

DRAFT COMMENT

FURTHER EDUCATION MEANS BUSINESS

CONSULTATION ON POLICY PROPOSALS FOR:

- **Curriculum Provision in Further Education Colleges to Support the Economy**
- **Curriculum Provision in Further Education Colleges to Support Social Inclusion**
- **Provision in Further Education Colleges for 16 to 19 Year Old Learners**

CONSULTATION RESPONSE BOOKLET

November 2007

Consultation on Further Education curriculum

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Organisation on whose behalf you are replying if appropriate:
University and College Union

Does your response represent the collective view of your organisation

Yes

Your position within the organisation: Regional Official

THEME 1: CURRICULUM PROVISION IN FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES TO SUPPORT THE ECONOMY

The Department has made a series of recommendations for improvement in this theme. At the end of each group of recommendations there is a question, or number of questions, to which you are asked to respond.

COLLEGE PROVISION IN PRIORITY SKILLS AREAS

Recommendation 1

The Department will continue to view Further Education college provision within the priority skills areas as critical, and continue to provide weighted funding for priority skills provision, primarily at Level 2 and Level 3.

Recommendation 2 (see also recommendation 15)

The Department will consider providing weighted funding for some aspects of priority skills provision at Level 1 - where relevant Sector Skills Councils identify specifically that Level 1 qualifications are important to their sectors.

Recommendation 3

The Department will agree enrolment targets with colleges through the annual College Development Planning process to increase incrementally the % of provision in priority skills areas.

Recommendation 4

The Department will consider the evidence-base to support sub-regional needs and, if deemed appropriate, the Department may consider applying the same weighted funding that other priority skill areas will attract, and consider allowing colleges to include any appropriate provision in their agreed enrolment targets.

Question 1 (Recommendations 1 to 3)

Do you agree that, through weighted funding and performance targets, colleges should be encouraged to increase the proportion of their provision that is in Northern Ireland's identified priority skill areas? Please comment.

UCU has concerns with recommendations 1-3. The priority skills areas identified by the Skills Expert Group relate mainly to the needs of the private sector of the economy. Whilst UCU recognises government's aim is to increase the contribution of the private sector to the Northern Ireland economy, the needs of the public sector must not be neglected. Areas such as health and social care, the environment, education and public administration are also vital to economic well-being. Weighting of funding which militates against those areas of provision is not in the interests of employers or employees in these areas of economic activity. Furthermore, weighted funding which diverts colleges away from delivery to meet the needs of the public sector and targeting social need would result in a dis-service to the wider fabric of our society.

Question 2 (Recommendation 4)

Do you agree that weighted funding should be applied to sub-regional skills needs? Please comment.

Notwithstanding our comment to question 1 above, there is a case to be made for targeting provision to meet local needs - weighted funding available at local level could assist the development of a skills base in an area where a need has been identified. The justification for same however would need to be clearly stated, transparent and in the public domain.

COLLEGE PROVISION AT LEVEL 2 AND ABOVE

Recommendation 5

The Department will continue to view all college provision at Levels 2 and 3 as high priority, and will support this position through weighted funding.

Recommendation 6

The Department will agree enrolment targets with colleges through the annual College Development Planning process to increase incrementally the % of Level 2 and Level 3 provision delivered by the Further Education sector.

Question 3 (Recommendations 5 and 6)

Do you agree that a key objective for Further Education colleges is to encourage and support learners to progress to Levels 2 and 3, and that through weighted funding and performance targets, colleges should be encouraged to increase the proportion of their provision that is at Levels 2 and 3? Please comment.

The evidence shows a significant and persistent demand for provision at level 1. Until evidence indicates a fall off in the demand, colleges must continue to meet it. To require colleges to prioritise levels 2 and 3 could be detrimental to the interests particularly of the adult learning community.

In its approval of college development plans, the Department would be wise to listen and pay heed to the views of local college managers as to what the needs are of learners in their localities and to approve proposals aimed at progression from a baseline below that of level 2.

PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE PROVISION

Recommendation 7

The Department will agree enrolment targets with colleges through the annual College Development Planning process for the proportion of their provision that should be of a professional and technical nature.

Question 4 (Recommendation 7)

Do you agree that Further Education colleges should be encouraged to increase the proportion of their provision that is of a professional and technical nature? Please comment.

UCU supports recommendation 7 – we would seek acknowledgement from the Department that such provision is accepted as being wider than the prescribed priority skills areas.

Recommendation 8

The Department will support colleges to continue to deliver all academic and applied 'A' Level and GCSE provision for adults.

Question 5 (Recommendation 8)

Do you agree that Further Education colleges should continue to be the main providers of academic and applied 'A' Level and GCSE provision for adults? Please comment.

UCU supports recommendation 8. The successful "A" Level and GCSE provision offered by colleges should be continued for young people in 16 – 19 age group who prefer FE to the schools system. In terms of college organisation and teaching experience the two are complementary.

ACCREDITATION OF COLLEGE PROVISION

Recommendation 9

The Department will move away from monitoring NQF Provision at course level to monitoring the extent of learner enrolments on NQF provision.

Recommendation 10 (see also Recommendation 17)

The Department will agree enrolment targets with colleges through the annual College Development Planning process for the proportion of their provision that should be based on the NQF. For the sector as a whole, the recommendation is that by the 2009/10 academic year 95% of colleges' taught hours of delivery should be on courses that are on the NQF.

Recommendation 11

The Department will work with QCA, CCEA and Further Education colleges to produce a "Prescribed List of Approved Qualifications" (PLAQ) which will be deemed to be of similar status as NQF qualifications for the purposes of setting performance targets for Further Education colleges and for funding. However, only those qualifications which are valued by employers and endorsed by the relevant Sector Skills Council or Standards Setting Body for the occupational sector will be included on the PLAQ.

Recommendation 12

The Department will discourage colleges from offering non- NQF provision by not including it in performance targets set for regulated provision, and by funding colleges for no more than 5% of their taught hours of delivery (by 2009/10) for this type of provision.

Recommendation 13

The Department will use the NDAQ, and the Sector/ Subject Area Classification system within it, as the standard references for classifying provision and determining which qualifications are included on the NQF.

Question 6 (Recommendations 9 to 13)

Do you agree that colleges providing courses that are on the NQF is the best way to ensure that learners are offered provision that is of a high quality, that is recognised by other educational establishments and by employers and that guarantees progression routes for learners? Please comment.

UCU broadly agrees with this statement however there is a need to recognise the educational value of non-vocational/non-qualification types of courses which meet the needs of particular learning communities.

Question 7 (see also Question 12) (Recommendations 9 to 13)

Do you agree that NQF courses should be the main provision offered by Further Education colleges i.e. 95% of colleges' taught hours of delivery by 2009/10? Please comment.

There is confusion in the use of statistical information in this area. The main statistics used in the paper are based upon total enrolments. For example 3.3.10 shows 46% of total enrolments at Levels 2 or 3. This gives a misleading picture as to the hours taught by a college in that equal weight is given to a student on a 2 hour course and a full time student on 18 hours per week.

Total provision of colleges should be presented in total student contact hours. That measure is used in Para 3.3.26 and shows 93% of current taught hours is on the NVQ framework. Thus Levels 2 and 3 combined provision is a much higher percentage of college provision than the figure quoted at 3.3.10. The proposal to increase the figure to 95% of provision to be NQF courses by 09/10 is not unrealistic in that context.

Question 8 (Recommendations 9 to 13)

Do you agree that an approved list of courses is necessary to ensure that colleges are able to deliver high quality professional and technical courses that sit outside the NQF, but which are valued by employers? Please comment.

It will be helpful.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Recommendation 14

The Department will not be prescriptive in terms of how colleges can meet agreed curriculum targets. However, it will monitor progress and the impact of the curriculum changes and set performance measures accordingly.

Question 9 (Recommendation 14)

Do you agree that Further Education colleges are best placed to assess how their curriculum targets are achieved to best suit local needs and that, consequently, the Department should not be prescriptive in terms of how colleges meet the agreed targets? Please comment.

UCU agrees with this statement.

THEME 2: CURRICULUM PROVISION IN FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES TO SUPPORT SOCIAL INCLUSION

The Department has made a series of recommendations for improvement in this theme. At the end of each group of recommendations there is a question, or number of questions, to which you are asked to respond.

COLLEGE PROVISION AT LEVEL 1 AND BELOW

Recommendation 15 (see also recommendation 2)

The Department will continue to fund provision at Level 1 and below, although this type of provision will not attract weighted funding, except where Level 1 provision is in a priority skill area where the relevant Sector Skills Council identifies specifically that it is valuable to its sector.

Recommendation 16

The Department will require the focus for learners at Level 1 and below to be on learning programmes that support their progression into employment and/or on to higher levels of learning.

Recommendation 17(see also recommendation 10)

The Department will provide funding for up to 5% of a college's total taught hours of delivery in respect of provision that is not on the NQF, including recreational provision. In addition, recreational type courses that are delivered through NQF provision can also attract funding.

Question 10 (Recommendation 15)

Do you agree that colleges should be funded to deliver provision at Level 1 and below, but that weighted funding should only be available for Level 1 provision identified by SSCs as being relevant to their sectors? Please comment.

UCU does not support this view for a number of reasons. As we stated at question 1, the priority skill area approach is private sector orientated to the detriment of public sector employment interests – skills development is equally important in the public sector and should be funded at an equal level. Secondly SSC's for the most part in Northern Ireland are not at a level of development where they can make the kind of judgement the Department appears to expect from them - a small number of SSC's could make such a judgement but such is far from universal. The Department should take into account the views of Governing Bodies, college managers and lecturers in respect of decisions of this kind.

Question 11 (Recommendation 16)

Do you agree that the focus for provision at Level 1 and below should support learner progression to higher levels of study or into employment? Please comment.

Up to a point – progression to higher level of study may be attractive to some but not everyone – the system must be capable of meeting student individual needs and for many educational attainment for its own sake can be an enriching experience.

Question 12 (see also Question 7) (Recommendation 17)

Do you agree that by 2009/10 only 5% of colleges' taught hours of delivery should be on non-NQF provision? Please comment.

See response at question 7.

THEME 3: PROVISION FOR 16-19 YEAR OLD FURTHER EDUCATION ENROLLED STUDENTS

The Department has made a series of recommendations for improvement in this theme. At the end of each group of recommendations there is a question, or number of questions, to which you are asked to respond.

Recommendation 18

In liaison with Further Education colleges, and building on work already done by colleges, the Department will develop proposals for the introduction of an Individual Learner Programme for every 16 to 19 year old enrolling with Further Education colleges, commencing in the 2008/09 academic year.

Recommendation 19 (see also recommendation 24)

The Department will agree with the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) how this area of activity can be included in their routine inspection of college performance.

Recommendation 20

The department will support colleges to ensure that the essential skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT and the wider Key Skills of problem solving, team-working, and managing one's own learning, are provided for all 16-19 year olds where appropriate.

Recommendation 21

The Department will build into the curriculum a component on enterprise, and an understanding of how business operates in order to cultivate an entrepreneurial culture within the 16 to 19 year old cohort of students.

Question 13 (Recommendations 18 and 19)

Do you think that the enhanced Individual Learner Programme will add value to the curriculum offer for 16-19 year old students, and that it should be an area of college activity that should be inspected by the Education and Training Inspectorate? Please comment.

It may do – however the Department needs to be conscious of the workload implications for lecturers in such a development. Significant additional resources must be made available to enable lecturers to engage in such student contact activity. Furthermore there are implications for the sector by way of training and staff development to ensure consistency of practice and quality of delivery.

UCU would support this activity being inspected by the ETI.

Question 14 (Recommendations 20 and 21)

Do you agree that the curriculum offer for 16-19 year olds should include wider key skills that prepare young people for the world of work, and should cultivate an entrepreneurial culture within this cohort of students? Please comment.

We support the inclusion of wider key skills. As with the above however there are major resource implications for colleges in increasing provision in that area. Such an initiative can only be accomplished through the provision of extra tuition time for students.

UCU is not convinced that it is the role of educators to “cultivate on entrepreneurial culture”. Educators and educational establishments can impart learning, knowledge and skills to enable students to attain their full potential in employment and as active citizens. Entrepreneurial activity is merely one aspect of social and economic activity and colleges must make provision to meet all of society’s learning needs.

A LEVEL AND GCSE PROVISION

Recommendation 22

The Department will support and encourage individual colleges to continue to work collaboratively with post-primary schools in the context of area planning, to determine the most appropriate balance between academic and applied 'A' Level and GCSE provision for 16 to 19 year olds.

Recommendation 23

The Department will not set specific targets for colleges regarding the balance to be achieved between academic and applied 'A' Level and GCSE provision. However, colleges can take this provision into account in achieving their wider curriculum performance targets.

Question 15 (Recommendations 22 and 23)

Do you agree that Further Education colleges should focus on providing more Applied 'A' Levels and GCSEs for 16-19 year olds in the context of Area Planning? Please comment.

UCU believes that FE colleges should continue to provide a wide range of academic and applied "A" level and GCSE programmes to 16 – 19 year olds who prefer FE colleges to the schools system. Student and parental choice should not be artificially restricted by limiting FE provision to solely applied A levels and GCSEs. It can be argued that subjects such as Physics, Chemistry or Biology are equally or possibly more appropriate for future employment than an applied "A" level science course.

It is also the case that recommendations 22 and 23 need to take account of the extensive range of BTEC National and Certificates offered successfully by FE colleges – these are the equivalent of applied A levels.

CAREERS EDUCATION, INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE (CEIAG)

Recommendation 24 (see also recommendation 19)

The Department will agree with the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) how this area of activity can be included in their routine inspection of Further Education college performance.

Recommendation 25

The Department will require each college to develop an Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) strategy, to be agreed with the Department and monitored under the College Development Planning process.

Recommendation 26

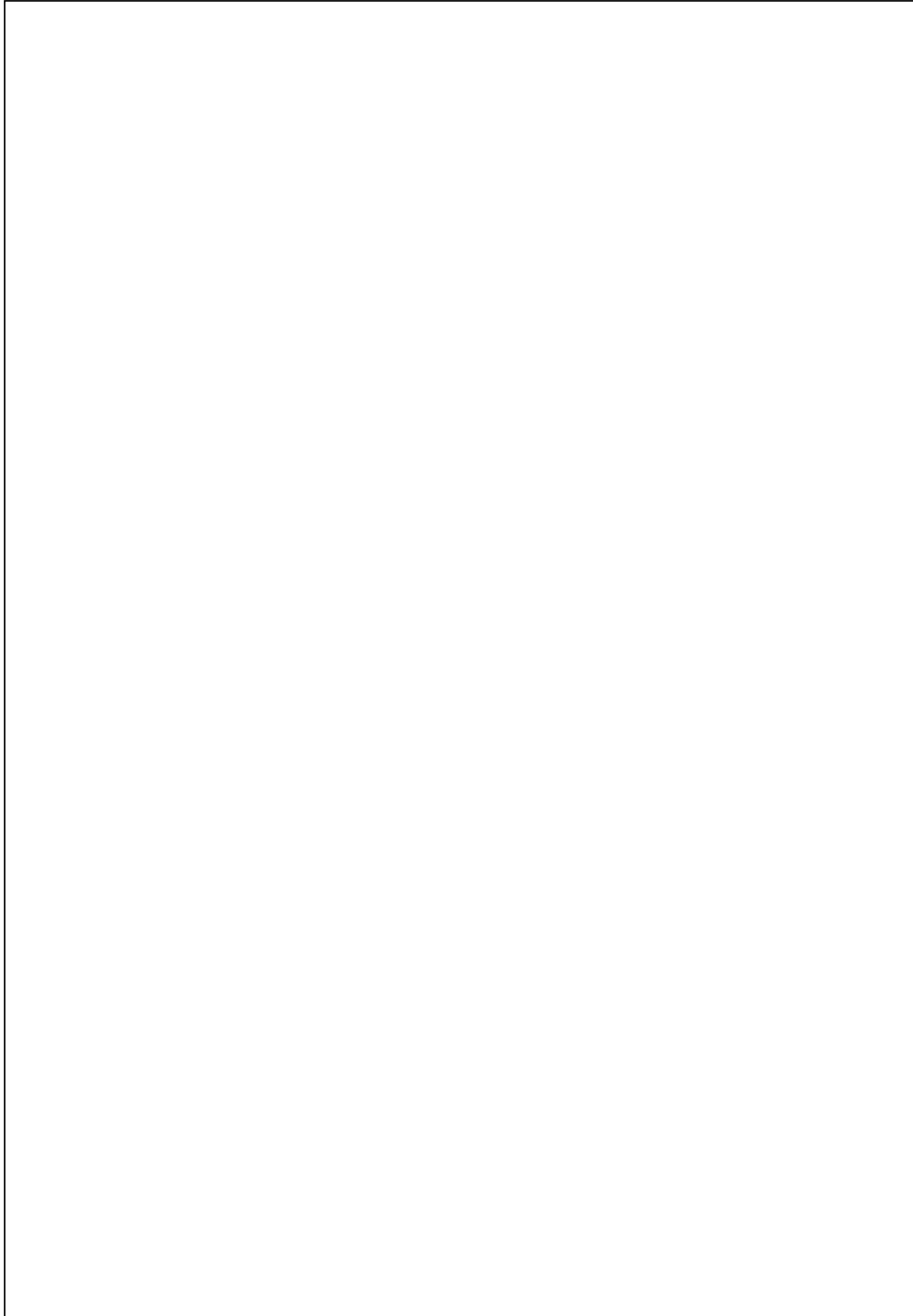
The Department will ensure that all IAG strategies are in line with the outworkings of the Department's CEIAG strategy, that is currently the subject of separate consultation.

Question 16 (Recommendations 24 to 26)

Do you agree that colleges should develop Information Advice and Guidance strategies to ensure that all 16 to 19 year old students enrolling in Further Education colleges, and where appropriate adult learners enrolling in Further Education colleges, are provided with the most appropriate package of learning to meet their specific learning needs? Please comment.

UCU supports the development of information advice and guidance strategies which are adequately resourced.

Please feel free to add additional comments on any aspect of this consultation.

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Thank you for taking the time to complete this response booklet.

Please return your completed questionnaire by email to:

FEProgramme@delni.gov.uk

If you cannot return it electronically please send your paper copy to:

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The closing date for response is 7 January 2008