulletin on the '*Qualifications and Destinations of Northern Ireland School Leavers*'²³ which includes all young people leaving school, whether that be after Year 12, 13 or 14. In the period between 2009/10 and 2018/19, there was little fluctuation in the destinations of school leavers however, in the 2019/20 year some variations can be seen. This could be attributed to the impacts of Covid-19 including the different process for awarding qualifications in 2019/20.
22. Most young people choose to remain in school until they are 18. In the 2018/19 school year, 160 out of 196 post-primary schools (82%) had sixth form provision with around 63% of all 16-17 year olds in Northern Ireland studying a Level 3 course in school, usually A levels or equivalent.²⁴ This participation in sixth form provision has stabilised in recent years but still represents a significant increase from 46% in 2003/04. Most recently, in 2019/20 and 2020/21 respectively, 61% and 63% of all 16-17 years olds were in school sixth forms.

23 [Qualifications and Destinations of Northern Ireland School Leavers](#)

24 [School enrolments](#)

23. In terms of those who choose to leave school, 95.8% of 2018/19 school leaver (Years 12, 13 and 14) destinations were recorded by their school as either education, employment or training. This includes a range of destinations and the proportion remained consistent in the 2019/20 year (95.3%).



24. A proportion of young people leaving the school system will enter Higher Education, attending a university of their choosing. In 2018/19 42.0% of pupils leaving school entered Higher Education with the proportion of girls (49.2%) continuing to Higher Education higher than that for boys (35.0%). In 2019/20 there was a 5.9% increase in those leaving school entering Higher Education (47.9%).
25. In addition to those young people studying courses at one of our six FE colleges, some young people will move on to study a Level 2 or Level 3 qualification at one of CAFRE’s three campuses in Enniskillen, Antrim (Greenmount) or Cookstown (Loughry) where a wide range of courses are offered in agriculture, food, horticulture, equine and agri-food business to school leavers and to farmers, farm family members and those who work in the food and land-based industries. The proportion continuing on to Further Education decreased from 35.4% in 2013/14 to 32.9% in 2018/19. This figure reduced further in 2019/20 to 29.2%.
26. Relatively few young people leave school and enter directly into employment. However, the proportion of school leavers entering employment has increased by 3.4 percentage points from 6.9% in 2013/14 to 10.3% in 2018/19. In 2019/20 the proportion declined slightly to 8.7%.

27. Some young people will choose to enrol in training provision. DfE introduced a new Traineeship programme from September 2021, which is delivered by FE Colleges across Northern Ireland. The Traineeship replaces Training for Success, Skills for Work, Level 2 and FE Level 2, mainstream vocational education and training programmes. The programme aims to deliver a full level 2 qualification, equating to a minimum of five GCSEs at grades A*- C, including English and maths, alongside vocational education and training and structured work-based learning to young people who are over 16. The Traineeship will normally take two years to complete and will provide alternative pathways with parity of esteem for those young people who do not wish to follow an academic route, enabling participants to gain the skills needed to access employment, Level 3 Apprenticeships and higher levels of Further Education. At 15.3%, the proportion of boys entering Training in 2018/19 was almost treble that of girls (5.8%).²⁶
28. Apprenticeships NI aims to provide participants with the opportunity to take part in a Level 2 / Level 3 Apprenticeship where the apprentice, in paid employment from day one, works towards achieving an industry-approved Level 2 / Level 3 Apprenticeship Framework.²⁷ The Higher Level Apprenticeship (HLA) Level 4 and 5 programme provides further progression opportunities with a parallel route to the traditional academic pathway, focused on the skills needed by the local economy, with opportunities for the apprentice to work towards an internationally recognised qualification. This also provides an opportunity to attract underrepresented groups to skills pipelines required for the Northern Ireland economy and specifically women into Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) disciplines.

26 It should be noted that young people following an apprenticeship route are recorded under 'training'. DE does not currently have a code to record Higher Level Apprenticeships and these are currently being recorded against the institution the leaver attends so could be included in either the Higher Education or Further Education category.

27 [Apprenticeships NI Statistics](#)

THE NEED FOR A MORE STRATEGIC APPROACH TO 14-19 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

29. The range of pathways, particularly at the end of Key Stage 4 and post-16, are wide-ranging and provide opportunities for progression however, with multiple options and a complex range of qualifications available there is a need to ensure that young people, their parents and their carers understand and are aware of the full range of options in order to make informed choices about their future. It is important that they also understand the potential implication of their choices in terms of future education, training and employment.
30. As previously noted, young people encounter a series of transition points in the 14-19 phase of their education. This begins at the age of 14 with subject choices for their Key Stage 4 programme of study which may steer them towards a specific pathway or career. At 16 years old, young people have to make further and more definite decisions about not just what they want to study but also where and how. A small number may choose to leave education and training at this point. For those who remain in the education and training system, at 18 years onwards, decisions are made on continuation of a programme of study or, to enter employment.

KEY TRANSITION POINTS

CHOICES AT 14

Subject choices
for Key Stage 4
/ GCSE / Level 2
qualifications

CHOICES AT 16

School
Further Education
Apprenticeship
Training
Employment

CHOICES AT 18+

Apprenticeship
Further Education
Higher Education
Training
Employment

31. At each transition point there are also multiple pathways for a young person to choose from and these are not always communicated effectively.
32. There are a range of factors that influence the decisions made by young people including both peer and social influences, family expectations, costs and access to finance. Young people's ambitions and aspirations are often shaped by gender-specific ideas about certain jobs. Boys overwhelmingly aspire to take on roles in traditionally male-dominated sectors and professions. Gendered patterns also emerge in STEM-related professions. It is crucial that young people have a wide range of experiences of the world of work from a young age. High quality careers education and guidance is crucial in order to help young people make informed choices.
33. In order to support young people, it is crucial to address inconsistencies in how careers education and careers guidance is delivered across providers, as well as variations in the quality of this provision. Most recently, an Independent Review of Careers Guidance,²⁸ commissioned by the Department for the Economy highlighted the need to ensure that careers related learning starts much earlier; is informed by the future needs of the economy and encourages children to broaden their career ideas and to raise aspirations. Easily understood and accessible information must be readily available. In addition, teachers need to be equipped to deliver careers education in schools supported by the professional advisors in the Department for the Economy's Careers Service.

Easily understood and accessible information on careers must be readily available.

34. Employer engagement is also essential to ensure careers education and guidance is responsive to the needs of the economy and provides young people, parents and schools with information on current and future employment opportunities. The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) Chief Inspector's Report 2016-18²⁹ highlighted a paucity of appropriate professional development opportunities for teachers, particularly in forging better links with employers and securing first-hand work experience for teachers to learn lessons about business and industry.
35. We also need to ensure that every young person is equipped with the knowledge and skills to secure employment and contribute to the changing Northern Ireland economy. The Skills Barometer has identified skills gaps at levels 3, 4 & 5.³⁰ The Chief Inspector's Report 2016-18³¹ also highlighted that greater cognisance needs to be taken by pupils and teachers of the Skills Barometer report which identifies those skills that are likely to be in demand in the labour market over the next decade and which will support the main growth areas in the Northern Ireland economy.³²

28 [Transforming careers support for young people and adults in Northern Ireland](#)

29 [ETI Chief Inspector's Report 2016-18](#)

30 [Northern Ireland Skills Barometer, Summary Report, July 2019](#)

31 [ETI Chief Inspector's Report 2016-18](#)

32 [ETI Chief Inspector's Report 2016-2018](#)

36. As outlined previously, most young people choose to remain in school until they are 18. As recognised by the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement³³, attention needs to be given to how young people progress on this pathway making sure that transition points are designed and delivered in the interests of individual pupils.
37. Whilst the actions set out in this Framework are intended to benefit all young people, those young people who have special educational needs (SEN) may face greater challenges in their journey through education and training, and in finding appropriate provision or employment once they leave education or training. As part of the implementation of the new SEN policy and legislative framework, the Department of Education will be taking forward a project to look at the transitions of children with SEN from education in to adulthood. The project will seek to review the existing transition planning arrangements including current pathways and services available in the Departments of Education, Health, Communities and Economy. It will put in place effective transition planning arrangements ensuring that all relevant parties are involved in the process at the right time and that statutory duties are met.

Increasing collaboration and enhancing partnerships is crucial in maximising progression and outcomes for our young people.

38. Increasing collaboration and enhancing partnerships is crucial in maximising progression and outcomes for our young people. Collaboration between schools, FE Colleges and other providers is encouraged at Key Stage 4 and post-16 and there are some outstanding examples of collaborative practice which is connecting young people to a range of pathways. However, challenges in terms of parity of esteem between qualifications (e.g. professional and technical qualifications and general qualifications for example, BTECs and A levels), and also between what are described as the academic / traditional and vocational / professional and technical pathways need to be addressed. It must be acknowledged that funding, or lack thereof, is potentially impacting on the collaborative provision between schools and FE colleges. The reduction in Entitlement Framework funding has resulted in schools withdrawing from collaborative arrangements and in some instances then duplicating the already available provision in FE colleges. Subsequently, the number of school pupils attending colleges for professional and technical provision under the Entitlement Framework declined by 43%³⁴ between 2013/14 and 2018/19.

33 [Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement in Northern Ireland: A Fair Start](#)

34 [DfE Further Education Ad Hoc tables](#)

39. With changing demographic trends for the 16-19 cohort, schools, FE colleges and other training providers are competing to attract full-time enrolments at post-16. The increased competition for young people between the Further Education sector and schools, where the factors which make some parents increasingly see remaining at school as a 'safe' choice for their children, also make recruitment onto some CAFRE programmes more challenging. The Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement recognised that this competition between Further Education and post-primary schools is not in the best interests of our young people at a critical stage in their education.

A more joined up approach to post-16 education and training policy will help create an efficient and effective system that meets the needs of young people and the economy.

40. There is widespread agreement that a more joined up approach to post-16 education and training policy will help create an efficient and effective system that meets the needs of young people and the economy. The development of a collaborative approach to post-16 education provides a unique opportunity to address the competition and duplication within the system and also improve the quality of provision and outcomes for the learner.
41. Specifically in relation to schools, whilst there are a range of policies that relate to post-16 provision or sixth forms - the *Entitlement Framework*³⁵, *Schools for the future – a policy for sustainable schools*³⁶ and *Every School a Good School*³⁷ - a recurrent theme raised suggests that the development of a dedicated Department of Education Sixth Form policy that sets out a clear, strategic vision for sixth forms has the potential to help move towards a more equitable and consistent approach to 14-19 education and training with young people at the centre.
42. The issue of qualifications was initially beyond the scope of the Transition of Young People into Careers (14-19) Project, however, issues with both general and vocational qualifications were consistently raised as a key challenge. There is consensus amongst the majority of stakeholders within the 14-19 landscape that there is a need to reform the qualifications system and simplify the multiplicity of qualifications which exist in Northern Ireland. The current qualifications landscape is complex, with too many qualifications which are poorly understood. Ultimately, the qualifications landscape needs to be streamlined, accessible and easily understood by young people, their parents and carers and employers.

35 [Entitlement Framework](#)

36 [Schools for the future – a policy for sustainable schools](#)

37 [Every School a Good School \(ESaGS\)](#)

43. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought about a number of significant challenges for the education and training system, in particular, the provision of courses and qualifications in the absence of face to face teaching and learning. The past two summers have seen the cancellation of key exams, along with schools and colleges engaging in a process of producing Centre Assessed Grades (2020) or Centre Determined Grades (2021) based on teacher professional judgement. There is a strong view among stakeholders that now is an opportune time to review how our learners are assessed and to identify how best to support young people in developing a range of skills and positive values going forward. Evidence³⁸ confirms that children who develop a positive attitude towards learning and strong cognitive skills in compulsory education will have greater motivation and foundations to participate effectively in adult learning later in life. Improving the curriculum and examination methods would help ensure that all learners develop the right skills and attitudes to learning in the context of megatrends.
44. Moving on to the curriculum and how it is delivered, the Northern Ireland Curriculum covers all 12 years of compulsory education and the overarching aim is ‘to empower young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions through their lives’. The Entitlement Framework³⁹ aims to provide young people at Key Stage 4 and post-16 with access to a broad and balanced curriculum, regardless of where they live or which school they attend. The curriculum offer should be diverse in order to meet the wide reach of young people’s skills, abilities and interests whilst also being relevant to the needs of the Northern Ireland economy. The courses available must be relevant and have clear progression pathways to further or higher education, training or employment.

The curriculum offer should be diverse in order to meet the wide reach of young people’s skills, abilities, interests whilst also being relevant to the needs of the Northern Ireland economy.

45. Whilst still in school at Key Stage 4 or post-16, young people may attend a FE college to complete part of their course. Alternatively, at post-16, young people might attend one of six FE colleges on a full time basis. In Further Education the Programme of Study within the colleges provides opportunities for student progression either within colleges or in conjunction with partner organisations.
46. The College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) provides a range of full and part-time education and industry short courses for those entering or already working in the agri-food industry. There is no statutory curriculum for CAFRE. A progressive education model is used, in which there is an emphasis on learning by doing – hands-on projects, expeditionary learning – and an integration of entrepreneurship in to education.

38 [OECD Skills Strategy Northern Ireland \(United Kingdom\): Assessment and Recommendations, p.30](#)

39 [Entitlement Framework](#)

47. The Northern Ireland Curriculum has been in place since 2007 and there is widespread recognition that its design is broadly sound. Whilst in theory, the curriculum is skills and knowledge based and captures exactly what young people require to progress, stakeholders observe that, in its delivery, the current system is geared to narrowing knowledge down to a single pathway, through subjects, rather than skills. The aim at Key Stage 4 is to empower pupils to become independent learners and prepare them for everyday life and lifelong learning. This includes fostering attitudes and dispositions to support personal development, active citizenship and employability. It should also focus on improving standards in literacy and numeracy across all subjects. This will help ensure they can build on their prior learning and achievements.

48. A consistent message from stakeholders across the 14-19 landscape is the implementation of the curriculum can be inconsistent and there are challenges to ensure sufficient opportunities for skills development at Key Stage 4, where in some cases assessment is driving practice and there can be a focus on a narrow set of skills. Stakeholders considered that work experience should be integrated throughout qualifications as this is essential to building skills, especially for those with additional needs. To address these challenges, we need to build awareness and understanding of the Northern Ireland Curriculum and refresh the focus on both knowledge and skills. This not only applies to schools but also extends to our further and higher education sectors, employers and wider society.

THE VISION FOR 14-19 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

49. In order to move forward and address the challenges identified within the current system, an agreed vision for 14-19 education and training is of central importance. The vision for 14-19 education and training has been developed in collaboration with stakeholders, and sets out the aspirations for the 14-19 education and training landscape in Northern Ireland. We need to ensure that every young person is equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to fulfil their potential. We need to ensure they are equipped with skills and attributes to contribute to both society and the economy of the future.

Our Vision for 14-19 Education and Training

“Educating all of our young people to develop their knowledge and skills, enabling them to fulfil their potential and contribute to society, the economy and the environment”

A FRAMEWORK TO TRANSFORM 14-19 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

50. The aim of this Framework is to set out a pathway to realise the 14-19 education and training vision. In realising the vision for 14-19 education and training, there are three key drivers:
- Every young person is equipped to fulfil their potential;
 - Improved awareness and understanding of the pathways through 14-19 education and training; and
 - Our 14-19 education and training system is efficient and effective and meets the needs of young people and the economy.
51. The Framework sets out a series of strategic actions which have been grouped into five key themes. The five key themes are:
- Curriculum and Qualifications;
 - Post-16 Provision;
 - Careers;
 - Awareness and Engagement; and
 - 14-19 Education and Training System.
52. Under each theme, the strategic actions provide a clear direction of travel for 14-19 education and training, signalling where emphasis and resources should be directed to help address the key challenges identified. The strategic actions are underpinned by supporting actions which provide detail as to what activities need to be initiated and progressed over the short, medium and long term to ensure the overarching objectives and outcomes are achieved.
53. This Framework should ensure that some actions to start the journey towards a more joined up and collaborative system can be progressed whilst recognising that some of the issues to be addressed will take some years to move forward. It will also give the flexibility to respond to other ongoing reviews such as the Independent Review of Education⁴⁰.

40 [Independent Review of Education](#)

54. While the Framework focuses on improving the 14-19 educational and training landscape, the delivery of these actions is resource dependent. The resource requirements to take forward some of the actions are significant and in some instances will require the establishment of dedicated projects or additional staffing resource. We also recognise the need to ensure that our teaching staff in schools, colleges and universities as well as our education and training partners including the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), the Education Authority (EA) and the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) have the capacity to support the delivery of these actions as they balance their various priorities. In that, it is crucial that appropriate resources are allocated to ensure that the actions can be taken forward and embedded successfully.
55. Coupled with the other activities ongoing across the Department of Education, the Department for the Economy and beyond, the strategic and supporting actions within this Framework should ensure that we have an education and training system that meets the needs of young people and develops the skills that they require to progress, fulfil their potential and contribute to the Northern Ireland economy and beyond.

A FRAMEWORK TO TRANSFORM 14-19 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

OUR VISION FOR 14-19 EDUCATION AND TRAINING:

“Educating all of our young people to develop their knowledge and skills, enabling them to fulfil their potential and contribute to society, the economy and the environment”

In realising our vision for 14-19 education and training there are 3 Key Drivers

- 1** Every young person is equipped to fulfil their potential
- 2** Improved awareness and understanding of the pathways through 14-19 education and training
- 3** Our 14-19 education and training system is efficient and effective and meets the needs of young people and the economy

A series of strategic actions under 5 Key Themes will be taken forward to deliver our vision



Curriculum and Qualifications



Post-16 Provision



Careers



Awareness and Engagement



14-19 Education and Training System

Under each theme, the strategic actions provide a clear direction of travel for 14-19 education and training, signalling where emphasis and resources should be directed to help address the key challenges identified. Underpinning the strategic actions are a series of supporting actions to be taken forward in the short, medium and long-term.

IMPLEMENTING THE FRAMEWORK

56. If the Framework is to have a truly transformative effect, it will require commitment across the government departments, arms-length bodies, and the wider education and training community. A high degree of focus and collaborative working between government departments, arms-length bodies, schools, FE Colleges, CAFRE, universities, parents and young people will be critical to its success. In taking forward the actions, there are also significant opportunities for employers and industry to contribute to the shape of the future 14-19 landscape.
57. This Framework cannot be considered in isolation from other key public strategies and initiatives. It is vital that any overlapping strategies are cognisant of each other and there are better connections on progression to ensure more harmony and collaboration and avoid contradiction and duplication.
58. As already noted, the implementation of the Framework is resource-dependent. Many of the actions within this framework cannot be delivered within the current resources available however, if we are to transform the 14-19 education and training system and address the challenges for the benefit of our young people and our economy, investment will be required.

MEASURING AND ENSURING SUCCESS

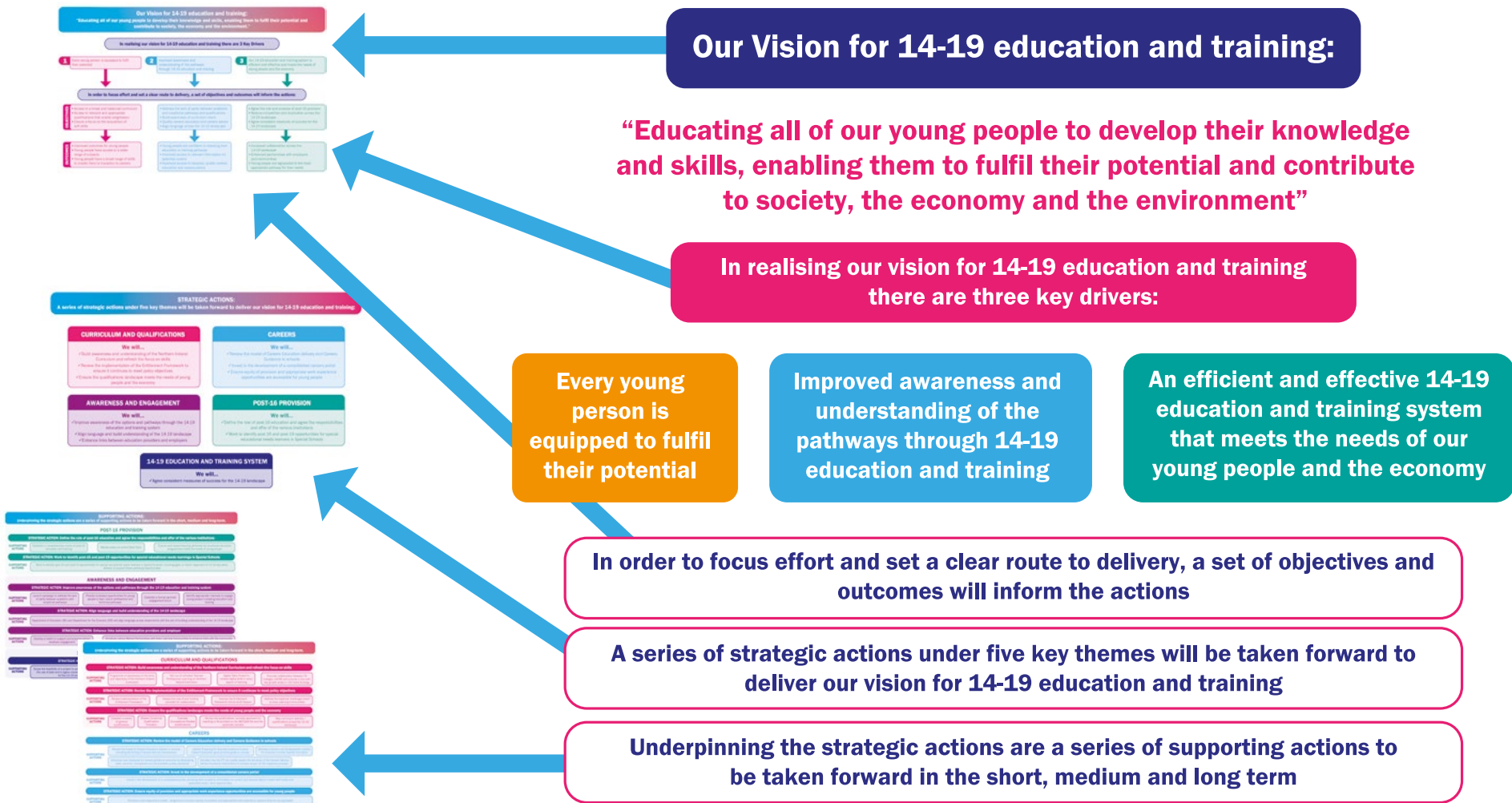
59. A wide range of performance indicators and success measures have been developed within the 14-19 education and training landscape. Under the '14-19 Education and Training System' theme, the Strategic Action to '*Agree consistent measures of success for the 14-19 Landscape*' seeks to address the significant challenges in relation to the interpretation and translation of statistical data by departments, institutions and wider stakeholders.
60. Consideration needs to be given to the current assessment measures in place and how we can ensure that these are more flexible in terms of accommodating a broad and diverse range of learning pathways. We also know that there is a need to clarify and communicate to young people, parents/carers, employers and other stakeholders what is understood by success for 14-19 year olds.

Consideration needs to be given to the current assessment measures in place and how we can ensure that these are more flexible in terms of accommodating a broad and diverse range of learning pathways.

61. Nonetheless, in order to track the implementation and progress of this Framework, in addition to monitoring the progress of each of the actions we need to identify suitable measures to allow us to see the impact of the strategic actions. This will be taken forward as part of the development of implementation plans for the Framework.

A FRAMEWORK TO TRANSFORM 14-19 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Navigating the 14-19 Framework



A FRAMEWORK TO TRANSFORM 14-19 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Our Vision for 14-19 education and training:

“Educating all of our young people to develop their knowledge and skills, enabling them to fulfil their potential and contribute to society, the economy and the environment.”

In realising our vision for 14-19 education and training there are 3 Key Drivers:

1

Every young person is equipped to fulfil their potential

2

Improved awareness and understanding of the pathways through 14-19 education and training

3

Our 14-19 education and training system is efficient and effective and meets the needs of young people and the economy

In order to focus effort and set a clear route to delivery, a set of objectives and outcomes will inform the actions:

OBJECTIVES

- ▶ Access to a broad and balanced curriculum
- ▶ Access to relevant and appropriate qualifications that enable progression
- ▶ Ensure a focus on the acquisition of soft skills

OUTCOMES

- ▶ Improved outcomes for young people
- ▶ Young people have access to a wider range of subjects
- ▶ Young people have a broad range of skills to enable them to transition to careers

OBJECTIVES

- ▶ Address the lack of parity between academic and vocational pathways and qualifications
- ▶ Build awareness of curriculum intent
- ▶ Quality careers education and careers advice
- ▶ Align language across the 14-19 landscape

OUTCOMES

- ▶ Young people are confident in choosing their education or training pathways
- ▶ Improved access to relevant information on potential careers
- ▶ Improved access to bespoke, quality careers education and careers advice

OBJECTIVES

- ▶ Agree the role and purpose of post-16 provision
- ▶ Reduce competition and duplication across the 14-19 landscape
- ▶ Agree consistent measures of success for the 14-19 landscape

OUTCOMES

- ▶ Increased collaboration across the 14-19 landscape
- ▶ Enhanced partnerships with employers and communities
- ▶ Young people are signposted to the most appropriate pathway for their needs

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

A series of strategic actions under five key themes will be taken forward to deliver our vision for 14-19 education and training:

CURRICULUM AND QUALIFICATIONS

We will...

- ✓ Build awareness and understanding of the Northern Ireland Curriculum and refresh the focus on skills
- ✓ Review the implementation of the Entitlement Framework to ensure it continues to meet policy objectives
- ✓ Ensure the qualifications landscape meets the needs of young people and the economy

CAREERS

We will...

- ✓ Review the model of Careers Education delivery and Careers Guidance in schools
- ✓ Invest in the development of a consolidated careers portal
- ✓ Ensure equity of provision and appropriate work experience opportunities are accessible for young people

AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT

We will...

- ✓ Improve awareness of the options and pathways through the 14-19 education and training system
- ✓ Align language and build understanding of the 14-19 landscape
- ✓ Enhance links between education providers and employers

POST-16 PROVISION

We will...

- ✓ Define the role of post-16 education and agree the responsibilities and offer of the various institutions
- ✓ Work to identify post-16 and post-19 opportunities for special educational needs learners in Special Schools

14-19 EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM

We will...

- ✓ Agree consistent measures of success for the 14-19 landscape

SUPPORTING ACTIONS

Underpinning the strategic actions are a series of supporting actions to be taken forward in the short, medium and long-term.

CURRICULUM AND QUALIFICATIONS

STRATEGIC ACTION: Build awareness and understanding of the Northern Ireland Curriculum and refresh the focus on skills

SUPPORTING ACTIONS

Programme of awareness on the aims and objectives of the Northern Ireland Curriculum

Roll out of refresher Teacher Professional Learning on Northern Ireland Curriculum

Digital Skills Project to embed digital skills in every aspect of learning

Promote collaboration between FE Colleges, CAFRE and schools in line with key growth areas in 10X Skills Strategy

STRATEGIC ACTION: Review the implementation of the Entitlement Framework to ensure it continues to meet policy objectives

SUPPORTING ACTIONS

Review implementation of the Entitlement Framework

Assess the cost of and funding provided for collaboration

Improve the Entitlement Framework Online Audit System

Address the logistical challenges faced by Area Learning Communities

STRATEGIC ACTION: Ensure the qualifications landscape meets the needs of young people and the economy

SUPPORTING ACTIONS

Establish a review of general qualifications

Review Vocational Qualification Provision

Evaluate Occupational Studies qualifications

Review the qualifications currently approved for teaching in NI as listed on the NIEFQAN file and the approvals process

Map curriculum delivery / qualifications across the 14-19 landscape

CAREERS⁴¹

STRATEGIC ACTION: Review the model of Careers Education delivery and Careers Guidance in schools

SUPPORTING ACTIONS

Review the model of Careers Education delivery in schools including the timing of Careers Service interventions

Update Preparing for Success Guidance & Issue Careers Education good practice guide or circular

Develop a Careers and Employability module for inclusion in Initial Teacher Education

Introduce new measures for careers guidance outcomes by developing clear, common, transparent and accountable quality standards

Consider how the ETI can quality assess the provision of the Careers Service Careers Guidance interventions in schools as part of the inspection process

STRATEGIC ACTION: Invest in the development of a consolidated careers portal

SUPPORTING ACTIONS

Invest in the development of a consolidated portal, providing open access to information on current and forecast labour market skill needs and applicable study / work opportunities

STRATEGIC ACTION: Ensure equity of provision and appropriate work experience opportunities are accessible for young people

SUPPORTING ACTIONS

Develop a work experience model / programme to ensure equity of provision and appropriate work experience opportunities for young people

41. The supporting actions outlined under the 'Careers' theme will form the initial steps to address the recommendations from the Independent Review of Careers Guidance as commissioned by the Department for the Economy.

SUPPORTING ACTIONS

Underpinning the strategic actions are a series of supporting actions to be taken forward in the short, medium and long-term.

POST-16 PROVISION

STRATEGIC ACTION: Define the role of post-16 education and agree the responsibilities and offer of the various institutions

SUPPORTING ACTIONS

Establish a comprehensive review of post-16 education and training

Review policy on school Sixth Form

Ensure work based learning delivered via vocational education programmes meets the needs of young people

STRATEGIC ACTION: Work to identify post-16 and post-19 opportunities for special educational needs learners in Special Schools

SUPPORTING ACTIONS

Work to identify post-16 and post-19 opportunities for special educational needs learners in Special Schools, including gaps, to inform alignment of 14-19 education delivery to support these pathways/opportunities

AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT

STRATEGIC ACTION: Improve awareness of the options and pathways through the 14-19 education and training system

SUPPORTING ACTIONS

Launch campaign to address the lack of parity between academic and vocational pathways

Provide increased opportunities for young people to learn about professional and technical pathways

Establish a formal parental engagement forum

Identify appropriate channels to engage young people in shaping education and training

STRATEGIC ACTION: Align language and build understanding of the 14-19 landscape

SUPPORTING ACTIONS

Department of Education (DE) and Department for the Economy (DfE) will align language across departments with the aim of building understanding of the 14-19 landscape

STRATEGIC ACTION: Enhance links between education providers and employer

SUPPORTING ACTIONS

Develop a toolkit to support and enhance school employer engagement

Introduce Labour Market Partnerships with Area Learning Communities to enhance links with the community and employer engagement

14-19 EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM

STRATEGIC ACTION: Agree consistent measures of success for the 14-19 landscape

SUPPORTING ACTIONS

Scope the feasibility of a project to address the challenges around the use of data and to agree consistent measures of success for the 14-19 landscape

Progress an agreement to continue to provide all school pupils with Unique Learning Numbers

Develop a single approach to the analysis of the costs of delivery and provision across the 14-19 landscape