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and Learning**
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SKILLS
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Downloadable response booklet for the
**New Further Education
Strategy for Northern Ireland**

July 2015

Please complete the following information.

NAME:

ORGANISATION:
(IF APPLICABLE)

POSTCODE:

E-MAIL ADDRESS:

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Responses can be submitted electronically via email or sent to the following address:

Further Education Strategy Programme Branch
Department for Employment and Learning
Adelaide House
39-49 Adelaide Street
Belfast
BT2 8FD.

By 5pm on 02 October 2015

For further information
Tel: 028 90 257630

[Email:FEStrategyProgrammeBranch@delni.gov.uk](mailto:FEStrategyProgrammeBranch@delni.gov.uk)

The Department cannot accept responses by telephone. General enquiry calls may be made to the above number.

Which category best describes you?

Employer

FE Sector

Student

Other

Other (please specify):

Trade Union

Please tick this box if you do not wish for your response to be published.

Please use the comment box below to explain why.

NEW FURTHER EDUCATION STRATEGY: CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Economic Development

Policy Commitment 1 – Priority Skills

Colleges will have a crucial role working with employers and other key stakeholders to ensure that the professional and technical qualifications and curriculum they provide support the rebalancing and rebuilding of the Northern Ireland economy.

Question 1 Do you agree that colleges should focus provision on those areas that contribute to rebalancing and rebuilding the economy?				
Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>
Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:				
<p>Before progressing with our consultation response, UCU would wish to make a clear point about the timing of this consultation into the future of Further Education in Northern Ireland – a strategy which is significant for our members. UCU is a democratic organisation, which means consultation with our members is a vital component of our work. The timescale for this consultation response – spanning the summer period - is particularly difficult for an education union to gain responses from members, or for arranging meetings with our membership committees to discuss, thereby ensuring that our members have a fair and adequate chance to share their views.</p> <p>UCU recognises colleges have a crucial role working with employers and other stakeholders to ensure professional and technical qualifications they provide is economy relevant. However, engagement with employers must not be permitted to extend into dictating curricula. The cyclical and varied nature of capitalist economy is such that to subordinate further education to ever changing demand in the short or medium term, will undermine colleges' abilities to develop specialisms over the longer term.</p> <p>There is an assumption in the question that as a society N.I. is through the worst of the recent economic downturn and the job in hand is to focus on rebalancing and rebuilding the economy. UCU doubts if this represents a realistic assessment of the political, economic horizon. The colleges' ability to build upon its provision to the economy has been seriously dented by the Executive's unwillingness to oppose austerity measures. It is difficult to conceptualise how colleges can drive forward provision delivery in the context of a Westminster political campaign to shrink the public sector of which FE is part. DEL has cut funding to the FE sector and prioritised funding Further Education staff redundancies rather than expand educational provision. In these circumstances, it is somewhat perplexing how the department expects the colleges to deliver the grandiose vision contained in this consultation.</p>				

Policy Commitment 2 – Levels of College Provision

Further education colleges will have a particular focus on further developing provision at level 3 (A level equivalent) and above in areas that will support the rebalancing and rebuilding of the Northern Ireland economy. Progression for learners who wish to study at higher levels will be encouraged and facilitated through the qualifications system, and through innovative delivery and clear pathways.

<p>Question 2 Do you agree that colleges should focus on developing provision at level 3 and above in areas that will support the economy and encourage progression for learners to study at higher levels?</p>				
<p>Strongly agree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Agree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Neither agree nor disagree</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/>*</p>	<p>Disagree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Strongly disagree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:</p>				
<p>While UCU agrees that colleges have a remit and responsibility to develop provision at level 3 we do not believe it should be an overriding focus or exclusionary to, the important work colleges do with level 2 students.</p> <p>FE colleges service significant numbers of students who do not succeed in gaining qualifications, for whatever reason, through the schools system. In many instances, the colleges provide a last chance opportunity for disadvantage young people to place their first step on the social mobility ladder. The importance of this cannot be over-estimated. The N.I. economy will not be bolstered by an educational emphasis that neglects the position of the most disadvantaged, this will simply serve to exacerbate disengagement and in a semi- post conflict society, this is dangerous. UCU believe development pathways from level 2 to promote greater engagement at level 3 and beyond is a more appropriate focus.</p>				

Policy Commitment 3 – Up-skilling the Existing Workforce

Colleges will support indigenous companies and new companies which are being established in Northern Ireland, to ensure that employees have the required knowledge, skills and qualifications. In doing this, colleges will operate in flexible ways in terms of where, when, and over what period of time up-skilling activities are provided, so that the needs of employers can be met effectively and in a manner which suits business needs.

Question 3

How can colleges build on the support they provide to employers with regards to up-skilling the workforce whilst ensuring they deliver services to employers in a flexible way?

UCU fundamentally disagrees with the assumptions underpinning the question. There is a difference between learners and workers. Those who fall within the worker category who can accurately be labeled the 'workforce' are those individuals who hold an employment contract. The matter of up-skilling is a negotiation that takes place between the two parties to the contract, on the basis of employer requirement and the employee's career aspiration. While employers may choose to avail of courses run at further education colleges, a publicly funded education system must be wide-ranging in its provision and not become a state subsidized alternative to employers properly investing in staff development.

There is an over-emphasis on private sector needs throughout this consultation which does not reflect the employment landscape of N.I.

Policy Commitment 4 – Support to Employers

Colleges will be at the forefront of providing support to employers to enable them to innovate, to grow, to operate more effectively and efficiently, to develop new products and to identify new markets for their products.

Question 4

How can colleges build on the support they provide employers to enable them to innovate, to grow, to operate more effectively and efficiently, to develop new products and to identify new markets for their products?

UCU believes private enterprise is responsible for its own research, development and product to market strategy.

Policy Commitment 5 – College Specialism and Regional Capacity

Centres of specialism and expertise will be developed in each college to enable the further education sector as a whole to deliver high quality professional and technical provision to employers. Through a collaborative approach, individual colleges will have identified sectors where they will be recognised for their expertise and specialism. As well as identifying specialisms, all colleges will develop networks of experts who will share the latest developments in curriculum and skills training across Northern Ireland.

Question 5a Do you agree that individual colleges should be identified as specialists in key sectors of the economy?				
Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:</i>				
<p>A cautious Yes. The specialism must be identified on the basis of an established and proven track record in the area.</p> <p>UCU does not believe a good example was set in this regard by the decision of the Belfast Met, and seemingly supported by the Minister, to close the Performing Arts department. This department had a long established relationship with the industry, its courses always well subscribed, with an extremely successful alumni. Despite this, the DEL chose to allocate funds to SERC for performing arts premises in Bangor, miles away from where the bulk of the industry is located. This then became the justification for the Met closing its successful operation, much to the consternation of the industry service users, staff and students of that department all of whom were totally disregarded.</p> <p>UCU is of the view that if colleges are to be identified as specialist sectors that status must be allocated on a transparent and well evidenced basis.</p> <p>The debacle concerning the Performing Arts, Belfast Met, SERC and DEL does not render the most auspicious start in the implementation of this policy direction.</p>				

Question 5b Do you agree that colleges should develop networks of experts to enable the sharing of latest developments across Northern Ireland?				
Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>
Please explain the reasons for your answer, and provide any supporting comments.				
<p>More detail about the role and remit of these 'networks of experts' is required to to answer this question properly.</p> <p>If the intention is to establish a network of experts drawn from colleges throughout the 6 centre's to promote good practice and knowledge transfer, a number of practical considerations arise.</p> <p>Lecturing staff are employed on an annualized hour's contract. UCU would expect any lecturer requested to participate in an experts' network to be incorporated within the agreed 1440 hours of work. UCU would have concerns about the workload associated with belonging to the expert panel and how this is to be managed? Will the role attract responsibility allowances? UCU would not welcome an arrangement whereby individuals are simply patronized through flattery into undertaking an additional workload burden to attract an expert status.</p> <p>UCU would expect the Department to allocate the colleges an additional budget to facilitate the network in order to ensure that our members who participate within it are appropriately recompensed.</p> <p>In principle UCU is not opposed to the concept of each FE college becoming a centre of specialist expertise, sharing the latest developments via a co-ordinated network. Our concern is feasibility within the current FE sector financial landscape and in the context of a shrinking workforce.</p>				

Social Inclusion

Policy Commitment 6 – Increasing Economic Participation through Engagement

Colleges' distinctive contribution to social inclusion will be to provide learners with the knowledge, skills and qualifications required to find, or progress within employment, in order to avail of the benefits of economic participation. Working in partnership with others, colleges will support diversity and social inclusion through widening access to provision for those with barriers to learning. They will work with other organisations in the voluntary, community and private sector to strengthen pathways for learners that can open up their ambition and develop their talents.

Question 6a

In what other ways can colleges support those with barriers to learning?

FE Colleges have made a distinctive contribution to social inclusion in Northern Ireland. However a strategy to promote social inclusion via 'increasing economic participation through engagement' is too narrow in focus and appears to be entirely subjugated to the FE sector bolstering up a private sector economy.

There is no escaping the fact that the austerity agenda has been devastating to voluntary and community groups, many of whom have had funding reduced or pulled completely. Similarly, colleges cannot do the work necessary to support those with barriers to learning without money.

Question 6b

How can colleges increase participation in further education, particularly those who are hardest to reach?

UCU believes that the ethos of the FE strategy outline in this consultation will not encourage colleges to focus on social inclusion initiatives.

Scant attention is given to social inclusion when compared to the space devoted to the needs of private enterprise and performance measurement strategies. UCU believes that the proliferation of proposed performance measures will be counter-productive to a social inclusion agenda. To pit college against college via an insistence that retention, achievement, progression and destination rates are published will not encourage colleges to recruit students in difficult social circumstances, or who have particular learning obstacles. If implemented, this strategy will coerce colleges to seek short term successes that reflect favourably in the performance measures. This must not become the *raison d'être* of FE.

Policy Commitment 7 – Improving Literacy, Numeracy and ICT

Colleges will raise the level of literacy, numeracy and ICT competence in Northern Ireland by adopting the new qualifications that are being developed through the refreshed Essential Skills strategy and the reviews of GCSEs in English and mathematics.

Question 7

In what other ways can colleges assist in raising the level of literacy and numeracy competency in Northern Ireland? In particular, how can colleges encourage participation on literacy and numeracy programmes?

Learners undertaking Essential Skills at college do so largely as a mandatory requirement to study on other courses. Typically, the student was unsuccessful at gaining essential skills qualifications at school. However much policy makers would like it to be otherwise, no amount of marketing is going to attract individuals who do not have an aptitude for, or enjoyment of, literacy and numeracy, onto those courses unless necessity dictates.

UCU believes retention rates might be improved with changes to course delivery. Evidence suggests that students learn better when taught often for shorter periods of time. Essential skills in small doses, spread over the course of the vocational training period, is likely to produce better outcomes.

Curriculum Delivery

Policy Commitment 8 – Using Technology to Enhance Learning

Colleges will adopt international best practice in the use of technology enhanced learning to support and improve their teaching and learning, and will adopt flexible approaches to learning to meet the needs of learners and employers.

Question 8a Do you agree that colleges should use technology to support and improve their teaching and learning?				
Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>
Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:				
Insufficient detail supplied about what constitutes international best practice to comment.				
UCU agrees that the role of technology should be supportive. It must not become a substitute for the teacher or used to undermine the important relationship between student and teacher i.e. pre-recorded online lectures.				

Question 8b

What are the main barriers to achieving this, and how could these be overcome?

No comment.

Question 8c

What types of flexible approaches can be used to meet the needs of learners and employers?

Teaching staff often feel frustrated that their ideas and potential solutions are not listened to by college hierarchies. Listening to staff when they present new ideas and innovative ways of recruiting and delivering programmes would better equip colleges to meet learner and industry needs.

Policy Commitment 9 – Developing Employability and Enterprise Skills

A distinctive element of provision delivered by colleges will be the development of employability skills, through high quality and relevant work placements and the use of virtual reality technology to simulate work placements in innovative and effective ways. Through their teaching strategies and approaches, colleges will also seek to develop enterprising learners, who are innovative and creative, and are able to adapt to change.

Question 9a Do you agree that work placements are the best way to develop employability skills in learners?				
Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>
Please explain the reasons for your answer, and provide any supporting comments:				
Work placements do enhance employability skills. However, there is still an important place for the classroom in developing the range of skills required to succeed in the labour market.				

Question 9b

Where work placements cannot be provided, do you agree that college based and simulated work placements are effective alternatives to employer based work placements?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>
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Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments, in particular what alternatives do you suggest?

Agree. College based and simulated work placements are suitable alternatives.

Question 9c

In what way can colleges develop enterprising learners who are innovative and creative, and who can adapt to change?

To develop innovative and creative learners it is important to integrate opportunities for “learning by doing” into the everyday curriculum of learners at all levels. This encourages learners to seek out answers for themselves rather than depending on the teacher/lecturer to lead and provide answers and solutions. In their core education market, colleges can develop a design focused methodology to enhance the learner experience for students at all levels, deliver an economically relevant curriculum and create new learner pathways.

Combining design thinking and opportunities for students to work on employer led projects – Project Based Learning – can enhance creative confidence while encouraging participants to explore and develop their potential to innovate. Project Based Learning involves working in small teams and immersing students in a thinking process to solve practical problems. Students learn to assess their ideas, accept that some ideas fail and understand that there is no predetermined right answer.

This approach not only develops problem solving skills but teaches students to work effectively in teams, improve their communication skills, hone and practice presentation skills and learn to negotiate and plan a project. These are all skills that employers identify consistently as required in the workforce and are essential to running a business.

During 2015 the Northern Ireland Science Park(NISP) carried out a stakeholder analysis process involving over 50 industry organisations in Northern Ireland. On the 22 September 2015 NISP published a number of reports and one of these entitled “Innovation into Action” had a particular emphasis on education. Two recommendations from this recent report were that

“Project based learning (design thinking) must be introduced into the curriculum as an essential skill for every child to equip them with the tools to be able to solve problems collaboratively.”

And

“Teach project based learning as a skill to all students. “Learning by doing” is the essential element of PBL, project based learning. PBL is a model for the classroom activity that shifts away from teacher-centered instruction and emphasises student-centered projects. This model helps make learning relevant to students by establishing connections to life outside the classroom and by addressing real world issues. In the classroom, PBL gives teachers an opportunity to build relationships with students by acting as their coach, facilitator, and co-learner. In the school and beyond, the model further allows teachers opportunities to build relationships among colleagues and with those in the larger community. Student projects can be shared with other teachers, parents, and others who have a vested interest in the students' education.

This benefits students by instilling independent thinking, growing confidence and a can do attitude. “

Policy Commitment 10 – Embedding High Quality Teaching

Through a new teacher education framework there will be a renewed focus on high quality initial teacher education and continual professional development for all lecturing staff, with minimum standards for pedagogy and subject qualifications put in place. College staff will also have the opportunity to undertake relevant and good quality industrial placements to ensure that they understand the needs of employers and workforce development. The quality improvement process, including the inspection regime, will be reviewed to ensure that it is appropriate for all aspects of delivery in colleges. The Department will support the development of research in pedagogy to inform best practice in professional and technical education and training to establish Northern Ireland as an internationally renowned centre for excellence in teacher education in professional and technical subjects.

Question 10a

Do you agree that a strong focus should be placed on continual professional development, including industrial placements across the further education sector?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:

Agree

UCU welcomes the re-launch of Lecturers into Industry. UCU would further welcome the GTCNI being given responsibility for the development and promotion of CPD.

There are some good examples of CPD programmes in colleges. However, UCU members report that the experience is varied, some colleges treat CPD as a tick box exercise to satisfy the Department. The result is online courses of the multiple choice question and answer variety that members do not feel enhances their pedagogical development in any meaningful way.

UCU is of the view that colleges have been given too much autonomy in CPD delivery. For lecturers to enhance their professional knowledge through CPD provision requires an improved and accountable regulatory framework.

Question 10b

Do you agree that minimum standards for pedagogy and qualifications should be put in place for all lecturers?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>
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Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:

Minimum standards for pedagogy and qualifications are already in place for those employed on the Full Time and Associate Lecturer contract.

UCU is in favour of part time hourly paid lecturers being given the opportunity to avail of the PGCFE. If the Department were to insist that all part time hourly paid lecturers must hold the PGCFE to teach, UCU would expect the same arrangement applicable to full time lecturers to be implemented i.e. study over two years to be obtained over a three year period and paid for by the employer. If the requirement becomes mandatory for PTLs, access to the PGCFE must be uniform to be consistent with less favourable treatment regulations.

Question 10c

Do you agree that the quality improvement process, including the inspection regime, should be reviewed to ensure that it is appropriate for all aspects of delivery in colleges?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:

Further information is required to understand the basis upon which it has been suggested that the current inspection regime might be inappropriate.

Inclusion of draft terms of reference would assist the consultee in providing informed comment.

Anecdotally, UCU members report that during the inspection cycle, the working atmosphere in colleges sour, as management panic to impress the ETI. Unreasonable work demands follow.

Policy Commitment 11 – Improving Performance

Standardised approaches to receiving and analysing feedback from learners and from employers will be developed and introduced. Additional performance measures will be adopted to enable colleges and the Department to monitor colleges' performance more effectively as part of quality management, including learner progression and learners' destinations after leaving further education. Colleges will publish information on learner retention, achievement, progression and destinations on their web sites in such a way as to inform learners' choice of courses on which to enrol.

Question 11a

Do you agree that standardised approaches to receiving and analysing feedback from learners and employers should be introduced across all colleges?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>
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Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:

What is proposed sounds dangerously close to establishing performance league tables between colleges which UCU could not support.

The FE colleges are spread across different geographical locations, servicing diverse populations both in terms of learners and employers. It is an erroneous assumption that valid comparisons can be made between colleges delivering similar programmes devoid of context in which the learning takes place and amongst whom.

The consultation notes that the colleges recruit across the five recognized groupings of deprivation. For feedback to be meaningful, the data capture instrument would need to reflect the reality of the learner's starting point. Frequently this is related to socio-economic circumstance and any difficulties the learner may have in terms of troubled family background or additional learning needs.

UCU do not believe it is possible to design a quantitative measure capable of capturing accurately the true benefits experienced by learners. The educational journey can often be more significant and life changing for the student than the post college destination.

UCU does not agree that publishing narrow data about retention, achievement, progression and destination will assist prospective students to make an informed course choice. Not least because it fails to reflect the background realities already identified but also because going to college is totally dissimilar to applying to university. A hypothetical example; if an applicant wishing to train in hairdressing lives in Bangor that individual is unlikely to avail of a hairdressing course in the South West College however superior SWC's performance indicators might be. Geography and financial viability will always trump the league table.

UCU believes that such performance indicators will exercise a negative impact upon lecturing staff and lead to a prioritization of number crunching above learner centered pastoral care.

Question 11b

Do you agree that additional performance measures should be introduced to take account of learners' progression into employment or further study, and that colleges should publish this information on their websites?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:

UCU does not believe it will be easy for colleges to collect this information and nor do we believe that in the context of diminishing resources this is a reasonable additional burden to levy.

International Dimension

Policy Commitment 12 – Operating Internationally

Colleges will enhance the learner experience, and the professional development and industrial knowledge of their staff, through placements and exchanges with similar institutions in other countries. They will also build on the excellent partnerships that have already been created across the world to share best practice with, and to learn from others. In addition, colleges will, with the Department, explore commercial opportunities to deliver more services in the international market.

Question 12a

How might colleges maximise placements for learners and the use of secondments and exchanges for staff outside of Northern Ireland?

UCU questions whether this is necessary or desirable. The colleges still have an enormous job to do in attracting and educating students in N. Ireland. UCU is aware limited international 'work' is occurring in some colleges. However, this usually does not involve staff beyond director level participating in and benefitting from international visits. For example, when personnel from the Belfast Met visited the Koning Willem College in Holland, not a single lecturer was permitted to go on the trip despite lecturers being those primarily responsible for the delivery of teaching and learning.

UCU suspects that the expenditure of international ventures exceeds the benefits. Those who participate in international trips must be required to demonstrate the usefulness of the visit at curriculum level upon their return.

In UCU's view, the Department should undertake a cost benefit analysis of international work done to date in the colleges, before adopting 'operating internationally' as a policy commitment.

Question 12b

How might colleges develop further partnerships with international organisations, including educational institutions and employers?

UCU does not believe this is what colleges should be doing.

Question 12c

Do you agree that colleges should explore opportunities to sell their education and training expertise internationally?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:

This should not be a priority for colleges. The reality is only one College in N.I. is grade one and arguably in a position to expand its focus internationally.

Colleges that are achieving grades of 3 and 4 in inspections, have a job of work to do improving their expertise in education and training before engaging in international marketing of that provision.

UCU does not believe a focus on international marketing of N.I. FE will be a fruitful policy direction. The reality is that it is enormously difficult to attract overseas students to take up courses below degree level. It is also the case that at degree level, the colleges are not well equipped to compete against the universities for international students. The universities have well developed research expertise and projects that feed into education delivery, the FE colleges do not. Why, given the choice, would an international student choose to study at N.I. FE college in preference to a university? For the colleges to devote attention to this policy direction will further divert resources from the disadvantaged N.I. population who most need it.

Governance

Policy Commitment 13 – Further Education Governance and Business Model

Colleges and the Department will work together to maximise the benefits to colleges and their customers of colleges' NDPB status, while also addressing any challenges posed.

Question 13

In what ways can colleges create income outside of funding provided by the department and wider public sector?

UCU is aware that the European Union funds social innovation projects. This could be explored.

College Partnerships

Policy Commitment 14 – Sectoral Efficiency through Collaborative Working

In order to ensure that their services are delivered with maximum efficiency colleges will operate more collectively in the delivery of their corporate services through a more rigorous and comprehensive approach to collaborative (shared services) working. Where appropriate, the colleges will take advantage of their NDPB status by adopting collaborative working opportunities that are available across the public sector in Northern Ireland.

Question 14 Do you agree that colleges should operate more collectively in their delivery of corporate services by adopting shared services through their NDPB status?				
Strongly agree <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>
Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:				
<p>UCU is in favour of the shared services project, the pursuit of this initiative will increase the Department's ability to safeguard funding into colleges' principle purpose of delivering education and training.</p> <p>However, UCU has been disappointed at the tortoise like pace in which the sector has progressed shared services. UCU believes that within FE administration there remains expensive and unnecessary duplication of function. For example, throughout the sector staff is employed on regionally agreed terms and conditions with the same policies and procedures applying in all colleges. This begs the question why it is necessary to have 6 HR departments? This function could easily be centralized generating efficiency savings to be re-invested into educational provision.</p>				

Policy Commitment 15 – Sectoral Effectiveness by Sharing Best Practice

Colleges will share best practice, and learn from each other, in the innovative and imaginative delivery of services to learners and employers. In particular, colleges will work together to ensure that technology can be developed and used in the most cost efficient and effective way to support learning.

Question 15

In what way can colleges share best practice in the efficient and effective delivery of services to learners and employers, including the use of technology?

UCU believes that to promote improved collaboration, communication and knowledge between colleges the Department must not proceed with performance measurement strategies that pit colleges against each other.

Historically, colleges have struggled to behave as a coherent collective. All too often the narrow organizational interest is prioritised over initiatives that might benefit the sector as a whole.

Policy Commitment 16 – Delivery Mechanism to Drive Efficiency and Effectiveness

A mechanism will be established to stimulate, manage and oversee collaboration and sharing of best practice between colleges to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of services, and to maximise the level of resource that is available to fund front line services.

<p>Question 16 Do you agree that a mechanism should be established to manage and oversee collaboration and sharing of best practice between colleges?</p>				
<p>Strongly agree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Agree</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/>*</p>	<p>Neither agree nor disagree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Disagree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Strongly disagree</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments, including how this could be achieved:</p>				
<p>There is no rational basis to oppose in principle the sharing of best practice.</p>				

Funding Model and College Sustainability

Policy Commitment 17 – Reviewing the Further Education Funding Model

Jointly with colleges, the funding model will be reviewed to ensure that it supports and incentivises colleges to deliver this strategy, that it supports a sustainable further education sector and that it aligns with the funding models that will be developed for other departmental programmes that further education colleges will deliver, in particular apprenticeships and youth training.

Question 17 Do you agree that the further education funding model should be reviewed to take account of the new further education strategy and the funding models for other DEL programmes, including apprenticeships and youth training?				
Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>
Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide any supporting comments:				
<p>UCU is nervous of revisiting the funding model in circumstances of budget reductions. Any diminution to the funding formula will invariably negatively impact upon staffing levels which are already over-stretched.</p> <p>Furthermore, UCU questions the truly consultative nature of this exercise if it has already been determined that the purpose of reviewing the funding model is to deliver the new FE strategy as proposed. Indicates a done deal rather than a consultation.</p>				

Promoting the Further Education Sector

Policy Commitment 18 – Promoting Further Education Provision

Colleges Northern Ireland, individual colleges and the Department will work together to demonstrate and explain the distinctive role that the further education sector has, as part of the wider education system, and the role that the sector plays in strengthening the Northern Ireland economy. More generally, the benefits and status of professional and technical qualifications will also be promoted.

Question 18a

What measures need to be taken to demonstrate and explain the distinctive role that the further education sector has as part of the wider education system, and the role that the sector plays in strengthening the Northern Ireland economy?

It is disappointing that legislation for the compulsory registration of further education lecturers to the GTCNI has been temporarily shelved. UCU believes that FE does not share parity of esteem either with the schools sector or HE partly because the professional status of its educators has failed to be appropriately recognized.

UCU urges the Department to force the FE employers to accept plans for the GTCNI to become a regulatory body. Sanctions should be applied to those colleges who attempt to undermine or refuse to co-operate with laudable GTCNI efforts to bolster FE professionalism.

Question 18b

How could the benefits of professional and technical qualifications be promoted to the users of qualifications?

Do not understand the question. Presumably users of qualifications have already identified the benefits?



Department for
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The Department:

Our aim is to promote learning and skills, to prepare people for work and to support the economy.

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