



Belfast Employability & Skills Framework 2015-2025



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Belfast
City Council

www.belfastcity.gov.uk/employability

1 Introduction

The Belfast Employability and Skills Framework for the period 2015 to 2025 sets a vision of “Realising the potential of Belfast’s people and its economy by transforming skills, employability and aspiration, resulting in higher levels of business growth, employment and income”.

As a Council, we are committed to making a change for our residents and developing Belfast as a vibrant city in which people love to live, invest, work and visit. This Framework is a starting point for achieving that ambition. However the Council cannot achieve this by working alone and we are committed to work with the key public, private and community partners in the context of a city agenda to tackle the challenges.

2 The Belfast Position

Belfast is a growing international business centre and, up to the economic downturn in 2008, was one of fastest growing regional economies in the UK. It is a location of choice for many leading international companies and is second only to London in attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Productivity has been reasonable across the city (at £41,535 of GVA per employee in 2013 which is 113% of the Northern Ireland average). However there are a number of key employability issues which must be addressed if the city is to achieve its growth potential. These include:

Unemployment and Economic Inactivity

Nearly 65,000 people were classed as economically inactive in January 2016, with 155,000 economically active. High economic inactivity rates have significant consequences for a growing economy; reducing the available workforce, constraining output levels and reinforcing concentrations of deprivation. Many of those identified as being economically inactive are lower skilled and therefore less likely to be employed – or at least will find it more difficult to get a job. Despite a wealth of employability and other support programmes, the economic inactivity rate has not decreased to any significant degree over the last thirty years.

Inequality

There is still a very marked polarisation of society: between those who are well qualified and those who have no qualifications or who are low skilled. This is an ongoing challenge for Belfast, to ensure that whole neighbourhoods are not left behind and are therefore economically and socially excluded. There are a multitude of interconnected issues that contribute to inequality and deprivation within the city, such as:

- Poor health and wellbeing;
- Lack of skills and poor educational outcomes;
- Long term economic inactivity;
- Low paid jobs.

Based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2010, Belfast has 8 of the ten most deprived wards in Northern Ireland on the income domain, 9 of the lowest performing on skills, and 7 for employment.

Persistent inequality and deprivation go hand in hand in these wards in Belfast, despite the considerable sums invested in interventions in these areas over decades. Existing initiatives have only had limited impact, and new place-based solutions based on coordinated working and a long term vision are needed to embed change.

Skills Levels

Skill levels have a significant impact upon employment prospects: people with no qualifications are five times more likely to be unemployed than those who have higher levels of formal education. According to the 2011 Census, almost a third of the adult population in Belfast has no qualifications, (30.4% compared to 23.2% in the UK).

While there needs to be a strong focus on building essential and lower level skills, there are also employment challenges for those with higher level skills. The percentage of graduates working in non-graduate jobs has increased over the last decade, from 37% in 2001 to 47% in 2013 for recent graduates, and from 29% in 2001 to 34% in 2013 for graduates out of full time education for more than five years. This effectively prevents unemployed or lower paid/skilled people from taking up those jobs and the progression opportunities that follow.

Better employment of those with higher level skills could help to create opportunities elsewhere in the labour market.

Economic Changes

Belfast's economy has changed with a move from manufacturing towards business and financial services. This change within the local economy has seen the contraction of traditional sectors towards new sectors of growth such as ICT, Professional, Scientific and Technical activities, Administration and Support Services and Human Health and Social Work activities, which collectively are expected to account of 76% of employment growth within the city by 2025. The impact of this will result in higher levels of demand for intermediate and higher level skills.

Entrepreneurship

A healthy business start-up rate is widely regarded as a good barometer of economic health in a city. Entrepreneurship levels in Belfast are lower than the NI average at 14.7% compared with 9.3% for Belfast. This is also lower than in other UK cities such as Liverpool (10.8%), Manchester (14.4%), Newcastle (11.7%), Leeds (12.1%), and Sheffield (10.7%). The higher figure for the whole of Northern Ireland may in part be due to its rural nature (as rural areas are likely to have high self-employment) and also the reliance in Belfast on both public sector employment (representing two fifths of employment) and on other large employers, partly due to the high levels of investment through FDI streams in recent years.

Increasing the residential employment rate

Belfast's resident employment rate is 65.6%¹ which equates to approximately 144,000 people in employment. Historically the city has struggled, even during periods of economic prosperity, to achieve an employment rate of 70%. Contributory factors to this position include high levels of economic inactivity with 29.6% (65,000 individuals) of the working age population classified accordingly and skills mismatch which make it difficult for some to gain employment. To increase the residential employment rate the city must address the high levels of economic inactivity by supporting those who are able back into employment, as well as ensuring local residents are equipped with the right mix of skills aligned to industry demands.

¹ Labour Force Survey December 2015

Impact of Welfare Reform

Northern Ireland is set to be hit harder by welfare reform than any other part of the UK with estimates that, when the reforms have come into full effect, they will take £750m a year out of the Northern Ireland economy. This is equivalent to a Northern Ireland average of £650² a year for every adult of working age (compared to an average of £470 a year across Great Britain). Belfast, with an expected loss of £840 per adult of working age, is hit harder than any major city in the UK – and significantly harder than other parts of Northern Ireland.

3 Future Employment Outlook

New employment growth to 2025 is forecast at around 4%, according to forecasts produced for the framework by Oxford Economics.³ This is a more restrained picture than during previous periods of high growth. Added to this, there are likely to be significant reductions in employment within the public sector.

In addition to the new jobs created, it is important to note that there will still be demand across all sectors to replace those who have left their jobs, meaning significant vacancy levels even in those sectors which may be in decline (“replacement demand”). Therefore, there are a number of large sectors such as hospitality and retail which, while they may not necessarily be creating large volumes of *new* jobs, will still create significant demand for replacement of labour.

Although the labour supply of skilled residents is set to improve in Belfast, there is still forecast to be a considerable oversupply of lower skilled labour in the short to medium term. This paints a relatively bleak picture for those at the lower end of the skills spectrum. Added to this, the impact of Welfare Reform has not been factored into these figures. Given that many of those who may be forced back into the labour market after long periods of absence are likely to have limited formal skills levels – in addition to the other challenges that they may face in entering the labour market – it is likely that there will be a significant surge in the claimant count in the short term at least (following the introduction of Welfare Reform in 2020). Cumulatively these trends, if they continue, could lead to an increasingly polarised labour market in Belfast.

² http://www.nicva.org/sites/default/files/d7content/attachments-resources/the_impact_of_welfare_reform_in_ni_2013.pdf

³ The forecasts provide employment projection figures based on ‘people’ based employment, as opposed to ‘jobs’ based employment. People based employment is the forecast number of people expected to be in employment. Jobs based employment (the number of total jobs) would be higher because many people have more than one job.

It is forecast that the key growth sectors continue to be those which have experienced the most investment and illustrate the structural shift to service sector growth within the city economy and have the largest share of employment. **Table 1** shows projected employment growth rates across all sectors in the period to 2025. The key growth sectors are forecast to be ICT, Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities, Administrative and Support Services, and Human Health and Social Work Activities. Between them these sectors account for three quarters (76%) of forecasted total employment growth. Conversely the forecasted impact of further austerity measures is highlighted through the expected loss of thousands of public sector jobs. It has been anecdotally reported that this cut may be as much as 10% of employment in the sector in the next four years. It illustrates a fundamental shift, with the ability of the public sector to create jobs in the future and directly influence the labour market more constrained.

Table 1: Forecast employment growth in Belfast, by sector, 2012-2025 (000's)⁴

| | 2012 | 2025 | Change | % change |
|---|-------|-------|--------|----------|
| A Agriculture, forestry and fishing | 0.15 | 0.18 | 0.0 | 20.3 |
| B Mining and quarrying | 0.12 | 0.09 | 0.0 | -24.8 |
| C Manufacturing | 9.38 | 8.26 | -1.1 | -12.0 |
| D Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply | 1.03 | 1.19 | 0.2 | 14.8 |
| E Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities | 0.87 | 1.04 | 0.2 | 19.8 |
| F Construction | 6.50 | 6.80 | 0.3 | 4.7 |
| G Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motor cycles | 25.84 | 25.50 | -0.3 | -1.3 |
| H Transport and storage | 6.17 | 6.65 | 0.5 | 7.8 |
| I Accommodation and food service activities | 11.58 | 12.39 | 0.8 | 7.0 |
| J Information and communication | 9.94 | 11.97 | 2.0 | 20.4 |
| K Financial and insurance activities | 10.47 | 9.63 | -0.8 | -8.0 |
| L Real estate activities | 3.20 | 3.76 | 0.6 | 17.4 |
| M Professional, scientific and technical activities | 11.75 | 15.04 | 3.3 | 28.0 |
| N Administrative and support service activities | 18.46 | 22.63 | 4.2 | 22.6 |
| O Public administration and defence; compulsory social security | 24.82 | 20.73 | -4.1 | -16.5 |
| P Education | 17.01 | 17.23 | 0.2 | 1.3 |
| Q Human health and social work activities | 31.35 | 32.72 | 1.4 | 4.4 |
| R, S, T, U Other | 9.88 | 10.67 | 0.8 | 8.0 |

Table 2 shows what the above means for the employment rate in Belfast across different skills cohorts. It shows that structural imbalances within the labour market are forecast to remain in 2025, with the greatest gains in employment in higher to intermediate qualifications. In 2025 the employment rate for individuals with Level 4 qualifications and

⁴ Source: Oxford Economics Forecasts, 2014

above (85%) is forecast to still be more than double of those with no qualifications (39%), as is the case now.⁵

Table 2: Forecast changing employment rate by skills level, 2012 to 2025 (000's)⁶

| Qualification level | GCSE/A Level Equivalent | 2012 | 2025 | % change: 2012 to 2025 |
|---|--|------|------|------------------------|
| No qualifications | | 38% | 39% | 1% |
| Level 1 qualifications | Equivalent of 1-4 GCSEs of any grade or entry level foundation diploma | 61% | 62% | 1% |
| Level 2 qualifications | Equivalent of 5 GCSE A*-C grades | 64% | 67% | 3% |
| Apprenticeship | | 74% | 76% | 2% |
| Level 3 qualifications | Equivalent of 2 A-Levels, 4 AS Levels, Advanced GNVQ, Advanced Diploma | 70% | 73% | 3% |
| Level 4 qualifications and above | Equivalent of degree level qualification or above, foundation degree in Northern Ireland | 85% | 85% | 0% |
| Other qualifications | | 72% | 74% | 2% |

Supply and demand imbalance

As highlighted in table 2 there is a significant oversupply of lower skilled residents within Belfast, and this trend is forecast to continue. However there will be an improvement in the reduction in people with no qualifications (a continuation of the improvement over the last decade), and the supply of working age residents qualified to Level 4 and above will also increase, forecast at 34% compared to 28% in 2012. This will result in higher earnings, which have already improved across the city by 7.5% between 2010 and 2013.

Table 3 shows the expected position between the supply of resident skills and the demand for skill levels up to 2025. As shown in the table below, in the future, greater demand is

⁵ Some of the data in this section and the appendix refers to the base year as 2012. Oxford Economics use 2012 as that is the base year that the current forecasting model starts from (based on when population data starts from). There are changes in the population over time and assumptions made up to 2025 that are linked back to the base year of 2012. This is also consistent with the data for the Integrated Economic Framework where the base year is 2012.

⁶ Source: Oxford Economics forecasts, 2014

expected for higher skilled workers with Level 4 qualifications and above. However the supply of resident skills at this qualification level is not expected to match demand. This is not just a question of quantity (as many graduates are currently in low skilled jobs). It is also about the extent to which graduates have the specific technical skills and employability skills that employers require. Additionally a significant oversupply of residents with no or level 1 qualifications is expected to result in an oversupply in the market, making it increasingly difficult for individuals with these skill levels to find employment.

Table 3: Forecast supply of Belfast’s resident skills and demand for skills by qualification level, 2012 and 2025⁷

| | 2012 | 2025 | 2012 | 2025 | 2012 | 2025 |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Qualification level | % of total supply | % of total supply | % of total demand | % of total demand | Supply Minus Demand 000's | Supply Minus Demand 000's |
| No qualifications | 23% | 16% | 12% | 6% | 28.6 | 22.2 |
| Level 1 qualifications | 12% | 12% | 12% | 7% | 4.2 | 12.6 |
| Level 2 qualifications | 14% | 15% | 17% | 15% | -1.8 | 3.1 |
| Apprenticeship | 3% | 2% | 3% | 3% | -0.4 | -2.1 |
| Level 3 qualifications | 15% | 16% | 16% | 20% | 2.4 | -4.6 |
| Level 4 qualifications and above | 28% | 34% | 37% | 45% | -11.4 | -17.6 |
| Other qualifications | 4% | 4% | 4% | 4% | 0.0 | 0.4 |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | | |

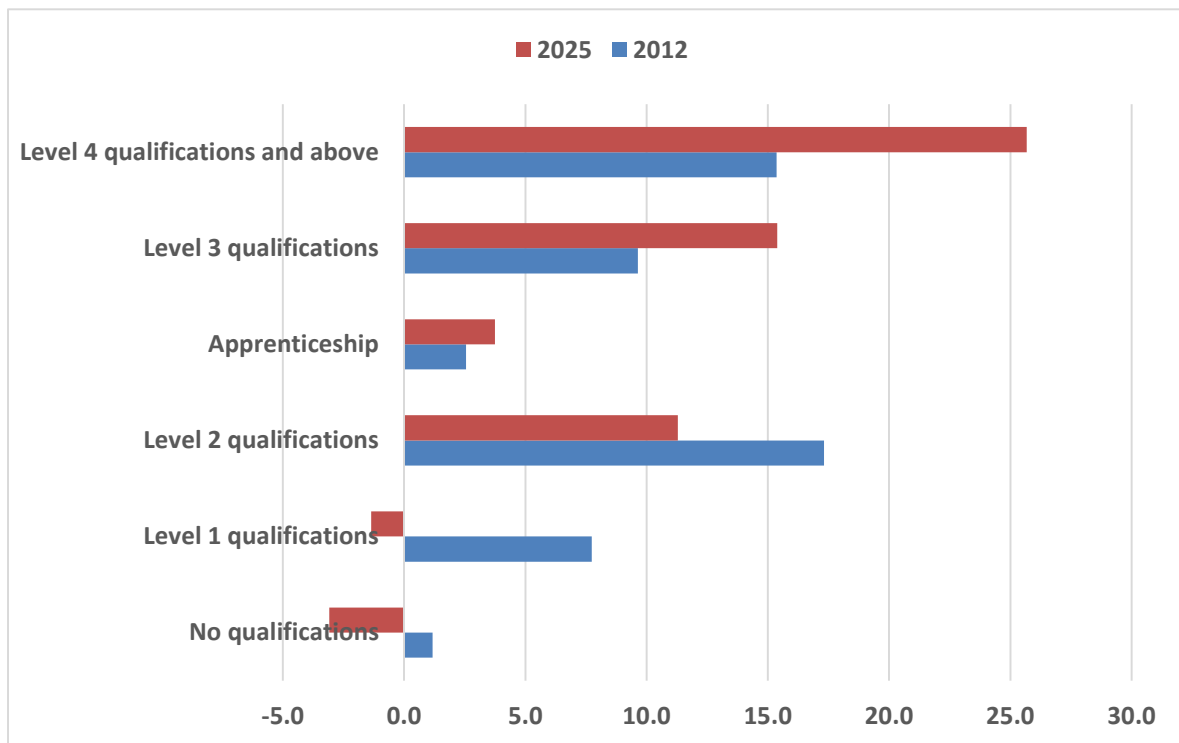
Reliance on skilled commuters

Because the increase in supply of higher skilled residents will not match demand, this will inevitably lead to an increase in net commuters with level 4 qualifications or above over the forecast period. Belfast is not producing enough of its own graduates with required skills sets to reduce commuting, and without action, it is difficult to perceive this trend changing in either the medium or long term. It is forecasted that commuting for those who possess level 3 and 4 qualifications will increase by 38% and 43% respectively by 2025.

⁷ Source: Oxford Economics Forecasts, 2014

Figure 1 illustrates the forecasted shift in numbers of higher skilled commuters over this timeframe, with net commuting for low level qualifications a negative, meaning more local residents are accessing lower level employment than those commuting in. However, as previously noted, there will be a much lower volume of these lower-skilled roles in the future.

Figure 1: Levels of net commuting by skill level, 2012 and 2025⁸



Skills demand across key sectors

Changes in skills demand are driven by changes in overall employment, sectoral employment and the share of skills within sectors. As highlighted previously in the future, jobs in Belfast will require more intermediate and higher level qualifications. Tables 4 to 7 illustrate the trends amongst the key growth sectors in the city. They suggest, that, with the exception of Administration and Support (which is forecast to experience particularly strong growth in jobs with intermediate occupations and a spread also amongst lower level qualifications), the focus is very much upon demand for Level 4, and to a lesser extent, Level 3 qualifications across these growth sectors. Particularly notable is the growth of nearly 6,000 jobs at Level 4 within Human Health and Social Work between 2012 and 2025.

⁸ Source: Oxford Economics forecasts

Beyond these key growth sectors however, there is also forecast for significant demand of higher level skills across other sectors, where the large forecast fall in lower skilled employment somewhat masks the demand for higher level skills. For instance, there is forecast employment for 1,700 jobs at Level 4 within Financial and Professional Services over this period; 1,600 within Wholesale and Retail; nearly 1,000 within Accommodation and Food; and 900 in Education.

This highlights the widespread trend for higher level skills extends not just within what would be deemed 'higher value' sectors, but is cross-cutting across the whole economy.

Table 4: Employment demand change in ICT by qualification level, 2012 to 2025 (000's)⁹

| | Volume change | % change |
|------------------------|---------------|----------|
| No qualifications | -0.3 | -68.7 |
| Level 1 qualifications | -0.5 | -69.7 |
| Level 2 qualifications | 0.2 | 14.5 |
| Apprenticeship | 0.1 | 20.4 |
| Level 3 qualifications | 0.9 | 60.5 |
| Level 4 and above | 1.6 | 28.2 |
| Other qualifications | 0.1 | 20.4 |

Table 5: Employment demand change in Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities, by qualification level, 2012 to 2025 (000's)¹⁰

| | Volume change | % change |
|------------------------|---------------|----------|
| No qualifications | -0.3 | -75.4 |
| Level 1 qualifications | 0.0 | -0.8 |
| Level 2 qualifications | 0.5 | 33.7 |
| Apprenticeship | 0.0 | 28.0 |
| Level 3 qualifications | 1.0 | 77.4 |
| Level 4 and above | 2.1 | 28.2 |
| Other qualifications | 0.1 | 28.0 |

⁹ Source: Oxford Economics Forecasts, 2014

¹⁰ Source: Oxford Economics Forecasts, 2014

Table 6: Employment demand change in Administrative and Support Services, by qualification level, 2012 to 2025 (000's)¹¹

| | Volume change | % change |
|------------------------|---------------|----------|
| No qualifications | 0.1 | 3.4 |
| Level 1 qualifications | 0.3 | 8.9 |
| Level 2 qualifications | 0.9 | 25.5 |
| Apprenticeship | 0.2 | 22.6 |
| Level 3 qualifications | 1.5 | 57.0 |
| Level 4 and above | 0.9 | 25.8 |
| Other qualifications | 0.3 | 22.6 |

Table 7: Employment demand change in Human Health and Social Work, by qualification level, 2012 to 2025 (000's)¹²

| | Volume change | % change |
|------------------------|---------------|----------|
| No qualifications | -1.7 | -62.1 |
| Level 1 qualifications | -1.6 | -58.6 |
| Level 2 qualifications | -1.8 | -37.5 |
| Apprenticeship | 0.0 | 4.4 |
| Level 3 qualifications | 0.7 | 15.2 |
| Level 4 and above | 5.8 | 38.0 |
| Other qualifications | 0.0 | 4.4 |

¹¹ Source: Oxford Economics Forecasts, 2014

¹² Source: Oxford Economics Forecasts, 2014

4 The Belfast Policy Context

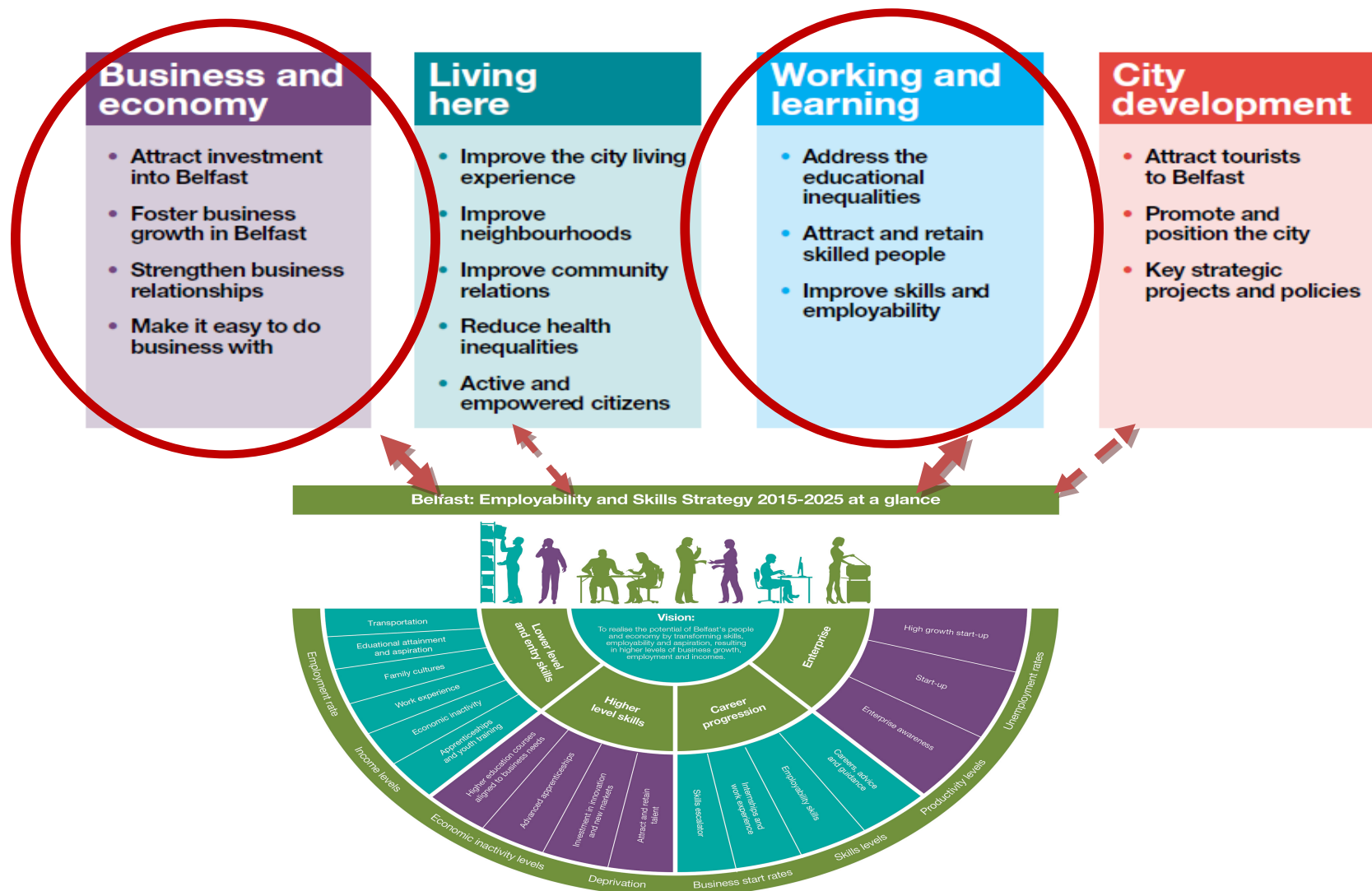
The Employability and Skills Framework is set in the context of Northern Ireland and Belfast level policy and strategy. Within Belfast itself, there are a number of strategies, policies and changes in the local government environment that are central to the employability and skills framework and action plan.

The most important change is Local Government Reform (LGR), under which Belfast City Council acquired enhanced planning, regeneration and economic development functions in April 2015. Community Planning is an important element of LGR, a process which will lead to the creation of an overarching plan (Belfast Agenda) to improve the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the city.

The 'Belfast Agenda' is the city's strategic plan for the future, up to 2030. As a sub-set of the Belfast Agenda, the Employability and Skills Framework will contribute towards the achievement of the priorities set out in the agenda. As outlined in **figure 2**, the framework will specifically align to the 'Business and Economy' and 'Working and Learning' themes of the Belfast Agenda. It will also support the delivery of the other two pillars, namely 'Living Here' and 'City Development'.

Research indicates that Belfast is a significant source of employment for residents from all across Northern Ireland. 58% of those who work in the city travel in from adjacent areas. The work that is currently under way to look at the role of Belfast in the regional economy has identified that addressing the employability and skills challenge will be critical to the future success of the city – and of the wider region. This work also identifies the potential for city-level activity to address the associated challenge and to start to make an impact in terms of improvements in the employment rate and in skills levels across the board.

Figure 2 – the Belfast Agenda and the Employability and Skills Framework



5 The Challenges Associated with Employability and Skills

Belfast faces a number of employability and skills challenges which were highlighted in the development of this Framework. These relate to both strategy and delivery and are contributing to the overarching problem of the Belfast economy not achieving its potential in terms of growth, productivity and employment. The key challenges include:

| Challenge | Associated issues |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Employability Skills | The lack of employability skills across all sections of the working age population. These combine basic attitudes and abilities that are essential to work, as well as crucial generic skills that contribute to productivity and success from basic to high level roles. This is affecting not only those who are most marginalised from the labour market but also those leaving college and notably university. This is having knock-on effects for access to lower level jobs. |
| Culture | Family cultures around schooling, education and the world of work are also affecting employability. In particular this has knock on effects for the ability to tackle the cycle of decline in some neighbourhoods, and for people to move into even the lowest levels of employment opportunity. |
| Basic and essential skills | The demographic aged over 25 lack general technical skills. A significant proportion of the working age population (aged over 25) have left school with no formal qualifications and have subsequently found it very difficult to move into employment. Similarly, there is a large number of over 40 year olds who have been affected by the decline of heavy primary industry and manufacturing, and have been unable to move back into employment with limited skill sets. |
| Enterprise | The low levels of entrepreneurship in Belfast mean that people are reliant on employment as a route into work. There is a need to link entrepreneurship in education and careers advice offers, and to build a stronger local support package for start-ups |
| Careers Advice | Careers advice and access to work experience opportunities is patchy. There is too little quality provision which enables young people to get informed advice about their future and there are gaps in the levels of awareness among teachers about future growth areas and the skills and pathways required to access these. |
| Governance | There is a significant amount of complexity and duplication in relation to provision around employability and skills. Interventions are being delivered by a wide range of stakeholders, with no real sense of joining up or measurement of impact |

6 Overview of draft Framework

Overarching principles

Consultation on this framework revealed that the way in which action on employability and skills is designed and delivered is as important as the actions themselves. There is acknowledgement that in the past there has been insufficient connection between organisations and projects, and too little emphasis on a long term and strategic approach. The following principles therefore guide the Belfast Employability and Skills Framework.

Joined up and holistic Whilst there is a myriad of activity going on around employability and skills in Belfast, there is little coordination, too much fragmentation and complexity. The Framework provides a mechanism to join up disparate activity, providing a strategic, coherent and city wide approach to employability and skills.

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Citywide approach | A strategic and joined up approach must also be a city-wide one. Delivering overall programmes for Belfast will be more efficient and effective than a myriad of smaller ones which risk duplicating activity. Whilst the overall vision and programmes will be city-wide it will be important to deliver through a model that is sensitive to local challenges and opportunities, and can work with local organisations and communities to meet specific needs. |
| Long-term approach | An ambitious and transformative approach will require time, so Belfast must look ahead at future trends, issues and opportunities and plan for the long term. It recognises that addressing employability and skills challenges is a significant and long term job and there are not necessarily any quick fixes. |
| Outcome-based | The Framework will focus on delivering tangible outcomes that contribute to wider goals and vision and which visibly benefit the people of Belfast. This framework is therefore driven by the outcomes of the Belfast Agenda. |
| Needs-based approach | The Framework is needs based recognising that demand and supply needs to be aligned to ensure labour market skills match employer demands and reflecting changes in market conditions in both a local and global market context. |
| Aspirational and ambitious | Belfast's long term goal is to maintain and improve its position as the economic driver for Northern Ireland. This is as challenging as it is important, and it will only be achieved if it is ambitious and seeks radical change for the good of the whole city |
| Inclusive growth | Employment is the main mechanism through which individuals can lift themselves out of the poverty trap. A core principle of this framework will be to support inclusive growth by facilitating access to employment opportunities, arising from economic growth, in all parts of the city |

Vision and targets

The vision for the Belfast Employability and Skills Framework is:

To realise the potential of Belfast's people and its economy by transforming skills, employability and aspiration, resulting in higher levels of business growth, employment and income.

Backing up this vision, a headline target has been established, based on the employment rate in the city. Therefore the headline indicator is:

To achieve an employment rate of at least 70% by 2025.

By way of context, the baseline position is around 65.6% (Labour Force Survey December 2015). The draft Northern Ireland Economic Inactivity Strategy (2014) suggested a regional employment target of 70%.

This increase would mean moving an estimated 17,300 **additional** Belfast residents into work up to the period 2025, and would require an increase in the employment rate of 0.36 percentage points per year (year on year).

The overarching vision and target is supported by three supplementary stretching sub-targets that relate to skills levels. This reflects the view that the two issues are inextricably linked: improvements in skills levels both enhance the potential to find work and can generate better financial returns in terms of increased earnings.

- **Sub target 1:** To reduce the proportion of the working age population with no qualifications from 2012 baseline of 23% to between 9% and 12% by 2025
- **Sub-target 2:** To increase the proportion of the working age population with level 2 qualifications and above from 2012 baseline of 64% to between 76% and 79% by 2025.
- **Sub-target 3:** To increase the proportion of the working age population with level 4 qualifications and above from 2012 baseline of 28% to between 37% and 39% by 2025.

These targets should not be viewed as static and fixed, rather there needs to be the flexibility to amend targets based upon wider external factors such as economic conditions and changes in the policy environment. As the wider framework needs to be a live and fluid document, so do the targets. This is particularly important in a constantly changing economy and where external policy changes will have a significant impact on the city's economy.

Achievement of the targets will be dependent on agreement to the need to focus on these, as well as a commitment to measure progress consistently across a range of interventions. While it will take some time to agree the full range of actions, it is considered that it is critical to retain these targets – albeit that they can be open to review – as a means of focusing attention across a range of agencies and delivery partners.

Overarching aims and objectives

The framework has four key aims. These are:

1. To increase access to employment by supporting the development of lower and entry level skills and by addressing barriers preventing access to jobs
2. To generate higher level skills which meet the demands of employers and investors
3. To facilitate career progression routes across all skill levels
4. To develop a culture of entrepreneurship at all levels

Each aim is supported by a suite of objectives (see overleaf). The draft framework identified a number of priority actions. These will be further developed by those parties involved in the working groups established to bring forward key projects in each area. Year 1 priority actions are set out in Appendix 2.

Table 8: Belfast Employability and Skills Framework: Aims and Objectives

| Aim | Objectives |
|--|--|
| <p>Aim 1: To increase access to employment by supporting the development of lower and entry level skills and by addressing barriers preventing access to jobs</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) To work collaboratively with government partners to establish more coherence around the support provision to help economically inactive individuals back into work (employability and support services) b) To work collaboratively with relevant government departments to influence the attainment and attitudes of schools and further education providers in key areas i.e. encouraging vocational skills in growth areas c) To create a cultural shift in aspirations through engaging families with complex needs d) To provide work experience and up skilling opportunities for those furthest from the labour market, including those aged 24+ e) To work with transport providers to look at how improvements in mobility can support access to employment f) To work with government partners and key partners to create more opportunities for apprenticeships and youth training, through investment projects. |
| <p>Aim 2: To generate higher level skills which meet the demands of employers and investors</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) To work with Invest NI, employers and higher education providers to ensure that course provision meets business needs b) To encourage more higher and advanced level apprenticeships c) To work directly with small growth-focused businesses and encourage all city employers to invest in innovation and new markets to close the productivity gap d) Attracting and retaining talent. |
| <p>Aim 3: To facilitate career progression routes across all skill levels</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) To work with government departments in the roll-out of the new careers advice and guidance strategy, better connecting education and employers b) To work with the education sector, training providers and employers to develop and encourage delivery of standardised employability skills (pre and post employment) c) To work with government departments and employers to provide opportunities for career progression along the ‘skills escalator’ at all levels d) Coordinate and extend internships and placements with employers across the city. |
| <p>Aim 4: To develop a culture of entrepreneurship at all levels</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Build enterprise, entrepreneurship and self-employment skills through targeted programmes b) Work with schools and colleges to increase enterprise awareness through the use of positive role models and encouraging a culture of entrepreneurship c) Work directly with universities and colleges to encourage more high growth potential business starts. |

Figure 3: Belfast Employability and Skills Framework: Summary of vision, overarching aims and activity themes



7 Implementation

Governance and management

The consultation and other desk based activities undertaken as part of this work has identified that whilst there is a myriad of activity going on around employability and skills in Belfast, there is little coordination, too much fragmentation and complexity. What is required is a means of joining together this disparate activity and providing a strategic, coherent and city wide approach to employability and skills.

Additionally it is important that strategic and operational activity around employability and skills links into wider strategy being undertaken at Belfast City and Northern Ireland levels. As the Community Plan for the city, the Belfast Agenda will provide overall strategic context for the Employability and Skills Framework. Therefore, it is proposed that the overall governance of the Framework will be through the Belfast Community Planning Board who will agree key priorities and provide strategic oversight of the Framework's implementation.

It is intended that delivery structures will be created around the four key aims of the framework. These will involve representatives from the public, private, community and voluntary sectors based on the areas of priority, as set by the Belfast Community Planning Board. Given that this is not yet operational, it is proposed that a number of Task and Finish groups start to take forward individual elements of activity, in the context of the Belfast Agenda.

A draft action plan for year one activity (2016/17) has been developed. Given the long-term focus of much of this activity, it is likely that there will also be a significant degree of preliminary work to look at longer-term collaborative approaches. The Programme for Government commitments on employability, skills and inclusive growth as well as the Belfast Agenda framework are critical vehicles in helping focus activity and in securing buy-in from all partners around an agreed programme of work, and leveraging the relevant resources to make this happen.

Figure 4: Belfast Employability and Skills Framework: overview of aims, targets and outcome measurements

