



Belfast Region City Deal

Employability and Skills Framework

Initial proposition



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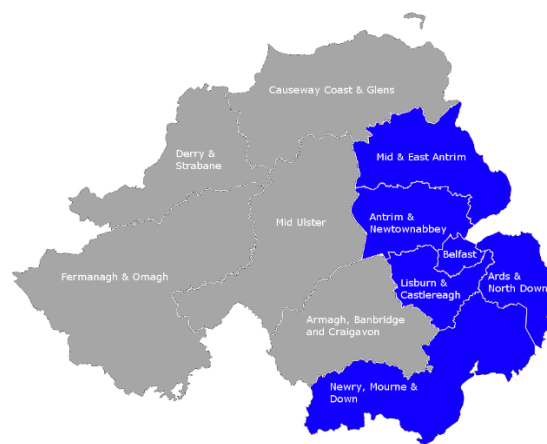
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1. Introduction

On the 22 November 2017 the Chancellor for the Exchequer announced in the Autumn Budget that the UK Government will **"open negotiations for a Belfast (Region) City Deal as part of our commitment to a comprehensive and ambitious set of City Deals for Northern Ireland."** The Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) is being developed by a partnership of Councils who have established a shared vision of Inclusive Growth for the Region, with the aim of *"delivering more and better jobs, inclusive growth; improved skills and growth of domestic business and foreign direct investment"*.

The six Councils in the Belfast Region have developed an industrial strategic framework to align the BRCD proposals with the UK and draft NI Industrial Strategies. The strategic framework identifies the key challenges facing the region's economic performance including Brexit, relatively low levels of productivity and innovation and very high levels of economic inactivity. It also identifies a number of strengths and opportunities for the Region, including: the potential development of the Eastern Economic Corridor; a number of vibrant and growing sectors; increasing investment in the knowledge economy and supporting infrastructure and, of course; the educated workforce that is available to support our growth areas.



However, all the partners recognise that investment in employability and skills will be critical if we are to continue to attract investment, deliver our ambitious targets for the Region and enable all sections of society and parts of the Region to benefit from the new and better jobs that we plan to create. In line with the vision agreed by partners, the BRCD skills proposition will need to deliver Skills for Growth and Skills for Inclusion.



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The UK and NI industrial strategies highlight and emphasise the level of ambition that we need to have for the employability and skills agenda if we are to stay ahead of global competitors by investing today in skills for the future. For example, it has been estimated that within 20 years 90% of all jobs will require some level of digital skills. The Belfast Region Industrial Strategic Framework also highlights some of the fundamental challenges to providing a skilled workforce that can support our growing sectors, when economic inactivity rates across the Region stand at 26.5% and 15% of the working age population have no formal qualifications.

The fundamental importance of skills to delivering inclusive and sustainable growth has been recognised in all City Deals, with employability and skills forming an integral part of programmes to equip City Regions to compete on a global stage. Skills, underpinned by a commitment to improving employment opportunities by integrating approaches to employability, has been identified as one of the pillars upon which Belfast Region City Deal will be built. Work has therefore commenced with the Further Education Colleges, as NDPBs under the Department for Economy, to develop this initial proposition for discussion with NI Government Departments and Agencies. This will help us in our efforts to provide a transformative investment, employability and skills programme for the Region.

The role of employability and skills, is vital to ensuring the ambitions and benefits of the BRCD proposition are realised. These ambitions include:

- More and better jobs
- Inclusive growth and benefits shared across the region
- Improved skills aligned to opportunities for business growth
- Reduction in the skills gap and in education inequalities
- Positive impact in areas of high deprivation
- Increased new business starts
- Provision of high level skills to support inward investment efforts
- Growth and job creation plans for indigenous business
- A more attractive proposition for private sector investment
- A balanced spread of benefits across the region
- Improved collaborative working between Councils and other delivery partners

The BRCD partners consider that the City Deal creates an opportunity for Councils, colleges, Government Departments and agencies, businesses and other partners to co-design a new



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integrated model of working that would align existing and new resources over the 10-year period to support a collective vision of inclusive growth for the Region. The model would draw on a range of existing and relevant strategies, e.g. 'Success through Skills' and 'Enabling Success' and align the Employability and Skills model with the NI and UK industrial strategies and the Industrial Strategic Framework for the Belfast Region.



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2. Strategic Context

Given the unique nature of the City Deal approach in a Northern Ireland (NI) devolved administration setting, it is important to understand how the BRCD can help both Central and Local Government deliver against existing strategic priorities, in so far as they connect into employability and skills.

Programme for Government - The focus on delivering sustainable skills and employment outcomes for people is a key requirement in the NI Programme for Government (PfG) which has shifted to adopt an Outcome Based Approach (OBA). In order to deliver a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy, Government and partners have been tasked with giving our children and young people the best start in life. This will involve increasing the proportion of the workforce qualified to higher levels, getting more people working in better jobs, raising the numbers of graduates progressing into professional or management occupations and creating the conditions where people can achieve their potential.

NI Industrial Strategy (Draft) – The vision in Economy 2030 is of “a globally competitive economy that works for everyone”. The draft strategy aims to transform the economy, enhancing indigenous business growth and making the Region even more attractive to foreign direct investment (FDI). It is ambitious in terms of renewing infrastructure and increasing innovation and so raising productivity in the Region, thus increasing its attractiveness for new and older businesses alike. The draft strategy recognises the challenges facing the region and aims to deliver sustainable, inclusive growth by restructuring the local economy. This will involve supporting the growth sectors in which NI has competitive advantage whilst ensuring that economic benefits reach into all communities and offer everyone new and better opportunities. This approach will be critical in tackling the continuing high levels of economic inactivity. The draft strategy also recognises that a successful restructuring and new direction economy cannot happen unless a dynamic labour market exists which has at its centre a constant talent pipeline of people. Economy 2030 aims to create a globally competitive economy like Norway, Switzerland, New Zealand and Sweden, ‘which provides opportunities for all their citizens, something to which we must aspire’.

Success through Skills – the NI Skills Strategy aims to raise the skills level of the whole workforce, raise productivity and increase levels of social inclusion by enhancing the employability of those currently excluded from the labour market. The vision for skills will be



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delivered through effective organisations with excellent leadership and a commitment to upskilling those entering the labour market for the first time, those already in work and those excluded from the labour market. The strategy has a number of priorities which include enabling people to access and progress up the skills ladder, raising the skills level of the whole workforce, improving productivity, increasing levels of social inclusion by enhancing the employability of those currently excluded from the labour market and securing Northern Ireland's future in a global marketplace. The strategy looks at the current skills base, examines the skills we will need in future to grow the NI economy and highlights areas for action, recognising the need for “transformational change” to deliver an ambitious improvement in the skill profile of the region.

FE Means Success - the NI Strategy for Further Education outlines the plan to continue the FE sector's 'significant and high quality contribution to addressing the current and future skills needs of NI. The strategy recognises the key role of colleges in the delivery of Inclusive Growth. As part of the strategy implementation plan, Colleges are expected to develop policy proposals on the most appropriate role for them to play in the delivery of provision 'with key partners' in order to widen participation and to encourage and facilitate progression to further education provision at higher levels.

Enabling Success – the NI Strategy for supporting the transition from economic inactivity to employment recognises the significant challenges to tackling persistently high numbers of people not actively engaged in the labour market. Despite large-scale investment by the colleges, departments and delivery partners, consistently high levels of economic inactivity from 26% to 32% over the last 30 years, are still the highest rate across all regions of the UK. If we are to use the BCRD to successfully address what has become a major source of inequality and a significant structural problem within the economy, then we will need to involve a range of partners to develop new integrated approaches.. Integrated approaches will enable further investment in retraining, the development of new skills that fit with the future economic needs and the provision of genuinely effective employability support.

Inclusive Growth – Stronger collaboration at a city region level enhances our ability to shape priorities and to work together to deliver on the many issues that can more effectively be addressed by working across traditional local authority boundaries, enhancing and honing our delivery with longer term investment rather than duplicating our resources. The



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employability and skills component of the City Deal can specifically reach the target groups who are most excluded from the labour market, but additional consideration needs to be given to ensure that the investment projects selected create opportunities for economic and social inclusion. Recent research published by JRF in January 2018 on inclusive growth decision-making frameworks, highlights the potential of City Deals to provide opportunities to address some of the challenges that have emerged around social exclusion, inequality and the failure to create and sustain inclusive economic growth.

Devolved Administrations Experience on City Deals - Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England have all developed different ideas and strategies for their skills agendas. However, investment in employability and skills has been fundamental to each and every City Deal. In studying the approaches in each devolved region common themes start to emerge. Firstly that the skills agenda is not just an education initiative, the skills agenda is an economic imperative. Failure to understand this will mean that skills shortages will continue to grow, a problem that may be exacerbated by Brexit, and productivity will fail to improve. Understanding the experience of City Deal employability and skills approaches across other parts of the UK, creates an opportunity to develop and implement the best ideas, providing a real opportunity to change lives and create sustainable and inclusive economic growth across the Region. One of the key challenges in Northern Ireland, in both the construct and delivery of an integrated City Deal solution, will be to successfully navigate and negotiate the planning and delivery mechanisms between Central and Local Government and associated NDPBs to deliver innovative solutions, for which the new Outcome Based Approach for the Programme for Government provides.

OECD Perspectives Aligning Economic Development, Employment and Skills Solutions- In the 2014 OECD report on Employment and Skills in Northern Ireland the importance of local employment and training interventions were highlighted as being integral to boosting job creation and increasing productivity, but only when effectively integrated with local economic development. The report further recommended that tackling economic inactivity required a partnership approach and significant outreach to focus on developing skills for people who have been out of the labour market for extended periods. In the OECD Report on Local Job Creation Methodology (2014) the importance of better aligning skills, employability and local economic development policies and strategies was further highlighted.

3. Challenges

An analysis of the Belfast Region's economic performance shows a mix of positives and negatives. While there has been significant success in terms of attracting FDI in Northern Ireland, this has not been equally shared across the region. Furthermore, economic inactivity rates remain stubbornly high and the 10 most deprived areas in terms of education and skills are located in the city of Belfast. In the following section, the BRCD partners reflect on employability and skills challenges that are common across the Region, where a City Deal solution offers the potential to deliver medium to long-term interventions with lasting impact. In developing this analysis attention has been paid to the specific challenges for each Council area as highlighted in socio-economic profiles and the community plans.

Figure 1. Summary of Employability and Skills Challenges Across BRCD

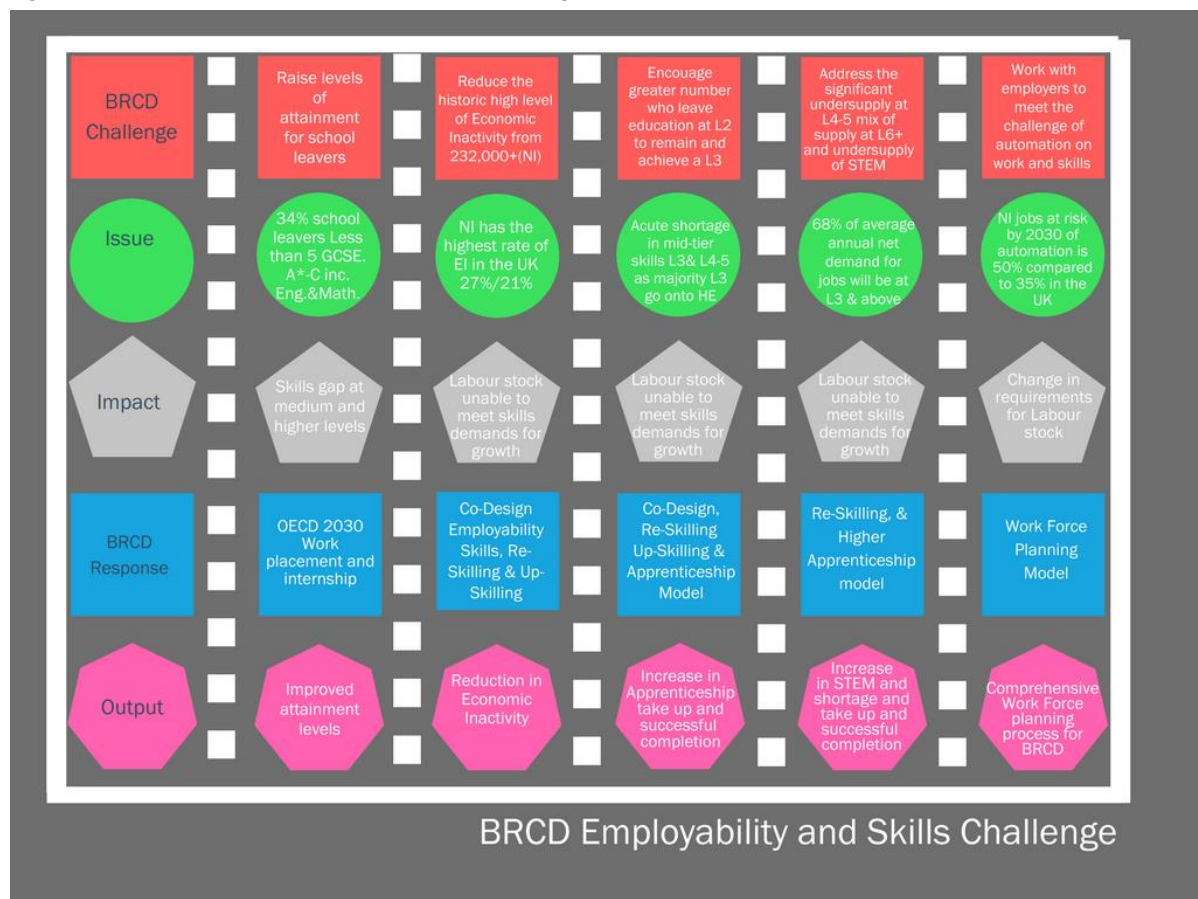


Figure 1 above presents a conceptual overview of common challenges across the region, including disparities in levels of educational attainment and core skills for school leavers, high levels of economic inactivity, the need to improve skills and qualification outcomes at the



bottom and top of the scales and the need to develop more integrated approaches to connecting with employers to better align the supply of skills with employer demands.

Educational Attainment

Although NI is recognised in many ways as having an excellent education system significant gaps in achievement remain across the post-primary system. Outstanding achievements, particularly for “A” Level outcomes relative to other parts of the UK, , coupled with insufficient achievement for too many young people at GCSE illustrate these gaps.

The 2016 Chief Inspector of Education's report (the latest available) highlighted the importance of the work needed to improve outcomes for young people: “While there has been some improvement, the 2015 figures show that 34% of school leavers still do not achieve five GCSEs (or equivalents) at grades A* to C including GCSE English and mathematics, and for those entitled to free school meals the figure is 59%”.

Recent analysis of levels of educational attainment and demographic projections presents a scenario in the next decade where 70,000 + students could leave the education system without 5 GCSEs including English and Maths (seen by many employers as a minimum entry point to employment).

Research shows that in NI, progress through education and training can vary depending on where someone lives. Higher levels of underachievement are more prevalent in areas of high social deprivation, which adversely affects the life chances of too many young people. A poor start, in terms of lower levels of educational attainment is a key tracker into economic inactivity. We believe there needs to be a more co-ordinated approach between the schools, colleges, training providers and the community and voluntary sector to address these long running deficits in core skills around literacy, numeracy and digital skills if the BRCD is to begin to create the foundations for inclusive growth.

Despite the challenges within our education system, it is encouraging to note that in 2015/2016 close to 96% of all school leavers across the BRCD succeeded in finding their way into Higher Education, Further Education, Training & Apprenticeships or Employment and the position has been gradually improving in recent years.

Skills Challenges

In the last 20 years employers have become increasingly interested in qualifications as a measure of competence. There are fewer occupational roles which exist in the labour market where it possible to enter with no skills or qualifications. According to recent reports



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from Ulster University's Economic Policy Centre, employers are more 'qualifications hungry', and 37% of people in NI have third level qualifications compared to 25% at the turn of the century. Whilst this is a plus in terms of our aspirations for skills for growth, it has a corresponding downside for those with low or no skills trying to enter the labour market and drives the need for BRCD to offer skills for inclusion. This trend is repeated across the EU, where EUROSTAT reported that between 2008 to 2014 the percent of highly skilled jobs increased from 38.6% to 40.6% and low-skilled jobs fell from 18.5% to 16.7%.

Lower level qualifications and skills create an enhanced risk for young people becoming economically inactive. In 2016, of the 12 UK regions NI had the 2nd highest proportion of its population not in education, employment or training (NEETs). 21% of people aged 18-24 are classified as NEET, which is more than double the rate recorded in 2006 before the economic crisis. Within this NEETs group, 33% had low levels of secondary school qualifications.

Even among the Region's key strength, the proportion of the population achieving degree level qualifications, NI has an evolving challenge to address the risk of underemployment, where graduates are securing jobs in "non-graduate" roles. The outworkings of this is that the graduates are blocking these opportunities for other candidates with more relevant lower level qualifications and experience. In the 2015 Employer Skills Survey (ESS) 37% of NI employers reported having staff who had qualifications more advanced than required for their job role. In addition, NI is a net exporter of its talent with many young people completing their undergraduate study in other parts of the UK, and a large proportion never returning to our Region.

In terms of jobs and opportunities in priority sectors, the 2017 update to the NI Skills Barometer highlighted the need for 19,300 replacement jobs and 9,300 new jobs over the next 10 years. In the Employer Skills Survey in 2015 by the UK Commission for Employment & Skills, employers from NI reported 15% or 2,870 vacancies were hard to fill due to skills shortages, clearly indicating the need to better match skills supply with demand. The investment in a Belfast Region Skills barometer represents an initial investment in creating a dynamic match between the employment opportunities and our skills pipeline.

In terms of our approach to tackling skills challenges, the BRCD partners view skills development as a continuum and not something we exclusively do to enter the world of work. As such, BRCD needs to work to deliver skills solutions which offer initial access training /



re-skilling / up-skilling opportunities throughout working careers, which will become more essential as technology advances, when old roles and occupations risk becoming obsolete and new roles are developed.

Economic Inactivity

The number of people of working age who are currently inactive across NI is around 232,000 and within the Belfast City Region there are circa 176,000 ; 22.6% in *Mid & East Antrim*; 29.6% *Newry & Mourne*; 30.1% in *Belfast*; 24.8% in *Antrim & Newtownabbey*; 22.4% in *Ards & North Down* and 26.4 % in *Lisburn & Castlereagh*. The economic inactivity rate in the Belfast Region of 26.5% compares with a NI Average of 27.1% and a UK rate of 21.8%. One of the key challenges will be to develop a series of interventions, which support inclusive economic activation.

The Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) 2016 discussion paper on Economic Inactivity provided some insight in the segmentation of the economically inactive:

- The inactivity rate for people with low skills is considerably higher when compared to people higher up the skill ladder. The UUEPC go further and suggest the gap in inactivity rate between NI and the UK could be closed with an equalisation of the inactivity amongst low skills people.
- Single people account for the largest number of economically inactive people and have the highest economic inactivity rate. Closing the rate here to match the UK would close almost half the overall gap in the inactivity rate between NI and the UK.
- Lone parents, who are predominantly female, have a very high economic inactivity relative to the UK. If lone parents with both dependant and non-dependant children were to match the UK inactivity rate, it would reduce the overall inactivity rate by almost one third. However, the policy remedy is likely to be different for each category of lone parent.
- The largest impact overall would be achieved by increasing the employment rate amongst over 50s, single people and people with a low level of qualifications. Unfortunately, these groups also represent the 'hard to reach' groups most distanced from the labour market, highlighting the significant challenge in reducing the overall rate.

Wider forms of inactivity associated with health, mental health and disability, the barriers to work for carers, including the costs of childcare, making workplaces more inclusive for older



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workers, the continuing pattern of young people moving into inactivity and the potential increasing displacement of workers due to automation all add to the complexity of addressing economic inactivity.

The UUEPC 2016 report highlighted concerns about increasing levels of economic inactivity in the 16-34 age group and recommended urgent action to stem the flow of young people into this situation. The number of people who were economically inactive in the 16-34 group was similar to the 35-65 group, with 56,000 inactive persons under 35, one third larger than the total claiming unemployment benefits at that time.

It is also clear that levels of economic inactivity can differ by family type, with rates as low as 15% for family units compared to 36% for lone parents with dependant children. In NI the proportion of single person family units is 36% compared to 22% in the UK. Access to and high costs of childcare further exacerbate levels of economic inactivity for these groups across NI.

The UUEPC report is clear 'it is difficult to achieve significant increases in the employment rate (and thus meet our growth targets) without a significant reduction in both the unemployed and inactive who have work aspirations.' We need to stem the flow of young people into economic inactivity and work to address barriers for those in this situation, recognising that a 'one size fits all' solution will not work in this context.

The OECD G20 Task Force on Unemployment 2016 identified that poor households and recipients of welfare benefits require broad and integrated packages of support, services and incentives as well as a delivery model that can successfully bring these services to the families that need them. For women, this included opportunities to work and to return to work after child related breaks. For informal workers, stuck in low productivity low paid jobs, it included further extension of social safety nets. There are a range of measures targetting the low skilled, including work experience in the public and private sectors and policies to support a Youth Guarantee.

Lower Business Productivity

Improving business productivity is central to enhancing a location's economic competitiveness as well as enhancing the quality of life and standards of living for its residents. Increasing productivity in Northern Ireland - along with addressing economic inactivity - have remained the two most persistent economic challenges facing the Region –



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with little change in either metric over recent decades, despite a range of public and private investments to address them.

The most recent Northern Ireland Composite Economic Index (published January 2018) showed that there was growth of 1.2% in the quarter July to September 2017 compared with the same period in 2016. This compares with a UK average growth of 1.7%. In real terms, productivity in Northern Ireland is now only at the same level as it was at its high points in 2006. Over those 11 years, almost 70,000 new jobs were added to the labour force in Northern Ireland, without any impact on productivity levels. Some other regions of the UK have progressed beyond their pre-recession levels of growth but Northern Ireland continues to struggle to shift the dial in a meaningful way. This means that the gap between Northern Ireland and other parts of the UK – in productivity terms – has not closed. The implications of this for the local economy include suppressed wage levels, which in turn impact on living standards by reducing the amount of disposable income.

Northern Ireland is essentially a micro and small business economy. Improvements in productivity will require a multi-faceted approach to investment, including investment in innovation and technology. They will also require investment in skills, including management and leadership, access to new forms of finance and exploring new ways of working, including enhanced business-education partnerships. Supporting improvements in productivity in high growth sectors, needs to be balanced with sufficient attention to support indigenous SMEs.



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4. Opportunities

The investment delivered through the BRCD has the potential to enable sectors, in which the Region has competitive advantage, and in which there is significant potential for growth, to deliver more and better jobs. The draft Industrial strategy for NI identifies the following key growth sectors.

- Financial, Business and Professional Services
- Digital and Creative Technologies
- Advanced Manufacturing, Materials and Engineering
- Life and Health Sciences
- Agri-Food
- Construction and Materials Handling

In addition to the above priorities, Tourism has been identified in the Industrial Strategic Framework for the Belfast Region as a sector which offers significant growth potential.

Encouragingly the BRCD has enjoyed significant success in recent years in creating jobs growth and opportunities in priority sectors. Of the £1.1 billion FDI investment attracted to Northern Ireland in the last 5 years, 84% has been focused in the BRCD area. To continue to realise and deliver on the growth potential, the BRCD partners recognise the need to ensure that a skills pipeline is developed which is responsive to these requirements, but which also anticipates and responds to the skills of the future. Creation of such a system will require genuine integration of systems for planning, funding and delivery by a range of partners. It will also need to build in sufficient intelligence and flexibility to ensure that we do not just deliver the skills for now, but also recognise the fundamental importance of creating the skills for the future.

The scale of Investment in capital programmes through the BRCD will provide unique opportunities to both deliver and test new models of integrated employability and skills, including for example new approaches to apprenticeships. Through the use of social clauses, planning agreements and commitments from the public sector partners there is potential to develop and test approaches well beyond the most obvious opportunities in the construction sector.



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Skills for the Future

At the recent conference in Belfast (28th February 2018) hosted by Catalyst-Inc., and supported by their 2017 Knowledge Economy Report, key issues for the labour market and the economy over the next ten years were discussed. The implications of the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution', included features of: Mobility, Sensors, AI and Machine Learning, Companies as Platforms, Disaggregation of Work into Activities, Talent on Demand.

The 2017 IPPR report on Managing Automation, points out that the impact of automation will be most keenly felt in the manufacturing sectors. The report refers to the potential for increased job losses for low skilled workers in these sectors and highlights the importance of increased innovation and investment in digital technology. It also recommends that investment is required to upskill existing workers to equip them to complement automating technologies. Interestingly, accepting there will be an impact in terms of potential job losses as a result of automation, IPPR advocate the introduction of personal retraining allowance for workers made redundant, or with below level 3 qualifications, in communities or sectors facing economic decline or transition.

The BRCD will seek to position the Region so that it seeks to create competitive advantage from challenges such as automation and the demand for clean growth. Whilst there has been much attention to potential job losses from automation, it has been estimated that whilst in the UK in the period 2001-2015, 800,000 jobs were lost to automation, 3,500,000 were created. This will require new skills to be developed and enhanced to enable businesses to compete in a number of our growth sectors.

The opportunities are perhaps most obvious in the digital sector, but the history of Northern Ireland in areas such as advanced manufacturing, materials and engineering and agri-food means that, with the right investments in technology and skills, we are well placed to take advantage of the new design and engineering opportunities that will come from the need for increased investment in robotics, clean technology and biosecurity.

One of the other grand challenges in the UK Industrial Strategy is the ageing nature of the population. There is significant potential to utilise new skills across areas such as medicine, ICT, design and engineering to support the rapid advancement of existing centres of excellence such as the Centre for Connected Health.



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Tourism and Hospitality

The BRCD partners have ambitious plans for investment in the development of tourism product across the region that will enable the full growth potential of the sector to be fulfilled. The investments will seek to deliver increases in tourism expenditure commensurate with the growth in visitors, by increasing overnight stays by high value business and leisure tourism customers. The expected growth, coupled with high levels of current demand, will undoubtedly create a number of new employment opportunities across a range of job roles throughout the region. This will create an opportunity, and perhaps indeed a necessity, for new thinking to enable the engagement, skills development and preparation for employment of people currently either unemployed or economically inactive, but who wish to get back into the labour market. Critically, in supporting people into employment, account also needs to be taken of the importance of both support and investment in progression to ensure that weaknesses in previous models of short-term employability support are addressed.

Digital ICT Skills

The 2016 Matrix Digital ICT report highlighted the importance of the sector to the Northern Ireland economy with around 28,000 employed in different ICT roles across the Region. The report also highlighted that the future success of the sector was dependent on our ability to attract more talent into the sector, creating progress routes from STEM subjects in schools through to Further and Higher Education programmes. It is clear with the focus of investments on digital infrastructure, continued promotion of innovation in the sector and with impact of automation on society, that it will be important to have a digital skills strategy in place. In addition, in order to ensure greater inclusiveness it will be equally important to create digital opportunities to engage wider sections of society in the efforts to make Northern Ireland one of the most digitally connected regions in the world. In effect, Digital ICT skills can become an enabler for future employment opportunities across a range of sectors including: public services, healthcare, tourism, advanced manufacturing, financial, professional and business services.

The BRCD partners have commissioned Future Cities Catapult to develop a vision for digital infrastructure and skills for the Region. In order to be able to capitalise on this investment the BRCD partners need to make sure we create a vibrant digital society : continuing to progress shared service solutions and digital service delivery models, reinforcing our commitment to digital skills across our education and training systems, investing in automation and digitally



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enabled technology to support improvements in productivity and assuring improved consistency in our coverage and connectedness in broadband and mobile technology. In a recent Tech Nation report over 40% of digital ICT companies cited challenges around accessing the skilled workforce as a barrier to their growth. A digital skills solution is a core requirement to underpin any investment in digital infrastructure. Critically, digital skills solutions will be required across all growth sectors and at all skill levels.

In terms of the Digital ICT sector itself, business has increased steadily over the last five years, despite the economic downturn, with Digital ICT businesses accounting for 2.26% of all business turnover in 2013, up from 1.8% in 2008. Turnover by digital ICT companies during that period increased by 38% from £1,049m to £1,450m compared to an average growth in turnover across all NI businesses of 11%. The NI Digital IT sector comprises over 1,200 companies, more than 100 of which are international businesses such as First Derivatives, Allstate, SAP, Citi and Cybersource. The BRCD partners will work with Future Cities Catapult to identify programmes that will enable the delivery of the increasing numbers of highly skilled ICT professionals to work in this sector.

The BRCD partners also recognise that to take advantage of key growth sectors, which rely increasingly on the use of digital technology, there will be a need for investment to support the development of the required skills at a range of levels. The recent Matrix Digital ICT Report predicted that within 20 years, 90% of all jobs will require some element of digital skills. The BRCD partners consider that improving digital skills can also play a key role in economic activation by ensuring that low levels of confidence in the use of digital technology are addressed working to create one of the most digitally engaged and connected regions in the world.

5. Towards A More Integrated Approach

The key to the success of the employability and skills approach for BRCD is the development of a more integrated approach to prioritising and planning interventions across the region and respective Council areas. The value of approaches creating the ability to flex national and central government policies to respond to local needs through devolved decision-making have been highlighted in a number of external evaluations of City Deals concluded to date.

Figure 2. Integrated Planning Approach

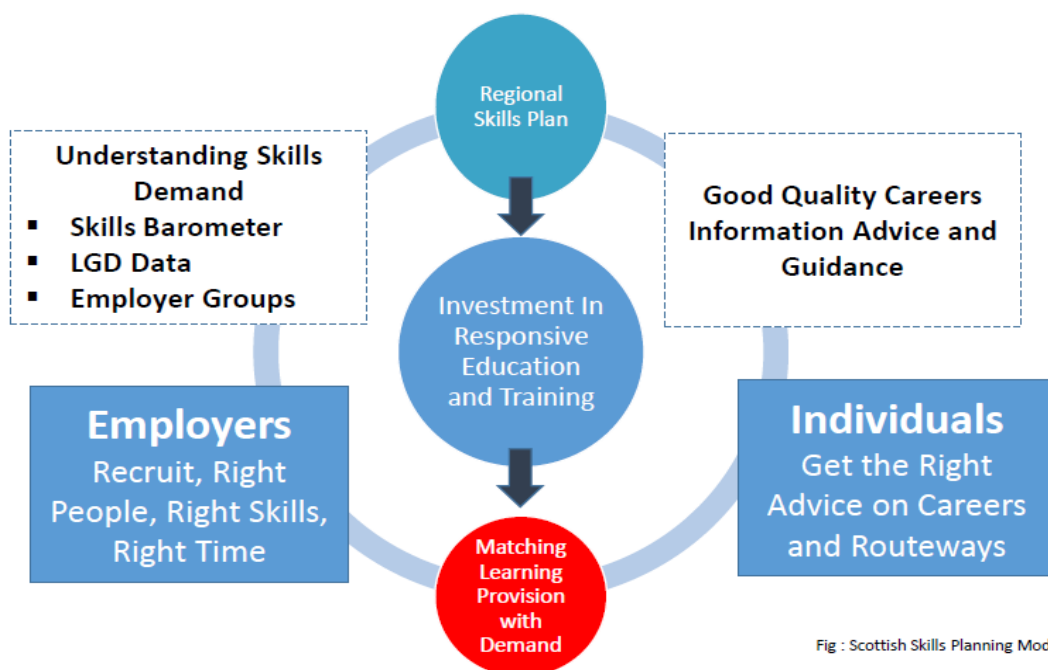


Fig : Scottish Skills Planning Model

In the development of the City Deal proposition it has become increasingly clear that there needs to be a more integrated approach to the **ANALYSIS AND PLANNING** work required to ensure that the interventions across local Councils, FE Colleges, funded programmes in the third sector and core Departments are better aligned to our economic priorities and against the themes supporting EDUCATION, EMPLOYABILITY AND SKILLS. In consultation with other statutory and community partners, work needs to be taken forward to develop new systems that enable the level of integration and partnership working that is envisioned. This should take account of the specific responsibilities of organisations in Northern Ireland.

The work commissioned by the BRCD partners on the Regional Skills Barometer will be key to understanding need and planning integrated responses. Equally, greater sharing and



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analysis of information on trends related to: unemployment; employment growth areas; skills shortages and; FDI needs, will also underpin the success of the City Deal. However, in addition to ensuring that economic intelligence continues to be available to all partners in a timely manner, there is also a need for investment in data capture and analysis to support the design and evaluation of the programme and ensure that there is a clear picture of who is being supported, how they are being supported and what the outcomes for those individuals are. Mechanisms for timely sharing of knowledge and learning also need to be built into the design of the proposition.

The BRCD partners have researched a range of potential models and consider that the Scottish Skills Planning Model, as developed through the Edinburgh City Deal, can inform a more integrated approach to developing and delivering regional skills solutions. In considering the Scottish Skills Planning model in **Figure 2 above** it is clear that the alignment of information captures the DEMAND side of the process and actively involves employers. Coupled with improved approaches to careers guidance and signposting individuals, this creates a stronger more cohesive solution. Moving forward to then incorporate this information into mechanisms which help inform and shape the SUPPLY side of education, skills and employability, will ensure a better match in the economy.

Partners are keen to engage and discuss other potential models with the ambition of co-designing an agreed approach to integration and delivery of education, skills and employability within the BRCD. This approach will need to take account of the nature and responsibilities of central and local government and statutory bodies in Northern Ireland. The Edinburgh City Deal utilised the investment in employability and skills to establish projects and programmes that enabled the development of an integrated skills programme under the direction of an Integrated Employability and Skills Board. The establishment of a Steering Group as part of the BRCD, led by the local Councils and including representation from business, colleges and the community and voluntary sector is considered to be crucial to the success of the BRCD in terms of the implementation of agreed programmes and projects.

The BCRD region has a strong network of community and voluntary sector employability provision. These organisations are largely resourced through EU and DfC funding. They play an important role in engaging with the most disadvantaged groups, building basic and key skills in order to enable participants to access employment or further training/education. Given the commitment to supporting inclusive growth in the BRCD deal,

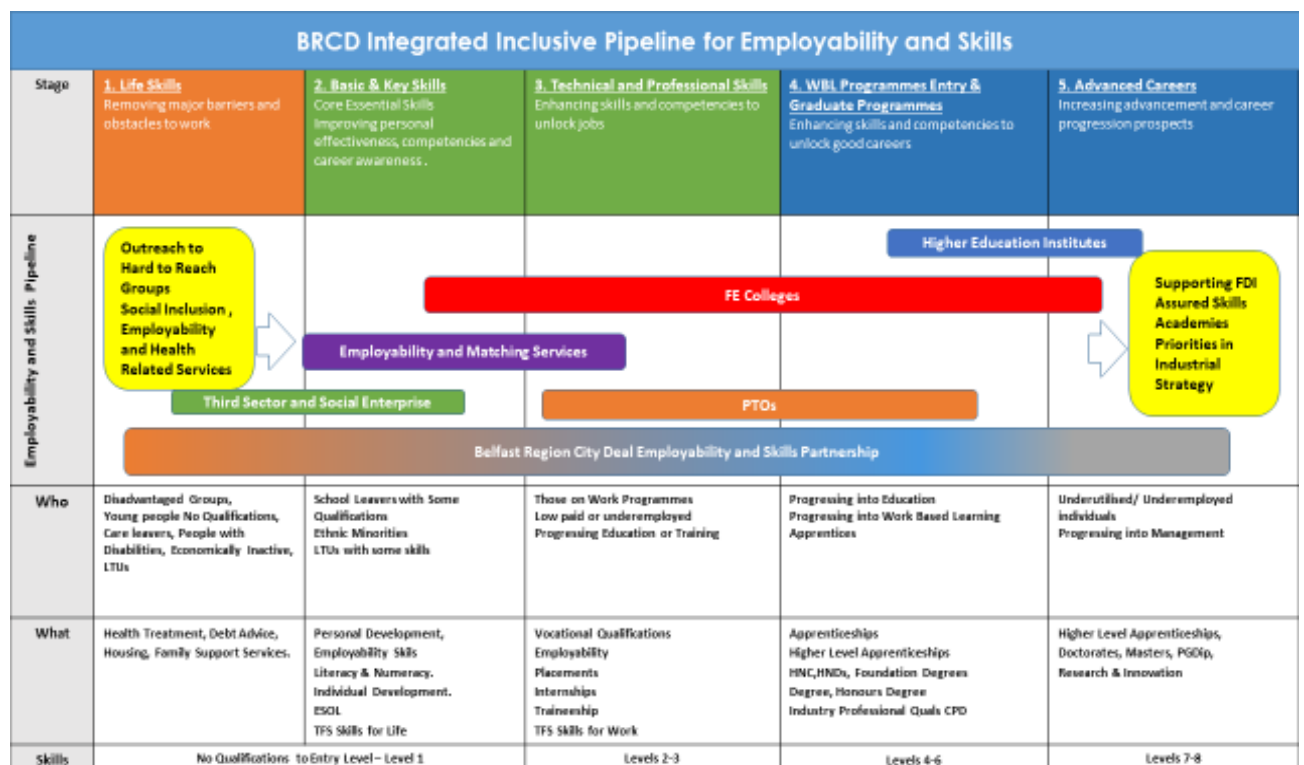


it will be important to engage with these providers in order to ensure that interventions take account of and build on existing provision to build skills and enhance the employability of those furthest from the labour market.

The BRCD partners are committed to investing in an agreed development and delivery model, based on appropriate partnership structures, which enable the needs of people and business to be aligned. The model will be designed to avoid duplication and to complement regional approaches proposed in the Programme for Government Delivery Plans.

The BRCD partners have already invested in the development of a Skills Barometer. In addition, the BRCD partners and the Further Education Colleges have committed to considering how they can align their resources to respond to the employability and skills needs identified through the skills barometer and which emerge from the investment priorities of the BRCD. It is equally clear that whichever model is developed to underpin delivery, it will need to recognise the challenges faced by different groups at different points in the Northern Ireland learning and skills system and we have tried to set this out in the Employability and Skills Pipeline below.

Figure 3. Employability and Skills Pipeline





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The pipeline model helps the partners to better understand who the target groups are, what they might need in terms of active intervention and who might be involved in supporting delivery. The BRCD partners recognise that a fully integrated approach may take some years to develop, but consider that there is a potential to seize the opportunity created by the BRCD investment. The BRCD creates an opportunity for councils, colleges, departments, agencies, businesses and the community and voluntary sector to co-design a new integrated model of working that will align existing and new resources over the 10-year period to support a collective vision of inclusive growth. This integrated, inclusive approach is similar to the model developed in Scotland where central and local government have worked to develop joined up solutions in terms of the demand and supply dynamics for employability and skills. This will require the re-imagining of the current skills infrastructure to create a seamless and easily understood eco-system for employability and skills in the region. It will seek to create a system, which recognises that people are a crucial asset in any economic success and that everyone must be given the access, opportunity and aspiration to succeed.

6. Shaping the Solution

Reflecting on the strategic priorities set out in the Programme for Government, the Draft Industrial Strategy for Northern Ireland, the draft Industrial Strategic Framework for the Belfast Region, the key strategies related to the reforms in training, apprenticeships and employability programmes, each Council's Community Plan and analysis of the challenges and opportunities which a City Deal provides, the collaborating partners have developed the following overarching framework which has helped shape the focus on a number of thematic areas for the BRCD.

Underpinning the framework, The BRCD partners have identified a number of principles which are central to their proposition. The employability and skills framework must:

- Develop models of delivery that are clearly **evidence based** with more integrated approaches to analysis and planning
- **Deliver for all** the people of the region and encompass models of delivery that support **skills for inclusion and skills for growth**
- Deliver education, employability and skills programmes that are **responsive to people and the needs of business**
- **Integrate and align resources** of partners to deliver for the people and the businesses of the Region

Figure 4. BRCD Employability and Skills Conceptual Framework





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Emerging from the Framework the partners are committed to developing a series of programmes and projects which come **under 3 main themes** :

Education – Recognising that many of the problems in the NI economy stem from the mismatch which develops in secondary schools, where on the one hand our education can produce some of the most highly qualified young people in terms of GCSEs and A Levels and the same time over 19% of school leavers have no or low qualifications. In common with other parts of the UK, a sustainable approach to the development of core functional (essential) skills in literacy, numeracy and digital areas needs to be developed which in turn could provide better options and pathways. In terms of promoting the uptake of STEM programmes and creating pathways to job opportunities in growth sectors such as Digital ICT, Tourism and Hospitality, Engineering, Life and health Sciences and Professional and Business Services, we need to redouble our efforts to improve the quality of our careers information systems.

Employability – is a cross-cutting issue which runs across various interventions. In terms of higher level outcomes NI has enjoyed success in running pre-employment programmes for graduates through Assured Skills. A key success in these graduate programmes has been the incorporation of FRESH new approaches to creativity, innovation, problem solving, working in teams and communication, decision making and negotiation skills. At the other end of the spectrum there are needs related to young people entering the world of work, long-term economically inactive groups seeking to reconnect with the work and those impacted by redundancy programmes in key sectors who need to refresh their job search skills. The challenge under this theme is to develop an approach which is comprehensive and yet flexible enough to be tailored to the needs of different groups. A key priority for the BRCD programme will be a continued focus on getting people into employment which will be the ultimate contributor to improving GVA.

Skills – the development and delivery of up to date traineeships, apprenticeships and higher level apprenticeships are critical to improving the opportunities for lower skilled workers to acquire skills to enter the labour market and to progress through to achieve higher level outcomes contributing to improving productivity and wage levels. Support is also required for employees already in the workforce to upskill/reskill and this requires encouragement and incentives for employers to buy into this type of investment. Traditionally low levels of



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productivity in NI can, in some cases, be attributed to the attitudes employers have to investment in skills which then creates a workforce which fails to understand the value of their own personal commitment to skills.

In the following sections we set out initial thinking on the types of programme and project interventions which could come together to represent the employability and skills solutions in the BRCD. The programmes will be designed with partners to ensure additionality and complementarity and to avoid duplication of existing projects. The proposals have been located under the key organising themes previously presented in the Belfast Region City Deal Framework. Having researched comparative approaches to City Deal programmes across other parts of the UK: interventions for young people, support for apprenticeships, approaches to tackling long-term economic inactivity and more integrated approaches to employability are common to many Deals. Note that the nature of these programmes and their final scope and size will be further developed as the broader capital strands of the BRCD are agreed.

EDUCATION

Career Enhancement Programme

To underpin the development and growth of priority sectors in NI in line with the Programme for Government and the draft NI Industrial Strategy and the key development projects outlined in the BRCD, there needs to be a more integrated approach, both to careers education, information, advice and guidance and to support career reconfiguration and reskilling. Recent strategic reviews on careers services in NI have highlighted the importance of more holistic approaches to service provision, the need for consistency in provision of information and the importance of employer engagement. The current operational environment for careers is complex and somewhat disjointed with different players having more or lesser roles in supporting young people, career changers and adult returners in making informed careers choices. The pace of change in terms of the evolving world of work and occupational standards, coupled with the ongoing reforms in youth training, apprenticeships and high level apprenticeships also add to the technical complexity in ensuring the provision of up to date information and advice at different points in the learner and worker pathways. Whilst all the key players have a vested interest in improving the quality and consistency of careers information, advice and guidance, the out workings of this intention are sometimes not delivered.



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The proposal for the Careers Enhancement Programme would be focused on delivering better informed choices for young people through the education system, with greater involvement from local and national employers. It is anticipated that DfE Careers Team, the network of Careers Teachers in the Secondary Education System, Sectoral Employer Groups, FE Colleges and Universities would develop a more holistic and integrated Careers Enhancement Programme, which would hopefully provide more focus for collaboration and better outcomes for young people. This programme would enhance the actions developed through the Northern Ireland Careers Advisory Forum.

The Careers Enhancement Programme would seek to develop an agreed calendar of careers education and information events, apprenticeship recruitment speed dating, jobs fairs and higher education events across different venues across the region. The key stakeholders would collaborate together to promote and attract employer interest to these events. The Career Enhancement Programme would also reach out to the part-time careers teachers in the secondary school system through a teacher work taster programme to ensure they too have the opportunity to have an up to date understanding on regional and local employer needs. CEP would also explore the opportunity across all the participating partners to enhance and develop a more systematic approach to developing and delivering work experience, paid and unpaid internships across the BRCD region.

STEM ++

In recent years between 2013 – 2017 there has been a decline in the number of young people taking on STEM related subjects at GCSE and A Levels in Northern Ireland. In order to meet the ambitions presented from the Industrial Strategy and in BRCD, and given the opportunities to build on our SMART specialisation approach in Northern Ireland, there is a need to revisit and redouble our efforts to develop more innovative approaches to nurture the STEM agenda. STEM ++ envisages a more integrated approach across the various stakeholders involved in promoting STEM careers to develop action plans and school engagement strategies which will result in an increase in STEM uptake in enrolments in schools, FE Colleges and Universities. The programme needs to work more closely with employers in offering animation and engagement opportunities to create individual role models and case studies around the broad STEM agenda. The STEM ++ approach could be supported by the development of capital projects and demonstrators which offer increased opportunity for parents and young people to engage in STEM activities. This approach also needs to be integrated with any interventions to develop digital technology test beds.



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Hospitality Works

There are immediate job opportunities in the tourism and hospitality sector in Northern Ireland and the potential for the future growth when the planned enhancements to the tourism product are clear. What is more of a challenge at this time is finding appropriately skilled people in the labour market. At a time when Northern Ireland has rightly identified this sector as having opportunities for significant growth in the future, the numbers of enrols and registrations on education and skills programmes are in decline. In order to redress this situation, there is a pressing need to begin to reshape the image and understanding of the career opportunities in this sector. Over a period of 7 years or more DfE in collaboration with the employer groups in the ICT sector developed an approach called BringITON to reach out to secondary schools to inform young people and parents of the opportunities and variety of career pathways available in the sector. This programme provided more information and opportunities for young people to understand the career opportunities in the Digital ICT sector. A similar approach could be considered for the tourism and hospitality sector.

At a national level the challenges of creating and maintaining interest in the Tourism and Hospitality sector has led to the Department of Work and Pensions and British Hospitality Association collaborating over a number of years on the Hospital Works initiative. The initiative sets out to improve the level of awareness of careers in the industry reaching out to schools, working closely with employment service and job centres to connect with interested jobseekers. Hospitality Works has been driven by employers offering placements, work experience, training and apprenticeship places and has made significant contribution in supporting local regeneration, improving social mobility and attracting workers from diverse groups including economically inactive. The proposal for the Belfast Region would be to develop a similar approach to support the employment growth opportunities and skills requirements in the Tourism and Hospitality sector, building on a recently developed Tourism Action Plan developed by the Department for Economy.



SKILLS

Apprenticeship HUB

In recent years the Department for Economy has initiated a major reform programme for youth training, apprenticeships and higher level apprenticeships. Similar radical transformations have been ongoing across the rest of the UK with the development of new approaches and new technical frameworks. Bringing people into the labour market through traineeships and apprenticeship programmes creates the opportunity to align skills and job opportunities. Analysis of comparative city deals across the UK demonstrate that local councils can play an active part in promoting and encouraging wider access to Apprenticeship solutions.

In terms of an Apprenticeship HUB, the proposal would be for Councils to establish a resource across the BRCD which would be a focal point for local employers in terms of brokerage services and signposting for employment, training and apprenticeship opportunities. FE Colleges would work with Councils to develop information packs and resources to support these efforts and could consider co-location in suitable premises to achieve further integration. In addition to the signposting and advisory functions in the HUB, there is potential to establish a virtual resource for the Apprenticeship HUB across the region, where placement, training and apprenticeship matching can take place supported by Council officers. This approach could build on the work which DFE has already undertake through the "Connect to Success" portal and enhance the access to the market and functionality.

Over and above the signposting services through the Apprenticeship Hub, there could be opportunities through the BRCD to pilot new approaches such as: 25+ adult apprenticeships, a public service apprenticeship and shared apprenticeship solutions for SMEs. The Apprenticeship HUB with officers operating across the region alongside FE College support could help pilot and roll out some of these solutions. The BRCD may offer the opportunity for NI to have a more ambitious conversation with Treasury about innovative approaches for Apprenticeship Levy funding.

Business Productivity Programme

As well as developing bespoke skills interventions, research also indicates the importance of improving workplace productivity. Work needs to be undertaken in collaboration with InvestNI and the various stakeholders supporting business development, innovation and



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process improvement to develop a suite of solutions which can support improvements in productivity. We believe there a need for focused, evidenced based interventions that aim to achieve long-lasting performance improvements in companies of all sizes, across all sectors and provide training, tools, including benchmarking support, and a focal point for businesses.

A Business Productivity Programme would also encourage sharing of best practice within communities of businesses as a catalyst to enable people to find out what's worked best for others seeking the same productivity improvements. In addition to a more structured approach to sharing information on best practice and benchmarking productivity, Northern Ireland needs to provide support to help SMEs to be more innovative, to improve understanding of the innovation process helping managers to problem solve and generate new solutions at an organisation level. To complement this approach opportunities need to be provided for employees to upskill to take advantage of the innovation efforts, when new technology or approaches are being implemented which can enhance business productivity. It might also be possible under the Business Productivity Programme to develop a financial incentives approach to encourage local businesses to invest equipment to underpin their innovation and enhanced automation.

Digital Skills Programme

According to the Future Cities Catapult research, growth in the digital economy requires that citizens and businesses have digital skills, and access to digital infrastructure. The emerging propositions for the BRCD capital investment programme have rightly identified the potential which Northern Ireland has to build one of the most digitally connected regions in the world. In order for the infrastructural investment to deliver a dividend, work needs to be undertaken to refine our approaches to delivering a Digital Skills Programme. In parallel to the growth in the digital opportunities, Northern Ireland has witnessed an ongoing shortage of digital skills and significant efforts have been made in collaboration with the Northern Ireland Digital ICT working group and DFE to create a pipeline of talent. Alongside meeting the high level needs of the sector, the Digital Skills Programme must provide some input to develop digital skills across society taking into account that advances in technology can and should disrupt the labour market and there will be those who risk losing out on this digital transition if no action is taken. The programme must also provide opportunities for those already in the workforce to upskill in order to keep pace with the developing technologies and software solutions impacting on the world of work.



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EMPLOYABILITY

Graduate Development Programme

This programme will be focused on recent graduates and post-graduates in NI. Given the increase in numbers of school leavers progressing into further and higher education in recent years, NI has access to a particularly well qualified graduate talent pool to support growth and business development. In the last 3yrs the Department for Economy in NI has supported over 1,000 graduates into employment through the Assured Skills Academy Programme in areas as diverse as technology, digital ICT, sales and export marketing, financial services and human resource management.

This Assured Skills Programme has been fundamental to the support provided to FDI companies establishing new operations in NI and has underpinned some of the most ambitious graduate recruitment programmes in the region. This is a pre-employment approach where graduates are supported through an intensive bootcamp which runs from 5 to 15 weeks to gain very specific skills relevant to the recruitment needs of key employers.

The proposal is to extend the scope of this model across the short-term Academy approach through the City Deal Region and to further enhance the approach by developing a 52 week Graduate Management Development Programme across the region which would offer opportunities for specialist management roles in key sectors including : Digital ICT, Civil Engineering, Manufacturing, Life and Health Sciences, Sales and Marketing, Agri-Food, Retail, Tourism and Hospitality. The Graduate Management Programme would create benefits in bringing underemployed graduate talent into the labour market creating high value employment opportunities. Access to good quality graduate managers also offers an opportunity to make a contribution to company productivity and there may be opportunities to develop a longer term 2 year version of the programme using Higher Level Apprenticeship funding. An additional secondary benefit of this approach to graduate pre-employment would be to free up entry and mid-level job opportunities in the labour market, where graduates are currently qualification blocking candidates with more experience but lesser accredited qualifications.



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Employment Academies (Employability for All)

Given that one of the long-lasting challenges in the BRCD is to tackle high levels of economic inactivity, there needs to be a focus on innovative approaches to creating job opportunities. Long Term Unemployed young people and adults across the range may not get the tailored support they need to get back into employment from the Employment Services or traditional work programmes. In recent years Councils have been working to develop some new approaches around Employment Academies, working closely with business partners in their local communities to create supported employment opportunities.

There are two types of Academy models which have been tested across the BRCD, targeted at different client groups : The Assured Skills Academy which are of medium term duration from 10-15 weeks, working exclusively with Graduates and targeted mostly on meeting the needs of FDI companies and the Bridge to Employment Academies which are targeted at unemployed young people and adults which can be shorter duration of 2 – 10 weeks.

In terms of the Bridge Employment Academies (BEAs), these are co-designed with employers in different sectors to meet a particular skills/employment requirement. BEAs are designed to be entirely bespoke to employer recruitment needs and only triggered by actual labour market demand. The bridge succeeds on the basis that employers have an immediate unfilled demand and this is matched to the provision of candidates who are unemployed and available for work. BEAs can be short intensive tailored pre-employment interventions to deliver accredited and non-accredited training or employability outcomes.

In terms of the BRCD, a more focused and joined up approach to collating information on employer demands and working to co-design training and employability solutions, with access to appropriate equipment and facilities would deliver immediate returns in terms of job outcomes. One of the keys to success in BEAs longer term is ensuring that appropriate aftercare and mentoring support is in place to help candidates to sustain employment. This employability academy approach is key to supporting the socially inclusive approach which is a key part of the BRCD, reaching out to the Long Term Unemployed and Economically Inactive groups across the region.



7. Funding the Employability and Skills Proposition

Having conducted a comparative analysis of the City Deals across other parts of the UK – we are proposing an indicative funding pot of £30 million to support employability and skills interventions across BRCD over a 10 year period. The BRCD has over 1 million people, and contributes over two thirds of regional GVA in Northern Ireland. The complementary investment capital projects and human capital creates the opportunity to have long-lasting impact on the economy in Northern Ireland.

We are aware that the funding associated with the skills and employability strand will be specified and redefined as the BRCD partners and core Departments work towards finalising the range of programmes and projects that will be supported across all other strands of the City Deal. We have also started to explore the sources of funding that can support our aspirations outlined throughout this document. The table below presents the areas that we are starting to explore:

| Funding Source | Rationale for exploring |
|--|---|
| Re-alignment of devolved funding associated with the interventions | Funding for employability and skills is devolved in Northern Ireland, by working with the Department for Economy and Department for Communities and associated NDPBs we can ensure that, where possible, existing funding supports the employability and skills needs resulting from the capital investments. Work to explore this with respective Departments to understand the possibilities and the mechanisms that could facilitate any re-alignment has been initiated. |
| Contributions from Council Partners | Council partners have agreed to make a financial commitment to support the employability and skills strand of the BRCD. This money will be used to fund bespoke interventions / target certain sectors / address a market failure that is additional to provision made by central government. The Councils recognise the importance of structured interventions in this space and have already conducted analysis as part of a broader community planning process to identify priorities in education, employability and skills which have been taken into account in preparing this current proposition. |
| Apprenticeship levy | Unlike other devolved regions in the UK, Northern Ireland organisations both public and |



| Funding Source | Rationale for exploring |
|--|--|
| | private have not been able to access a digital voucher scheme in order to draw down organisation specific funds to support apprenticeship programmes. The Department for Economy continues to support training, apprenticeship and higher apprenticeship programmes. As part of the BRCD the partners would be keen to explore what scope there may be through a City Deal construct to ring fence levy funding to explore a range of innovation to increase the number of apprentices. |
| EU & Community Voluntary Sector | Across the region, there are significant sources of funding to support those furthest from the labour market. This includes funding from Europe, such as Peace IV funding and the European Social Fund. In addition there are a range of funding sources that flow from the Executive Office and the NI Executive that support the important work carried out by the community and voluntary sector. BRCD will seek to ensure that we maximise this investment and work closely with the sector to develop more integrated approaches to support a pipeline of interventions for specific target groups, ensuring consistency with City Deal and community planning targets. |
| Widening Access and Participation | Widening participation is an increasing priority for higher and further education to improve access to disadvantaged groups, care leavers those returning to education. Through bursary and access programmes funds are targeted at developing wider access and participation (WAAP). As we progress we will work with our University and College partners to explore how we can ensure that WAAP targets and interventions can be supported in the BRCD to reach out to the most disadvantaged and enhance inclusiveness. |
| Social Clauses / Buy Social & Private Sector Contributions | Given the significance of the capital investment programmes resulting from the BRCD, partners are committed to ensuring that contracts associated with the BRCD reflect best practice and raise the bar in terms of social contracts / buy social policies. Maximising the impact of this in support of our skills and employability ambitions will be particularly important. |



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| Funding Source | Rationale for exploring |
|--|--|
| Planning Agreement Gains: Development Contributions Section 76 NI Planning Act | Partners are committed to maximising the potential that developer contributions can play in supporting investment in employability and skills. |

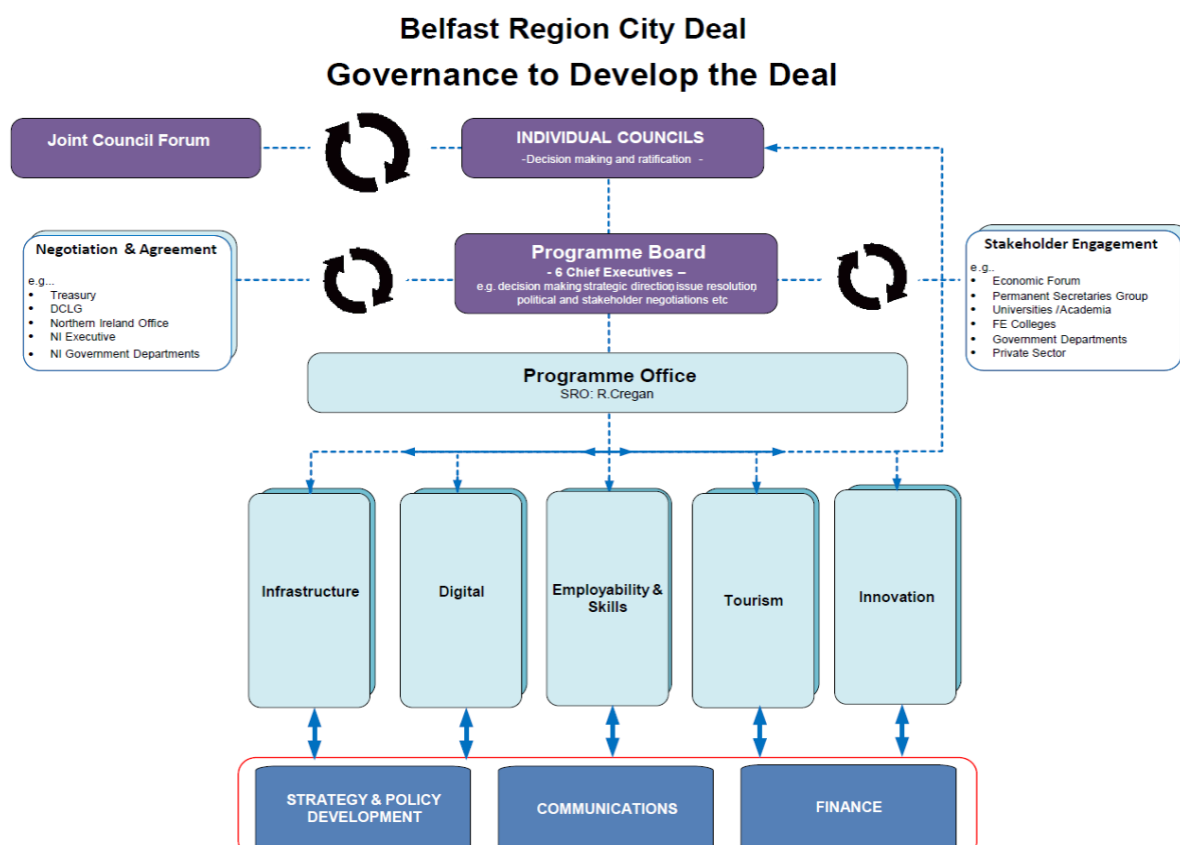
The key target for the employability and skills interventions across the BRCD is to ensure a pipeline of talent. In order to ensure jobs are created and supported under the Deal, Council partners will work with colleges, universities, government, businesses and the third sector to identify and agree a series of interventions. When delivered in a more integrated approach these interventions will provide sustainable opportunities for target groups who have been excluded from the labour market for long periods. This underpins a collective commitment that BRCD must deliver on a vision for inclusive and sustainable growth that benefits everyone. These goals are aligned to the draft Programme for Government and the draft NI Industrial Strategy, which emphasises the importance of “building a globally competitive economy on the pillars of innovation, enhanced skills and employability, an international outlook and the best economic infrastructure we can build”.



8. Proposed Governance Arrangements

During the initial development phase of the BRCD an informal working group, comprising lead Council officials and representatives of the Further Education Colleges in the region, was established to scope out a proposition on employability and skills capable of supporting the ambitions in the BRCD. Following the development of a draft proposition document, engagement commenced with relevant Government Departments and business representatives to support initial consultation and feedback. Following this engagement, the Programme Board agreed a revised initial proposition on employability and skills..

Figure 5. BRCD Governance Model



The development of a new integrated, responsive development and delivery model to support employability and skills is at the core of the BRCD partners' proposition. It has become increasingly clear that the City Deal, not only creates an opportunity to secure a significant investment package, but more importantly an opportunity for more integrated conversations on the role of core Departments, delivery partners and Councils in developing a pipeline of interventions.



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agus an Dúin
Newry, Mourne
and Down
Borough Council

Moving forward it is proposed that a wider range of key stakeholders is now directly involved in the development of the BRCD employability and skills proposition. While the skills proposition and its supporting governance arrangements depend on the shape and scale of the final BRCD, at this stage in the process partners believe that it is important to develop a steering group to support ongoing engagement and design. The steering group will reflect the models of best practice that have been pursued successfully in other City Deals, adapted to reflect the specific circumstances of devolution in Northern Ireland.

It is therefore proposed that the steering group should comprise representatives from local authorities, the Regional Colleges, Universities, and the Departments for the Economy and Communities. The Steering Group would also be responsible for identifying how best to engage with business representatives and the community and voluntary sector during the development of the proposition document.