



- Comments on the Draft Economic Vision for Northern Ireland should be submitted to the following address:

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A DRAFT ECONOMIC VISION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

CONTENTS

Foreword	2
Economic Vision	4
Drivers to Achieve Vision	8
ANNEXES	
Annex A - Measurements of Success: The Challenge	14
Annex B - Driver priorities and links to Government strategies	15
Annex C - Equality considerations	22
Annex D - How to respond to this consultation Document	23

FOREWORD

Why do we need an economic vision for Northern Ireland (NI)?

1. The attached paper sets out our strategic vision for the Northern Ireland economy; it is shared by Government and its main economic partner bodies. The Government's long-term economic goal for the UK is to maintain macroeconomic stability, ensuring that the fiscal rules are met and that inflation remains low. Its policies will ensure that all regions can share in greater employment opportunity and rising living standards. For Northern Ireland, there are particular challenges and opportunities, and the vision and policies set out here focus on how we can all help make Northern Ireland a more competitive and productive region, as well as a fairer society.
2. For some time now there has been a consensus between the business organisations and Government as to the need for a strategic economic vision to provide a corporate and cohesive view of the Northern Ireland economy over the next decade. The attached draft builds upon the objectives and aspirations set out in a range of strategies and action plans which have a direct or indirect influence on the economy.
3. Our relatively small size acts both as an advantage and disadvantage. It makes competing globally more of a challenge but should also enhance communication and co-operation between main contributing partners to bring about success. The intention is that the existence of a vision, which draws together and identifies the contributions to economic development by Business, Academia, Voluntary Sector, Trade Unions and Government and which highlights where responsibility lies, will accelerate decision making in key economic policy areas contributing to a more confident and business friendly environment.

Economic context

4. NI has continued the trend of steady growth that has typified the economy for over a decade and has benefited from the greater level of stability. Since 1998 employment levels are

up, unemployment rates down and Gross Value Added (GVA)¹ has grown steadily. Against this must be balanced the highest economic inactivity rates in the UK, relatively low intermediate and employability skills levels in the workforce and the need to close the productivity gap with the rest of the UK.

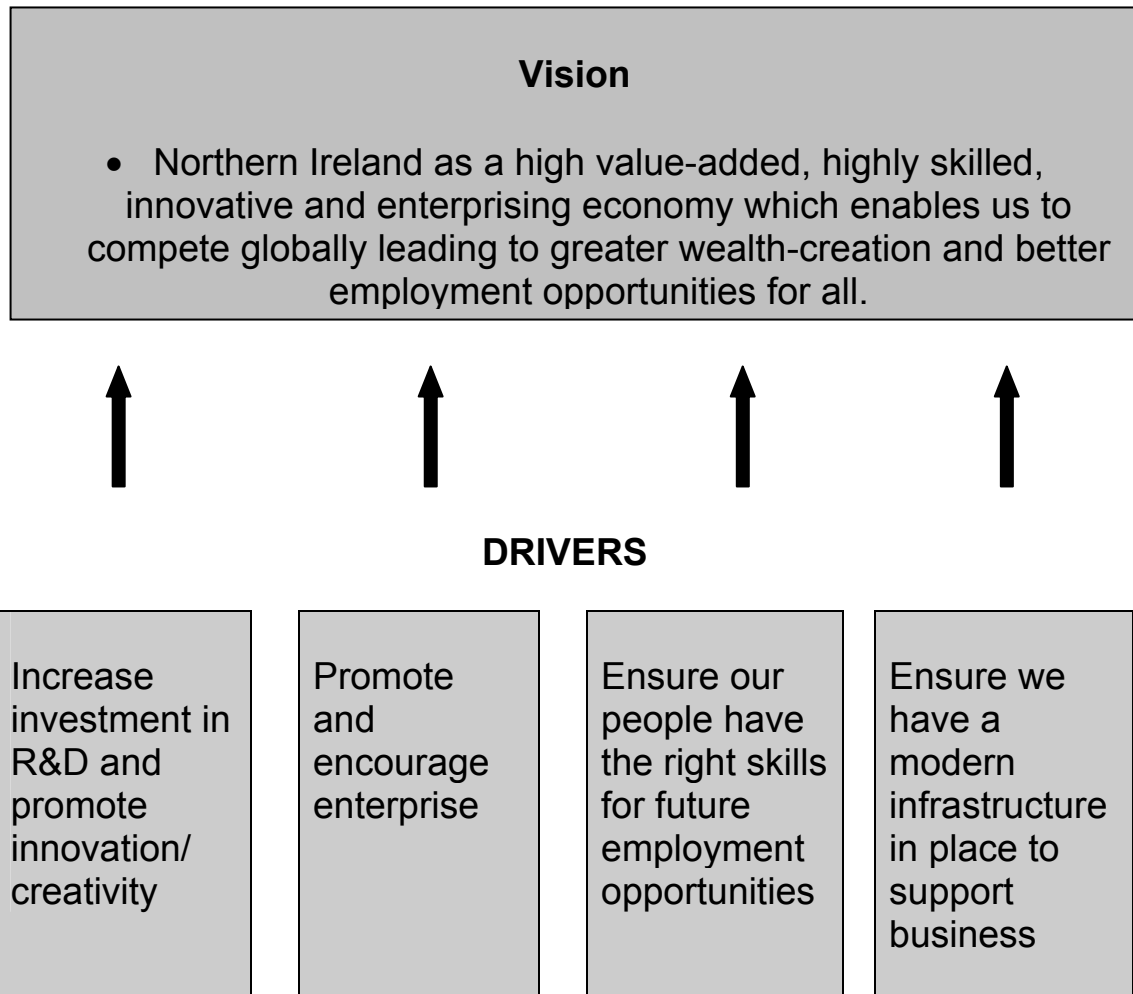
5. Productivity growth is central to long-term economic performance and rising living standards. In recent years, the UK has seen improved performance in terms of productivity growth, and this is a vital objective for Northern Ireland as we seek to become a fully competitive region. Closing the productivity gap means addressing the key productivity drivers of innovation, entrepreneurship, skills and investment.
6. It is imperative that the NI economy continues to improve its competitiveness and moves from a position which is based on low costs to one based on higher value added, innovation, creativity and high workforce skills. Along with enterprise and infrastructural investment, these will be the keys to securing a sustainable globally competitive NI economy and, in so doing, to drive future growth and prosperity and offer better employment opportunities.

How will this be achieved?

7. The Vision will act as a focal point and challenge policy setting and actions affecting the local economy. Importantly, the approach encapsulates not just Government, but also the private and voluntary sectors and trade union views and objectives on, and responsibility for, developing the economy.

¹Gross Value Added (GVA) measures the contribution to the economy of each individual producer, industry or sector in the UK. GVA is used in the estimation of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). GDP is a key indicator of the state of the whole economy. The link between GVA and GDP can be defined as GVA plus taxes on products less subsidies on products equals GDP.

ECONOMIC VISION



The Challenge for Northern Ireland

8. On the face of it Northern Ireland's relatively small size in relation to our competitors is a disadvantage. However, we can use our size to our advantage in terms of enhanced business responsiveness, better communications and partnership working. In achieving this vision of a vibrant Northern Ireland economy over the next decade, we must build on these strengths on a cross-sector basis and address our weaknesses and thereby generate those conditions which will help us become more globally competitive.
9. NI must grow its private sector and encourage companies to move up the value chain and raise the rate of productivity. Innovation, creativity and skills will increasingly play key roles

in enhancing our efficiency and global competitiveness. Whilst unemployment levels remain low, an untapped labour reserve still exists in NI and we need to concentrate our efforts to fully utilise the labour supply available by addressing NI's economic inactivity rate.

10. Though continuing to be important, future economic growth and employment opportunities cannot be dependent on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). The focus will therefore be on targeted FDI which provides wider economic benefits to the NI economy e.g. through the introduction of new products/processes, improved management practices, new technology and skills training. Indigenous businesses, and particularly those in high value added/niche markets, will become increasingly important to the economy. Encouraging a culture within SMEs of being more outward looking and enterprising, innovative and creative is key to future prosperity. Businesses in tourism, for example, are operating in a competitive global market and will therefore have to deliver world class excellence for the full tourism potential of Northern Ireland to be realised.
11. NI must have an expanded, vibrant and confident private sector offering a greater source of wealth creation and employment opportunities in an environment that promotes good employment practices and strengthens employer/employee relations. We want to see a private sector which is committed to job and wealth creation, innovation and partnership working. Over time it should have less recourse to public funding for support by taking advantage of greater levels of private sector finance. Northern Ireland realises that prolonged dependence on public expenditure will not be sustainable. Equally, we must have a healthy public sector which makes a valuable and significant contribution and is in better proportion with the overall size of the economy.
12. Our envisaged economy will be supported and strengthened by a political environment which builds on what has been achieved in the past 10 years and which offers long term stability and a greater sense of community. We want NI to be seen as an attractive tourism destination and investment location; a place where people want to live and work. A high

quality of life will attract and retain those people needed to drive the economy forward.

13. In a context of less rapid growth in public expenditure than in recent years, it will be important that Government resources are focussed, as far as possible, on those areas which deliver the Government's priorities. Alongside its commitment to provide appropriate resources for the top priority of the health service, the Government's priorities of education and infrastructure are central to Northern Ireland's future economic prosperity. Public expenditure will therefore be used in ways that promote and deliver central aspects of the Vision: in particular, continued investment in innovation, enterprise, skills through education, training and learning, and in infrastructure. Further policies and practices are also needed to enhance NI's 'business friendly' reputation.
14. The deployment of public expenditure funding for the Vision, and the Government's other priorities and responsibilities, will be determined through the normal budgetary process, (and its plans for the period 2005/06 to 2007/08 are being published alongside this document for consultation, with an Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland – reflecting longer term investment priorities and links to wider policy goals and objectives – to be published within the next few weeks). The Government will continue to deliver on the promise that no worthwhile proposal for eligible support to investment in industry or tradeable services will be lost, even if that means diverting resources from other programmes
15. The Vision will provide a framework for a dynamic process which will enable us to reconsider and improve policies to keep our economy on track to achieving its goals.
16. The overarching driver to achieving our economic vision is improving our global competitiveness through increased productivity and value-added leading to enhanced market share in products and services. The extent to which we are successful in meeting this Vision over the next decade will be measured by (a) closing the productivity gap with the UK and increasing Northern Ireland's GVA per hour worked compared with international averages, and (b) increasing the percentage of the Northern Ireland working age population who are

economically active. These are very appropriate links to our main purpose of improving wealth creation/productivity and increasing employment opportunities. (The present position in relation to these two areas is set out in the attached Annex A).

17. From this approach flow the four drivers highlighted on page 4 and expanded upon in the following pages, along with the key objectives/priorities set against a scenario of where we want to be rather than where we are at present. Annex B provides a more extensive list of priorities for each driver and identifies the relevant Government strategy or action plan.

DRIVERS TO ACHIEVE VISION

Increase investment in R&D and promote innovation/creativity

18. The importance of innovation and R&D contributing to competitiveness and driving economic growth is crucial to our success.

Where we want to be

19. Levels of innovation and business expenditure on R&D match or exceed our competitors. An innovation ethos is ever present within the manufacturing and service sectors and particularly in small businesses; companies of all sizes realise the benefits of expenditure on innovation, R&D and design. Links between industry and the research base are continuously encouraged and promoted, with greater commercialisation of R&D at university level the norm.

Key objectives

- (a) Increased expenditure on R&D, innovation and design by companies across all sectors and targeting of specific emerging sectors and technologies which offer a high potential economic return.
 - (b) Better and stronger links between the HE/FE sectors and industry/business, greater transfer of knowledge and technology between the research base and industry and greater commercialisation of R&D at university level.
 - (a) NI universities are supported in those areas of research where NI has the potential to compete with the very best in the world.
20. Success will be measured by both the growth in business and government expenditure in R&D resulting in increased activity in commercial innovation in the private sector.

Promote and encourage enterprise

21. Enterprise, in the broadest sense of initiating and taking creative action in response to opportunities and challenges, is about improving competitiveness and achieving high value-added. High, sustainable levels of entrepreneurship are essential.

Where we want to be

22. Entrepreneurial activity in NI is at the UK level; successful entrepreneurs are championed and there is no longer an inordinate fear of failure due to a greater awareness of opportunities. Education plays a major part in converting NI's high levels of education attainment into entrepreneurial activity. At post-primary school level the new curriculum gives a central place to learning for life and work, focusing on work in the local and global economy, enterprise and entrepreneurship. The increased competitiveness of our companies can be linked to their confidence in looking to opportunities to trade in the global market place achieving high levels of exports and strategic alliances. NI is regarded as an attractive location for foreign direct investment and tourism with high levels of visitor numbers and spend comparable to other major tourist countries. Clusters have been developed in industries, new and traditional, where we have particular competitive strengths. Regulatory and compliance requirements are in place which do not hinder enterprise and business growth/competitiveness. A fully developed social economy sector bringing economic benefits to the wider community.

Key objectives

- (a) A culture which supports enterprise and entrepreneurship; levels and quality of business starts are at UK levels and entrepreneurs are engaged as champions and their successes highlighted.
- (b) Better and stronger links exist between local business and HE/FE.

- (c) Clusters are developed where NI companies have a competitive strength.
 - (d) NI companies adopt and embrace an external and international focus including opportunities to trade.
 - (e) A globally competitive tourism industry.
 - (f) High value-added inward investment is targeted and strong, mutually beneficial links exist between indigenous and externally owned businesses.
 - (g) A modern regulatory framework which allows enterprise to flourish and is consistent with the public interest.
23. Success will be measured by the level of business starts, growth in export sales, growth in tourism visitor numbers and spend and an increase in the number of higher value added businesses.

Ensure our people have the right skills for future employment opportunities

24. Increasing workforce skills levels is central to raising productivity, increasing competitiveness and improving the sustainability of employment.

Where we want to be

25. NI to have a reputation for a flexible and skilled workforce supported by an effective education system. The implementation of the Post-Primary Review to provide young people with a range of vocational courses as well as the more traditional subjects, through collaboration between schools, further education and training organisations. Changes in the structure of the local economy too have brought about the emergence of new higher level skills, knowledge and attitude amongst a significant proportion of the workforce. Skills attainment brings greater social inclusion and personal confidence, providing a route to stable employment, equality of opportunity, better wages, and long-term prosperity, as well as to personal fulfilment. By helping those who wish to return to

work, NI's economic inactivity rate is now much closer to that of the UK. We have confident communities, assisted by a strong voluntary and community sector, capable of efficient and effective skills acquisition and employment.

Key objectives

- (a) An increase in the skills and qualifications of the NI workforce at all levels; initially through enhanced employability and essential skills in literacy and numeracy of those entering and re-entering the workforce (level 2); leading to an increase in the proportion of the workforce with high and intermediate level skills (levels 3-5).
 - (b) Managers have the capability, competence and capacity to lead innovation, creativity and change and the leadership skills required to play a key role in the development of the local economy.
 - (c) Assisting the disadvantaged and economically inactive to engage with skills acquisition and the labour market and reduce gender stereotyping in skills and jobs.
 - (d) Improvement in the labour market information provided by employers and specific skills demand and standards in key sectors of the economy have been identified.
 - (e) Greatly improved careers information advice and guidance at all levels and ages.
 - (f) Develop confident communities in previously deprived and marginalised areas as a basis for engagement in skills acquisition and fully utilise the contribution of Voluntary and Community Sector.
26. Success will be measured by the increase in the working age population securing qualifications and a reduction in the economically inactive.

Ensure we have a modern infrastructure (transport, energy, telecoms, water and sewerage etc) in place to support business

27. The social and economic well being of NI is enhanced by the provision and maintenance of quality infrastructure and related public services. Investment in public transport, roads, water and sewerage delivers economic returns and environmental benefits.

Where we want to be

28. Strategic air and sea routes are firmly established and significantly contribute to NI's economic prosperity. NI's air and seaports are competitive and profitable, enhancing business links and tourism. Vitally, we will have achieved a competitive, sustainable, reliable energy market at the minimum cost necessary in an all-island, UK and European context. NI's achievement of being the first region in Europe to have 100% broadband access is bringing tangible benefits to communities and business success.

Key objectives

- (a) Improvements made to the water and sewerage infrastructure to support sustainable economic development and enhance business competitiveness.
- (b) Improvements made to public transport provision to reduce congestion.
- (c) Improvements made to roads network to reduce journey times for business traffic.
- (d) Airports and seaports developed as drivers for economic development.
- (e) Achievement of a competitive, sustainable, reliable energy market at the minimum cost necessary in an all-island, UK and European context.

- (f) Optimum exploitation of our world class telecommunications infrastructure bringing benefits to business, communities and government across NI.
 - (g) Regeneration in the most deprived neighbourhoods to develop economic activity, across town and cities, with Belfast and Londonderry as the key regional centres.
29. Success will be facilitated by fully embedding the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland into the planning and budgeting process, and will be measured by improvement in the physical and electronic infrastructure underpinning the competitiveness of the economy.

MEASUREMENTS OF SUCCESS

GDP PER HOUR WORKED 1996-2002 (UK=100)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
France	132.8	132.4	132.4	131.6	132.3	132.9	131.7
Germany	124.0	121.7	119.7	120.8	119.8	118.1	116.4
Japan	89.4	88.5	86.9	88.0	87.6	87.2	N/a
USA	122.7	120.4	120.3	122.2	121.2	119.9	119.4
G7	114.3	112.6	112.2	113.3	112.7	111.7	N/a
UK	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
NI	86.2	84.1	84.7	83.4	82.3	84.4	84.4

Source: ONS

Note:

1. The NI data is expressed as GVA per hour worked in relation to UK GVA per hour. The international comparisons are based on ONS experimental data)
2. GVA is the major component of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Under European accounting conventions the difference between GVA and GDP is that GDP includes taxes (less subsidies) on products (mainly Value Added Tax) while GVA does not. ONS does not presently regionalise taxes on products.

WORKING AGE ECONOMIC ACTIVITY RATES – NI v UK

Year	UK	NI
1996	78.4	71.9
1997	78.6	73.3
1998	78.3	72.8
1999	78.7	72.6
2000	78.9	70.1
2001	78.6	71.9
2002	78.6	71.6
2003	78.7	72.9
2004	78.5	70.5

Source: NI Labour Force Survey

Notes:

1. Figures refer to April – June of each year.
2. Economic Activity Rate (working age)
The number of people who are in employment or unemployed as a percentage of the total population of working age.

DRIVER PRIORITIES

Increase investment in R&D and promote innovation/creativity

Priorities	Link to Government strategy
Encourage increased spending on R&D, innovation and design by companies across all sectors.	DETI's Regional Innovation Strategy – think create innovate Invest NI's Corporate Plan
Develop better and stronger links between the FE/HE sectors and industry/business	DETI, DEL, DE Enterprising Education Action Plan Invest NI's Corporate Plan DARD's Education Programme
Support NI universities in those areas of research where they have the potential to compete with the very best in the world	DEL's funding of university research capacity Invest NI's Proof of Concept
Promote the transfer of knowledge and technology between the research base and industry.	DETI's Regional Innovation Strategy – think create innovate Invest NI's Corporate Plan DARD's Technology Transfer Programme
Encourage greater commercialisation of R&D at university level and further strengthen Northern Ireland's research infrastructure particularly maximising the potential of the NI Science Park and the Centres of Excellence.	DETI's Regional Innovation Strategy – think create innovate Invest NI's Corporate Plan
Encourage creativity and new ways of doing things to support greater competitiveness and the thrust of reform.	DCAL's Unlocking Creativity Invest NI's Corporate Plan
DARD's significant Science and Technology programme, currently undertaken in-house, will be delivered from 2006 via a new Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute. This will result in a clearer definition between customer and contractor.	DARD's Science & Technology Programme

Priorities	Link to Government strategy
Encourage the tourism industry to make intelligence-based investments and decisions matching marketing and development to current and future customer requirements.	NITB's Strategic Framework for Action
Encourage innovation and creativity across the new school curriculum at all levels and for all age groups.	DETI, DEL, DE Enterprising Education Action Plan

Promote and encourage enterprise

Priorities	Link to Government strategy
Promote a culture which supports enterprise and entrepreneurship and raise the level and quality of business starts.	Invest NI's Accelerating Entrepreneurship Strategy
Engage entrepreneurs as champions and highlight their successes	Invest NI's Accelerating Entrepreneurship Strategy
Stimulate and develop greater links between business start ups and universities	DETI/DEL's Entrepreneurship and Education Action Plan DEL's Further Education Strategy
Strengthen linkages between the local business and education sectors	DETI/DEL's Entrepreneurship and Education Action Plan DEL's Further Education Strategy
Pursue the development of clusters where NI companies have a competitive strength.	Invest NI's Corporate Plan
Encourage an external and international focus by Northern Ireland companies including opportunities to trade.	Invest NI's Corporate Plan
Encourage targeted, high value-added inward investment and capitalise on existing links between indigenous and externally-owned businesses.	Invest NI's Corporate Plan
Assist existing companies to become more enterprising, innovative and creative and capable of competing in the global marketplace.	DETI's Regional Innovation Strategy – think create innovate
Promote cross-global partnerships and business alliances leading to improved product quality and design and the mutual transfer of knowledge.	Invest NI's Corporate Plan
Encourage sustainable development of the tourism industry	NITB – Tourism in Northern Ireland, A Strategic Framework for Action
Reduce <u>(where possible/practicable)</u> the burdens on business by developing a modern regulatory framework that promotes fairness and sustainability and in which enterprise can flourish.	DETI's NI Better Regulation Strategy

Priorities	Link to Government strategy
Develop learning curricula which teach, value and encourage enterprise, entrepreneurship and creativity throughout the education process from primary to tertiary levels.	DETI/DEL's Entrepreneurship and Education Action Plan DEL's Further Education Strategy DE Business Plan 2004/05
Develop financial incentive packages which stimulate enterprise; monitor the availability of both debt and equity finance and take action, where necessary, to address identified gaps in the market.	DETI/Invest NI support to Venture Capital funds and InterTradeIreland Equity Network activities.
Develop and shape the implementation of a broadly based strategy for the growth of the Northern Ireland agri-food sector.	DARD/DETI/Invest NI – Food Strategy Group
Reduce the costs, including insurance premium costs, experienced by businesses as a result of health and safety failures by encouraging the adoption of effective health and safety risk management strategies.	HSENI Corporate Plan HSENI Workplace Health Strategy
Develop a modern, co-ordinated and efficient planning process that integrates economic, social and environmental need	DOE Planning Service
Raise the profile of the value of the social economy sector, develop its business strength and provide a more supportive environment within which it can prosper	DETI's Developing a Successful Social Economy
Encourage the development of creativity in all its forms through inter-departmental working.	Inter-departmental Strategy NI: A Creative Region involving DCAL, DETI, Invest NI, DE and DEL

Ensure our people have the right skills for future employment opportunities

Priorities	Link to Government strategy
<p>Increase the skills and qualifications of the NI workforce at all levels; especially the proportion of the workforce with high and intermediate level skills (levels 3-5); and enhance employability and essential skills in literacy and numeracy of those entering and re-entering the workforce (level 2).</p> <p>Ensure managers have the capability, competence and capacity to lead innovation, creativity and change and have the skills required to play a key role in the development of the economy.</p> <p>Assist the disadvantaged and economically inactive to acquire skills, enter the labour market and reduce gender stereotyping in jobs.</p>	<p>DEL's Skills Strategy, including Essential Skills Strategy and Action Plan</p> <p>Invest NI's Company Development Programme</p> <p>DSD/DEL Welfare Reform/Welfare to Work Agenda</p>
<p>Improve the essential skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT among adults.</p>	<p>DEL's Essential Skills Strategy</p>
<p>Improve NI's working age inactivity rate and ensure those currently out of work gain the skills to compete in the labour market and get jobs.</p>	<p>DEL/DSD Welfare Reform Agenda and implementation of the Task Force on Employability and Long-Term Unemployment recommendations</p>
<p>Improve Careers and Information Advice and Guidance services to encourage greater efficiency in learning choices.</p>	<p>DEL Careers Information Advice and Guidance Review</p>
<p>Improve labour market information</p>	<p>DEL Skills Task Force</p>
<p>Ensure that the education system at all levels delivers the skills and qualifications to meet the needs of employers and to support the changing economy.</p>	<p>DETI/DEL's Entrepreneurship and Education Action Plan</p> <p>DEL's Further Education Strategy</p> <p>DE's Business Plan 2004/05</p>
<p>Strengthen the role of Further Education in the economy and improve partnerships between the colleges and business</p>	<p>DEL's Further Education Strategy</p>

Priorities	Link to Government strategy
Major focus and initiatives on the curriculum and post primary review to help young people and unlock their creativity and develop their employability skills.	DETI/DEL's Entrepreneurship and Education Action Plan DEL's Further Education Strategy
Strengthen support for the Voluntary and Community Sector (including development of community capacity and leadership in areas of weak community infrastructure) to help deliver Government's objectives and public services	DSD's Partners for Change – Government's Strategy for Support of the Voluntary and Community Sector; The Outreach Programme; and the Local Community Fund
Ensure that the skills base is not further eroded by reducing the risk of people leaving the labour market due to work-related illness and providing effective rehabilitation to ensure that people who do become ill can return to work as soon as possible.	DETI/HSENI Workplace Health Strategy
Ensure those in the rural community have access to programmes to upskill and reskill.	DARD's Vision Action Plan - Lifelong Learning programmes for the rural community

Ensure we have a modern infrastructure (transport, energy, telecoms, water and sewerage etc) in place to support business

Priorities	Link to Government strategy
Develop the water and sewerage infrastructure to support economic development as well as to deliver public health and environmental improvements.	Northern Ireland: Priorities and Budget 2004-2006
Facilitate infrastructure improvements to enhance business competitiveness and promote economic development.	DRD's Regional Development Strategy and Regional Transportation Strategy
Put in place a transport infrastructure which supports the needs of business and industry in the future	DRD's Regional Development Strategy and Regional Transportation Strategy
Promote and develop strategic air routes, gateway ports and airports as drivers for sustainable economic development.	DRD's Regional Transportation Strategy DfT's The Future of Air Transport DETR's Modern Ports: A UK Policy DETI's Air Route Development Fund
Achieve a competitive, sustainable, reliable energy market at the minimum cost necessary in an all-island, UK and European context.	DETI's Strategic Energy Framework
Develop a world class telecommunications infrastructure	DETI's Broadband Initiative
Develop a number of tourism Signature Projects with the potential to deliver world-class excellence drawing visitors from home and overseas.	NITB's Strategic Framework for Action
Tackle disadvantage and decline in NI's towns and cities	DSD's People and Place – A Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal; Belfast City Centre Regeneration Policy; and The Heart of the City – Derry/ Londonderry Strategy.
Continue implementation of all aspects of the Rural Development Programme and promote comprehensive and integrated action towards the sustainable and equitable development of disadvantaged rural areas	DARD Business Strategy

EQUALITY CONSIDERATIONS

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 ("the Act") requires the Department, in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:

- persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age marital status or sexual orientation;
- men and women generally;
- persons with a disability and persons without; and
- persons with dependants and persons without.

The Department must also have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion and racial group.

The Department is fully committed to the fulfillment of the section 75 obligations. Schedule 9 to the Act requires the Department to set out in an Equality Scheme how it proposes to fulfill the duties imposed by Section 75. The Department's revised Equality Scheme was approved and published in June 2003.

Under its Equality Scheme, the Department will undertake a screening process on any proposed strategy and legislation arising from this initial consultation and where necessary will carry out an equality impact assessment.

How to respond to this consultation document

Comments on this Draft Economic Vision for Northern Ireland should be sent no later than 7 December 2004 to:

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