

Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices - UK / Northern Ireland

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Introduction

In Northern Ireland career guidance refers to services intended to assist people, of any age and at any point throughout their lives to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. Career guidance helps people to reflect on their ambitions, interests, qualifications and abilities. It helps them to understand the labour market and education systems, and to relate this to what they know about themselves (Department of Education, 2016). This supports individuals to plan and make decisions about work and learning. Career guidance makes information about the labour market and educational opportunities more accessible by organising it, systematising it, and making it readily available.

The [Northern Ireland Careers Service](#) within the Department for Economy provides an all-age careers education and guidance service to promote employment, education and training opportunities. Careers advisers operate throughout Northern Ireland from Job Centres, Jobs and Benefits Offices and stand-alone careers offices. Advisers also work with careers teachers in schools and further education colleges to provide advice and guidance to pupils from 14 to 19. In Northern Ireland, careers education is a statutory area of learning in the common curriculum for all grant-aided post-primary schools. In addition, further education colleges and higher education institutions also offer careers guidance to their students.

The careers strategy, [Preparing for success 2015-20](#), jointly agreed between the [Department for the Economy](#) (formerly, Department for Employment and Learning) and the [Department of Education](#), was published in March 2016. Key commitments in the strategy include:

1. development of an accountability and quality assurance framework to ensure delivery of impartial careers guidance;
2. introduction of new and innovative delivery channels, including online web chat and increased use of social media improved access to up-to-date labour market information;
3. ensuring equality of opportunity; and
4. offering face-to-face advice to adults and young people at key transition stages, providing additional support to those at risk of becoming disengaged and those with barriers, and providing more advice to parents.

Work is also planned to develop an e-portfolio to facilitate the recording of education and work-related activities to support career management.

Sources

- Department for the Economy. <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/>
- Department of Education; Department for Employment and Learning (2015). *Preparing for success 2015 - 2020: a strategy for careers education and guidance*. <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/preparing-success-2015-2020-strategy-careers-education-and-guidance>
- Department of Education. <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/>
- Northern Ireland Careers Service. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/careers>

Coordination and collaboration among stakeholders

A [Careers Advisory Strategic Forum](#) was established to advise both the Department for the Economy and the Department of Education on current and future Careers provision in the context of the refreshed Careers Strategy, 'Preparing for Success 2015-2020'. The Forum comprises representatives from education, business, and other key stakeholders including parents and the community and voluntary sector. It held its inaugural meeting on 12th November 2015 and provides stakeholders with a platform to voice their opinions on the Careers system. The role of the Careers Advisory Forum is to:

1. advise both Departments on current and future Careers provision in the context of the refreshed Careers Strategy 2015-2020;
2. facilitate system level engagement between employers, educators and other key stakeholders, including parents, to support them in their advisory role; and
3. support local level stakeholder involvement with service users and the education and business sectors (further information can be found [here](#)).

In March 2022, the Minister for the Economy launched findings from an independent report based on evidence received from over 4,000 individuals following an intensive period of consultation with stakeholders from across Northern Ireland, including school principals/teachers, pupils, parents, employers, local Councils and Trade Union representatives - [Transforming Careers Support for Young People and Adults Executive Summary Report](#) and [Independent External Review of Careers Delivery - International Exemplars](#).

Sources

- Careers Advisory Forum (n.d.). Terms of reference. <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/economy/Careers-Advisory-Forum-TOR.pdf>
- Department of Education; Department for Employment and Learning (2015). *Preparing for success 2015 - 2020: a strategy for careers education and guidance*. <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/preparing-success-2015-2020-strategy-careers-education-and-guidance>
- Department for Employment and Learning (2016). *Careers Advisory Strategic Forum*. <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/careers-advisory-forum>
- Department for the Economy. <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/>
- Department of Education. <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/>
- Hughes, D. & Percy, C. (2022). *Transforming careers support for young people and adults in Northern Ireland*, commissioned by the Department for Economy (DfE), published March 2022.

Access to guidance

The [Entitlement framework](#), which sets out the post-14 curriculum, became statutory in 2013 and reached full implementation in 2015. It ensures a wide, pupils' needs-led offer at school through more learning options and two-third general and one-third applied courses. Schools are required to offer at least 24 courses at lower secondary level and 27 in the post-16 category, a minimum of one third being vocational. However, due to resource and budget restraints, along with giving schools more autonomy, a [January 2017 decision](#) gives schools more flexibility to reduce the number of courses. From September 2017 onwards, schools may offer 21 courses at lower secondary and 24 at post-16 level.

The Northern Ireland strategy for further education [Further education means success](#) (2016) recommended that further education colleges particularly



focus on developing increased provision at level 3 (EQF 4) and above, in areas that will help rebalance/rebuild the economy.

In October 2015 a new [regulated qualifications framework](#) (RQF) was introduced for England and Northern Ireland, replacing the QCF and the NQF. The RQF covers all academic and vocational qualifications regulated by the [Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation](#) (Ofqual) and by the [Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment](#) (CCEA) regulation. The RQF uses the same eight levels (plus three entry levels) as the QCF but introduces some changes in the way qualification size is calculated. Unlike the QCF, the RQF does not have a regulatory role and does not set qualification design rules. The RQF was designed to be more descriptive and less prescriptive than the QCF and help people better understand the qualifications controlled by the qualifications' regulators in England and Northern Ireland (Ofqual and CCEA regulation respectively), and how they relate to each other. Ofqual is responsible for the daily running of the framework. One of the main principles applying to all qualifications in the RQF (after consultation carried out in spring 2015) is using guided learning hours (GLH) and total qualification time (TQT). GLH is composed of activities completed by the learner under the direct instruction or supervision of a lecturer. TQT is made up of the GLH plus all other time taken in preparation without supervision (Department of Education, 2009).

The guiding principles (Department of Education, 2016: 32) for the delivery of careers provision are:

1. careers services should be impartial and of a high quality, irrespective of who is receiving the service, or where and by whom the services are delivered;
2. careers services should support those in education, those about to enter the labour market, those temporarily excluded from the labour market, and those in work;
3. individuals should become "career aware" and "own" their career development; they should maximise all opportunities to explore future employment opportunities and the various career pathways;
4. decisions about education, training and employment need to be underpinned by sound and impartial careers advice, to derive the maximum benefit from investment in training and employment opportunities;
5. partnership between employers, schools, families and communities should be fostered and all key stakeholders should be encouraged to engage actively in the careers process;
6. the entire system should be innovative and delivered in a way that is cost-effective, makes best use of technology and is easily accessed by all who would benefit from it;
7. careers education and guidance should be informed by the current and future needs of the labour market.

[Curriculum guidance](#) provided by the Department of Education (DoE) to schools, highlights that while career management is now embedded in the Employability strand of the curriculum, schools will need to augment this provision with timetabled careers education classes in order to fully meet all the aims and objectives of a high-quality careers programme. A school's careers programme will include careers education, information, advice and guidance, work-related learning, and the development of employability skills (Department of Education, n.d.).

Employability is a key theme underpinning the new statutory curriculum and there is a greater emphasis on developing a range of cross-curricular skills that employers have told us they need including communication, using ICT, and using maths. Pupils develop other skills highly valued by employers such as thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills; working with others; self-management; and being creative (Department of Education, n.d.).

[Every school has a partnership agreement](#) in place with the careers service, which provides impartial advice and guidance, and parents are encouraged to ensure that their child makes full use of this service, available free from professionally qualified careers advisors, particularly in year 10 and year 12 (more information can be found under ["Careers education"](#) on the Department of Education site).

Sources

- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). <http://ccea.org.uk/about>
- Department for the Economy (2016). Further Education Means Success. <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/further-education-means-success>
- Department of Education (2009). Every School a Good School: a policy for school improvement. <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/every-school-good-school-esags>
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- Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual). <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual>
- Ofqual (2015). Ofqual to introduce new Regulated Qualifications Framework. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ofqual-to-introduce-new-regulated-qualifications-framework>

Quality assurance

The [Careers Service](#) reaches out to all young people in school facing key career decisions to help them make informed decisions which will lead to a rewarding and successful working life. In addition, it will support adults to upskill and reskill, and to benefit from the opportunities available in the growth and emerging employment sectors in a high performing economy. The Service has introduced a robust and clear accountability and quality assurance system which:

1. allows individuals to understand what they can expect from the service;
2. has performance measures which demonstrate the impact of careers guidance on education, training and employment outcomes;
3. has a statutory duty to ensure that individuals can access impartial careers support from appropriately qualified practitioners;
4. has a careers advisory forum to advise both Departments on the future direction of careers and how we can meaningfully engage with employers both at a strategic and local level (Department of Education, 2016).

There is a strong emphasis on new delivery mechanisms, making the best use of technology, to provide high quality, accessible and cost-effective careers support for all individuals, including parents and vulnerable groups.

Central to the [Careers Strategy 2015-2020](#) is the development of an accountability and quality assurance framework which puts in place a system to monitor key areas of service delivery for both careers education and careers guidance. This will include both performance and quality measures which will be published in a user-friendly format. It is intended that the new framework will improve transparency, ensure consistency of service and provide further data to illustrate, as far as possible, the longer-term impact of careers education and guidance on individuals' learning and employment outcomes. A key aspect of the quality assurance framework will be the use of independent, external assessment. The Careers Service currently uses the internationally recognised [matrix standard](#) to assess the quality of provision. It will also consider collaborating with other relevant organisations to undertake evaluation and quality assurance exercises as part of continuous improvement. Careers education is externally assessed by the [Education and Training Inspectorate](#) (ETI) as part of the school inspection process (Department of Education, 2016).

Sources

- Department of Education; Department for Employment and Learning (2015). Preparing for success 2015 - 2020: a strategy for careers education and guidance. <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/preparing-success-2015-2020-strategy-careers-education-and-guidance>
- Education and Training Inspectorate: promoting improvement. <https://www.etini.gov.uk/>
- Northern Ireland Careers Service. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/careers>
- The matrix Standard. <https://matrixstandard.com/>

Career management skills

Young people face challenges and choices that are very different from those faced by previous generations. In the modern world of employment, people will change jobs, work in different sectors and even careers, on a much more frequent basis. They will need to acquire and continually update their knowledge and skills in order to remain in employment and to progress their careers. There is no longer the expectation of a job for life or one direct

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pathway into a career, so people will therefore need support to develop the necessary career planning skills and to navigate the various career pathways throughout their working life (Department of Education, 2016). In Northern Ireland, greater emphasis is given jointly by the Department for Economy (formerly Department for Employment & Learning) and Department of Education to young people developing career planning skills.

Source

- Department of Education; Department for Employment and Learning (2015). Preparing for success 2015 - 2020: a strategy for careers education and guidance. <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/preparing-success-2015-2020-strategy-careers-education-and-guidance>

Career information, ICT in guidance

A three-year sponsorship arrangement started in 2015 between the [Department for the Economy](#) and the [Ulster University Economic Policy Centre](#) to build a skills-barometer model to estimate future skill needs and gaps by level, sector and subject area across a range of economic outcomes. Skills Barometer reports were published in 2015, 2017 and 2019. Further information can be found [here](#). In addition, the [NI Careers Service](#) has commissioned a development project (2019-2020) to develop a customised online portal for individuals with autism.

The Department for the Economy's [Connect to Success NI](#) portal is a free online resource enabling employers to advertise apprenticeships, as well as work experience opportunities and provides those seeking to launch or develop their careers the opportunity to search for these positions through a central source. Further information can be found [here](#). Opportunities can also be posted on [JobApplyNI](#) which lists all current vacancies throughout Jobs and Benefits offices in Northern Ireland.

Sources

- Connect to Success NI. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/contacts-az/connect-success-ni>
- Department for the Economy (2017). Employers - Find the right apprentice or work placement for your business. <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/news/employers-find-right-apprentice-or-work-placement-your-business>
- Department for the Economy (n.d.). Skills and Employment. <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/skills-and-employment>
- Department for the Economy. <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/>
- Northern Ireland Careers Service. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/careers>
- Ulster University Economic Policy Centre. <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/epc>

Training and qualifications

As the lead body for the sector, the CDI professional body manages the [UK Register of Career Development Professionals](#), also referred to as the Professional Register and Register. They are custodians of the [National Occupational Standards: Career Development](#). These are used to inform qualifications in the sector and provide the framework for our [Career Development Sector Progression Pathway](#). In 2016, the CDI published the [CDI Blueprint of Learning Outcomes for Professional Roles in the Career Development Sector](#). This is used to inform professional qualifications across the sector and to raise awareness amongst politicians, government officials, employers and other stakeholders of the breadth and depth of skills and knowledge required for these roles. The CDI also awards the [Modern and Technical Apprenticeships in Career Development](#) in Scotland.

Careers Advisers on obtaining qualification, currently the QCD and recognised UK wide by the Career Development Institute, sign up the Code of Ethics of the career development sector and profession.

Sources

- Career Development Institute (n.d.). Career development sector progression pathway. <https://www.thecdi.net/Career-Development-Sector-Progression-Pathway>
- Career Development Institute (n.d.). CDI blueprint of learning outcomes for professional roles in the career development sector. <https://www.thecdi.net/CDI-Blueprint-for-Professional-Roles>
- Career Development Institute (n.d.). National Occupational Standards: Career Development. <https://www.thecdi.net/National-Occupational-Standards>
- Career Development Institute (n.d.). UK Register of Career Development Professionals. <https://www.thecdi.net/Professional-Register>

Funding career guidance

The [Department for Economy](#) is funded through the Northern Ireland Assembly to provide a national all-age careers service. The Department of Education oversees career education in schools and colleges.

An [independent review report](#) set out the funding for the national careers service compared to Scotland and Wales (p.6). The Careers Service has a current budget of £6m with circa 100 Careers Advisers employed as civil servants in the DfE. They are professionally trained, mainly at post-graduate level, who operate throughout all regions in Northern Ireland. This investment responds to education and labour market concerns and is there to deliver its services across a population of 1.9m in Northern Ireland. The service supports education, training providers and employers, young people aged 14+ in schools and colleges, and adults regardless of their work status.

Northern Ireland has similar levels of need for career guidance compared to other UK regions, considering standard metrics for education and employment trajectories. This similar need for career guidance can be contrasted with the very different annual amounts of dedicated public money invested by Scotland (c. £50m, via Skills Development Scotland CIAG budgets) and Wales (c. £29m, via Careers Wales and Working Wales).

Sources

- Department for the Economy. <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/>
- Hughes, D. & Percy, C. (2022). [Transforming careers support for young people and adults in Northern Ireland](#), commissioned by the Department for Economy (DfE), published March 2022.

Career guidance for school pupils

Careers-related learning is a compulsory element of the current curriculum under "Learning for Life and Work" (LLW) which has been taught to all pupils since 2009/10. Under "Learning for Life and Work" pupils in post-primary schools learn about work in the local and global economy, career management, and enterprise and entrepreneurship. In the primary curriculum, under the Areas of Learning of "The World Around Us", and "Personal Development and Mutual Understanding", there are many opportunities for children to learn about the world of work, career pathways and develop careers-related skills.

According to the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA, 2020), LLW builds on Personal Development and Mutual Understanding at primary: "It aims to bring closer links between the curriculum and the knowledge, skills and capabilities that are necessary for life and work. It explicitly addresses the three main objectives of the curriculum: to develop young people as individuals, as contributors to society, and as contributors to the economy and the environment."

CCEA states that teachers need to emphasize the relevance and application of subject learning to modern day life and future employment, enabling pupils to learn more effectively through 'their emotional engagement with subject matter applied to real-life contexts'.

[Learning for Life and Work for Key Stage 3](#) presents the rationale and contents of LLW, states that this learning component is central in helping young people. [Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices - UK / Northern Ireland](#)

people develop the fundamental skills, knowledge, qualities and dispositions that are prerequisites for life and work. The Northern Ireland Curriculum has included this Area of Learning as a key component because research indicated a need for closer links between the curriculum and developing skills and capabilities necessary for life and work. The research concluded that young people require an engaging and relevant curriculum that:

1. helps them develop as individuals and members of society;
2. delivers the skills and capabilities needed for adult life and work;
3. helps them cope with the changing global economy;
4. helps them learn how to make informed choices (further details can be found [here](#)).

Resources are available for teachers working with learners with severe learning difficulties (SLD). These resources give learners an opportunity to explore some of the issues and challenges that they will face as independent adults.

Career guidance for school pupils' post-primary is delivered by a cadre of trained and qualified careers advisers employed by the N. I Careers Service within the Department for Economy.

Sources

- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) (2020). Learning for Life and Work for Key Stage 3. <https://ccea.org.uk/key-stage-3/curriculum/learning-life-work>
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) (2020). The World Around Us. <https://ccea.org.uk/key-stages-1-2/curriculum/world-around-us>
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) (2020). Learning for Life and Work: Employability. <https://ccea.org.uk/key-stage-3/curriculum/learning-life-work/employability>
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) (2020). Foundation Stage Personal Development and Mutual Understanding. <https://ccea.org.uk/key-stages-1-2/curriculum/personal-development-mutual-understanding>
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) (2020). Learning for Life and Work (SEN). <https://ccea.org.uk/learning-resources/learning-life-and-work>

Guidance for VET participants

As a follow-up to the 2016 Northern Ireland strategy for further education [Further education means success](#), the [Department for the Economy](#), supported by colleges, has started the process of identifying and collecting information on learner progression and learner destinations after leaving college. As of September 2017, colleges are expected to publish information on learner achievements, learner progression and learner destinations on their websites.

In December 2017, Northern Ireland's six regional Further Education (FE) Colleges joined together to launch a new marketing campaign, [Let's do Business](#) to promote their services to local employers and businesses. Services include:

1. a range of funded training and mentoring programmes;
2. bespoke training and initiatives available to local employers who wish to grow their business through increased profitability or product development;
3. budding entrepreneurs who require assistance in turning their business idea into a commercial reality.

They can also help with recruitment, accessing funding and technical expertise to bring new products to market. Each college has developed expertise in specific areas.

In Northern Ireland, the Department for the Economy offers a guarantee of training at entry level/level 1 through its [Skills for Life and Work](#) programme for all unemployed 16 to 17 year old school leavers. Those with a disability and from an in-care background have extended eligibility. The programme is an important stepping stone for those young people who require it, to the Department's vocational education and training provision at Level 2 and above – namely the NI Traineeship, mainstream Further Education and [ApprenticeshipsNI](#), or to other employment.

Apprenticeships are available in Northern Ireland at EQF levels 3 and 4 within the 16+ further education (FE) sector. Qualifications that could be associated with an apprenticeship programme were those from the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) and National vocational qualifications (NVQs). Higher level apprenticeships had been piloted at EQF levels 4 and 5 since 2012. A new apprenticeship strategy, [Securing our Success](#) had been published in June 2014, taking on board suggestions from a review of apprenticeships carried out in 2013 in Northern Ireland. The main aims of the reform were to support the creation of apprenticeships across the full range of qualifications in professional and technical occupations starting at levels 3 up to 8 (EQF 4 to 8), with a special focus on higher apprenticeships, as well as to provide pathways to further education and higher education. Attracting more students and employers and raising the number and quality of higher apprenticeships were priority areas. Funds had been allocated.

A [Review of Youth Training provision](#) in Northern Ireland had also been carried out, examining vocational training offered at level 2 (EQF level 3). It led to a 2015 Strategy for Youth Training proposing to create a baccalaureate-style curriculum that would include work-based learning and allow students to continue into an apprenticeship or further education or be skilled enough to find sustained employment.

[Generating our success: the Northern Ireland strategy for youth training](#) aims at developing a new broad-based baccalaureate-style programme for young people at level 2 (European qualifications framework, EQF 3). It integrates structured work-based learning primarily as a method for developing skills; piloting started in autumn 2015. The programme was created as a stepping stone towards VET at EQF level 4 and above through apprenticeships and new higher-level apprenticeship programmes at level 4 (EQF 5) and above. An [Education and Training Inspectorate's](#) evaluation of the 2015-17 pilots found that most of the programmes were appropriately designed to enable students to progress or re-engage with education and training, to learn new skills and build upon their prior experiences. It also appeared that the piloted programmes enabled students to access education and training at an appropriate level and to progress seamlessly to employment, and further and higher education (Education and Training Inspectorate, 2016).

The Northern Ireland strategy for further education [Further education means success](#) and its implementation programme were published in 2016. The aim of the Strategy is to:

1. provide a world class, economically relevant professional and technical education system;
2. create a globally competitive economy through supporting employers to upskill and become more innovative;
3. overcome educational disadvantage and support social and economic inclusion.

The strategy commits the colleges to develop employability skills through high-quality work placements and simulated work environments using virtual reality technology and project-based learning, and to develop entrepreneurial spirit, creativity, and the ability to innovate.

A new development to the Strategy was initiated in April 2017 when FE Means Success Programme Board approved the further development of the lead [College Curriculum Hubs concept](#). From 2018 to 2019 Curriculum Hubs were established in a range of occupational areas, many of which focused on priority skills and growth sectors of employment noted consistently in the NI Skills Barometer.

The FE sector currently has a total of seven Curriculum Hubs across the six FE Colleges, namely; Digital IT, Engineering, Life Sciences, Construction, Health and Social Care, Hospitality and Tourism, and Entrepreneurship. The lead College, in meeting their responsibilities, must collaborate with the other five Colleges in order to achieve objectives and outcomes in order to draw in the teaching and curriculum excellence, sectoral knowledge and economic engagement and to provide a consistent high-quality provision for learners and employers across Northern Ireland. The use of virtual learning environments and continuous professional development are integral to the work of the Curriculum Hubs and are key to the effective delivery of high-quality curriculum. Action Plans have been developed and approved for each Curriculum Hub up to August 2023 and outcomes will be regularly monitored and reported on to the Department for the Economy through the governance framework.

Reforms to the traineeships and apprenticeships system are currently being implemented. When fully implemented, the new system will offer traineeships at level 2 (EQF 3) and apprenticeships at level 3+ (EQF4). In the reporting period, models of delivery, curricula and programmes were being piloted. Sixteen traineeship pilots were launched in September 2016 across a range of occupational areas and came to an end in June 2018. The pilot programmes were open to young people aged 16 to 24 to acquire the skills needed for improving their employability prospects. The pilot programmes comprised project and work-based learning, a vocational qualification as well as English and mathematics qualifications, and were completed while in employment or through training that included structured work experience. When the new system is fully operational traineeships will be accessible

through a web portal for employers to advertise, and learners to find, suitable programmes.

During the 2015/16 and 2016/17 academic years nearly 3,000 trainees enrolled onto the level 2 programme. The retention rate was above 82% in both years and the overall success rates were 69.4% in the first year and 59.2% in the second. A number of level 3 (EQF level 4) apprenticeship pilots have also tested the development of a new curriculum to meet employers' needs. There were 212 enrolments in the 2015-17 period with a 100% completion rate. **Higher Level Apprenticeships (HLAs)** at level 4 and 5 were piloted between 2012 and 2016, transitioning into a steady state programme of delivery from September 2017. There were just under 1,000 enrolments onto HLAs during 2015/16 and 2016/17 and the success rates were 88.6% in the first year and 79.1% in the second. HLAs at levels 6 were piloted between 2015 and 2017 with level 6 and 7 transitioning into a steady state programme from September 2018.

Since April 2017, across the UK, employers with a wage bill in excess of GBP 3 million contribute annually to an apprenticeship levy (0.5% of the employer's annual pay bill) to supplement apprenticeship funding. The apprenticeship levy was introduced by the UK Government in April 2017 to fund apprenticeships. The levy is charged at a rate of 0.5% of an employer's pay bill minus an apprenticeship levy allowance of £15k. As the levy is fiscal policy it is a reserved matter solely mandated to the UK parliament, with no scope for derogation for the devolved administrations.

In England, funds collected through the levy are used directly to fund apprenticeships via a **Digital Account Apprenticeship Service**. This however is not the case for Northern Ireland, where there is no direct correlation between the levy raised from employers and the funding allocation for skills development. Northern Ireland is allocated the Barnett consequential (comparable spending to England) from the levy in the block grant. In NI, funding arrangements for apprenticeship provision have not changed with the Government continuing to support the off-the-job training element.

In 2016-17, the **quality assurance reference point (QARP)** for Northern Ireland used Erasmus+ funding to support the six NI FE colleges in their implementation of quality improvement practices into the activities of VET teachers and trainers. A collaborative portal of educational resources and support of technology enhanced learning was developed.

Northern Ireland was above the EU average in IVET and continuing vocational education and training (CVET) in 2018. All EQAVET indicators are used (mostly always).

Sources

- Department for Employment and Learning Economy (2015). Generating our Success: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Youth Training. <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/del/youth-training-strategy.pdf>
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- Education and Training Inspectorate (2016). A longitudinal evaluation of the Youth Training pilot programmes at level 2 provided by the six colleges of further education in Northern Ireland. https://www.etini.gov.uk/sites/etini.gov.uk/files/publications/longitudinal-evaluation-youth-training-pilot-programmes_0.PDF
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Guidance for higher education students

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are largely autonomous institutions that are mostly able to devise and deliver curriculums as they choose. Legislation relating to higher education, therefore, is limited largely to the establishment and governance of higher education institutions and the provision of financial resources to institutions and students.

Higher education in Northern Ireland is delivered through three universities and two university colleges (including the Open University in Northern Ireland). Higher education courses are also delivered in six further education colleges.

Unlike other parts of the UK, Northern Ireland has no higher education funding council; the **Department for the Economy (Higher Education Division)** fulfils the roles of both a government department and a funding council. The Department's higher education division consists of six branches:

1. Student Support Branch
2. HE Institution Finance Branch
3. Capital and Student Finance Branch
4. Policy & Coordination Branch
5. Research and Knowledge Exchange Branch
6. Quality & Governance Branch

The **UK Quality Code for Higher Education** provides guidance and 'indicators of sound practice' in careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) for HEIs. Further information can be found [here](#).

All providers of higher education have their own careers service, staffed by appropriately trained professionals. Careers services offer a wide range of support for students including:

1. careers advice, including graduate placements, careers fairs and further study opportunities
2. CV workshops
3. networking / mentoring opportunities
4. coaching on interview techniques
5. support with job applications and employability skills.

A significant number of university degree courses now include employability skills, and some include compulsory careers sessions. Many institutions also help students to develop the 'soft skills' which employers seek (including effective communication, acting as a team player, creative / critical thinking, and problem-solving) through extra-curricular initiatives.

In many cases, students can still access their university careers service up to three years after graduation. Some universities allow lifelong access. Guidance activities offered can be categorised as:

1. core careers services: all HE institutions offer careers services;
2. value added service: run by over half of careers services and growing areas of activity as services diversify and careers and employability agenda continue to increase;
3. bespoke activities: offered by smaller numbers of services, often responding to particular local needs and contexts, for example, employability partnerships with local businesses and/or innovation projects commissioned by a wide variety of agencies, including government departments.

There is significant diversity in delivery methods, e.g. Zoom appointments, online seminars. Careers Advisers in Northern Ireland universities are often referred to as Careers Consultants

The **Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS)** is the UK-wide professional body for careers and employability professionals working with higher education students and graduates and prospective entrants to higher education. AGCAS provides support and training for professionals in the sector, with the aim of promoting and ensuring excellence in service delivery. AGCAS includes over 160 HE careers services as members, representing approx. 3,200 staff. The AGCAS process includes

1. a **Code of Ethics** which helps members maintain the highest professional standards. The Code of Ethics identifies the professional attitudes and behaviours expected of members and provides guidance to help members recognise and develop these;

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2. the **Membership Quality Standard** which outlines and demonstrates the levels of professionalism with which member services fulfil their purpose;
3. work towards external kitemarks/quality standards, e.g. **the matrix Standard, Investors in People**;
4. recognition that each individual university has its own strategic vision, plan and priorities, with services customised and delivered accordingly.

The **Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU)** is an independent research charity specialising in higher education and graduate employment that supports careers advisory services as they guide students and graduates through university and into the labour market. Its website **Prospects** provides careers information and services to students, graduates, university careers services, employers and others.

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Guidance for adult learners

Preparing for Success 2015-2020 sets out the vision and aims for the Northern Ireland careers system. This includes the aspiration that all individuals are encouraged to develop the skills and qualifications most valued by employers. The strategy recognises that access to good careers guidance throughout adult life enables individuals to clarify their aspirations for work, to understand the options open to them and to take control of, and make informed decisions, in terms of labour market information, job opportunities, work force skills, career progression, career change, and promotion.

The aim is to ensure that all individuals, regardless of age or ability, have access to independent, high quality advice which helps them to maximise their potential and contribute to their community and the local economy.

The **Department for Economy**, (formerly Department for Employment and Learning) had a Service Level Agreement with the **Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA)** for the provision of outreach careers information, advice and guidance support. However, prior to the SLA ending in May 2013 the Department was advised by EGSA that they would be entering into voluntary liquidation with effect from the 22 February 2013. The Minister decided that the **Department's Careers Service** would offer the services previously provided by EGSA, going forward.

Careers advisers in Northern Ireland are employed by the Government Civil Service. They help adults to explore their personal strengths, skills and abilities and explore opportunities for re-skilling and up-skilling, informed by the needs of the labour market. Targeted help is also available for those facing redundancy or unemployment, and individuals hoping to return to the labour market, through collaboration with the **Department for Communities (DfC)**. In recent months, the Careers Service has provided services to employees facing redundancy, including those in 'at risk' companies. They provide expert help to adults by:

1. assisting clients to analyse, identify, understand, map and positively articulate their transferable knowledge, skills, experience and competence;
2. providing individualised and tailored assistance to clients in compiling CVs that reflect individual knowledge, skills, ability and experience;
3. providing tailored advice on job search activities, job application techniques, form filling and job interview preparation;
4. helping clients to understand and explore their personality, learning style, aptitude, ability, work preferences, interests, values, strengths and weaknesses;
5. providing advice and guidance to help clients understand, balance and manage their personal career aspirations and abilities with alternative career and job opportunities and the future needs of the labour market and NI economy;
6. offering advice on alternative or further developmental and learning opportunities to assist clients in their career planning.

In 2018/2019, the Northern Ireland Careers Service delivered 12,843 careers guidance interviews with adults via a multi-channel delivery approach which included live webchat and telephony, as well as face-to-face services.

JobCentreOnline, the Public Employment Service website in Northern Ireland provides Jobcentres' and Jobs & Benefits Offices' current vacancies as well as linking to job vacancies in 29 European countries via the **European Job Mobility Portal**. In partnership with the Social Security Agency, the site also has details of work-related benefits.

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Guidance for young people at risk

For those needing additional help, the **Pathways to Success strategy** (2012) is the Northern Ireland Executive's agreed approach to addressing the

needs of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). The Strategy has a particular focus on helping those young people who face barriers to participation (including those with disabilities), while also complementing Department for the Economy's initiatives to tackle the wider problem of youth unemployment.

The 2016-21 Employment strategy for people with disabilities

The [Employment strategy for people with disabilities](#) (2016-21) launched in March 2016 aims to help people of all ages with disabilities achieve their full employment and career potential through enhanced working partnership arrangements between government departments and the local disability sector. A clear and simple pathway into employment that makes choosing the most suitable programmes easy is to be established. Assistance will be provided by specialist disability employment officers together with health professionals, education transition officers, careers advisers, occupational psychologists, and employment service staff. There will be particular focus on young people who are transitioning through school, further and higher education, skills training, apprenticeships and employability programmes.

Training for the young low-qualified

The [Strategy for youth training](#) adopted in June 2015 highlights the importance of support measures in helping young people complete their training and progress into employment or higher level VET. All 16- to 24-year-olds who require training at level 2 (EQF 3) will have the opportunity to participate: those not in employment, those starting a new job, and those in jobs. A central service will be established, supported by industry consultants, to market, promote and support youth training and apprenticeship provision. Financial assistance and additional support (for example for individuals with a disability) will be provided for young people participating in the scheme. Building on the current review of careers, the Careers service will work in tandem with the new central service to provide impartial advice and guidance for young people considering the youth training and apprenticeship pathway.

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