



Department for the
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SKILLS
TO SUCCEED

NORTHERN IRELAND

Higher Education Strategy

ISSUE 5



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Welcome

By Trevor Cooper - Head of Higher Education Policy and Finance Division, Department for the Economy.

Welcome to the fifth edition of the Higher Education Strategy E-zine. The E-zine provides an update on the implementation of the two Higher Education Strategies for Northern Ireland 'Graduating to Success' and 'Access to Success' and also some wider information of relevance to the sector.



Trevor Cooper - Head of Higher Education Policy and Finance Division, Department for the Economy.

In the previous edition of the E-zine, an overview of the Interim Review of the Higher Education Strategies was provided, including an update on one of its key recommendations which was to develop a Refreshed Implementation Plan for the programme up to 2020.

Taking account of the Refreshed Implementation Plan which included seven new project outcomes and one new project, there are 15 ongoing projects with a total of 28 outcomes attached to them. Five projects have completed to date.

Graduating to Success and Access to Success strategies - Vision and Guiding Principals

More responsive to the needs of the economy

A higher quality learning experience

Vision

The vision for Higher Education is one of a sector which is vibrant and of international calibre; which pursues excellence in teaching and research; which plays a pivotal role in the development of a modern, sustainable, knowledge-based economy; which supports a confident, shared society; and which recognises and values diversity.

A more flexible lifelong learning environment

A more accessible higher education sector

Higher Education Strategies: status overview 20 Projects; 75 Outcomes

5 Projects completed to date

5 Projects due to complete in 2019

15 Projects ongoing

47 Project outcomes closed

28 Project outcomes ongoing

*These figures take account of the refreshed implementation plan

Welcome

[CONTINUED](#)

In this issue of the E-zine we introduce you to the Department's Tertiary Education Statistics and Research Branch, who gather and interpret statistical information to contribute to major exercises such as reporting on the performance of the Higher Education sector, target setting and monitoring, departmental research projects, as well as policy formulation and evaluation. Find out more about who they are and what they do at [Section 2](#).

Higher Education in Northern Ireland is delivered principally through the universities and university colleges but the six further education colleges also deliver a broad range of higher education courses, which we refer to as 'HE in FE'. In academic year 2016/17, there were 11,175¹ enrolments on HE courses in NI Further Education Colleges which

represents approximately 17% of all enrolments on HE courses in NI. In this edition of the E-zine there is a particular focus on HE in FE as we take a look at some success stories arising from Project 10 (Establish University bases in Further Education colleges) at [section 3](#) and from Access to Success initiatives at [section 6](#).

The Department's Student Support Branch ensures that the Department's various policies around student finance are implemented. Most recent changes include the introduction of the non-means tested tuition fee loan. Find out more about Student Support at [Section 4](#).

The higher education landscape now also includes apprenticeships following the roll out of Higher Level Apprenticeships (HLAs). The

Department recently held a HLA conference to promote the flagship programme and pathway which allows participants to earn and learn while gaining a qualification designed and valued by employers themselves. Find out more about HLAs at [section 5](#).

Finally, as the current Higher Education strategies near an end, we begin to focus on what will follow it beyond 2020. Considerations within the Department are being given to inform the way ahead for HE Strategy and we look forward to engaging with many stakeholders to higher education in Northern Ireland in upcoming months.

I hope you find this issue of the HE e-zine both interesting and informative. Contact details and where to get further information can be found at [section 7](#).

¹ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/economy/Statistical-Factsheet-7-%20NI-enrolment-time-series-updated.pdf>

HE Statistics

HE Statistics and Research Branch (Tertiary Education) is responsible for the collection, quality assurance, analysis and publication of timely and accurate information derived from a wide range of statistical information returns supplied by the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Further Education (FE) colleges across Northern Ireland (NI).



The key source of data for HE statistics is the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), which is responsible for collecting data from all HEIs in the UK. This does not include information on NI students studying outside the UK, such as in the Republic of Ireland (RoI), and information on these is obtained separately from the Higher Education Authority (HEA).

The statistical information collected is used to contribute to major exercises such as reporting on the performance of the HE sector, other comparative performance exercises,

target setting and monitoring, departmental research projects, development of service frameworks, as well as policy formulation and evaluation.

Statistics available

The HE data we report on mainly cover (a) all NI domiciled students at HEIs in the UK, and (b) all students studying at NI HEIs. Details of our publications and statistics are available on the [Departments website](#).

On 28 February 2019, we released two of our three annual National Statistics bulletins, which provide a detailed Northern Ireland analysis of enrolments and qualifications at UK HEIs. Our third National Statistics bulletin (last published August 2018) reports on the Destinations of Leavers from HE Survey, which looks at where graduates are and what they are doing **6 months** after graduating.

Our other publications cover topics such as UK performance indicators, cross border student flows, age participation, UCAS applicants, STEM courses, equality categories and HE enrolments in FE colleges.



HE Statistics

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Future developments in HE statistics

Graduate Outcomes - HESA in collaboration with experts from the HE sector, government departments and other relevant organisations has designed a new Graduate Outcomes survey for collecting information about what students do after graduation, which will replace the Destinations of Leavers Survey.

In the new survey design, graduates will be surveyed by telephone or online approximately **15 months** after completing their studies. This timing gives graduates a more meaningful opportunity to progress in their post-graduation activities, while still being close enough to the point of completing their studies that good response rates should be achievable. The first wave of Graduate Outcomes

started at the end of 2018, with the first outputs due to be published in spring 2020. A separate webpage provides information for students.

The Graduate Outcomes survey...

- contacts graduates
- 15 months after graduation
- by email or phone
- to learn about your activities and views

Find out more www.graduateoutcomes.ac.uk

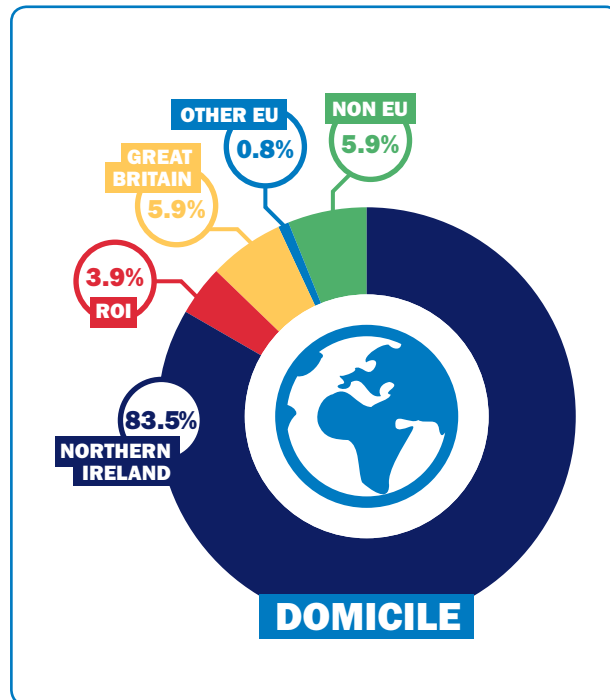
HE Statistics

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Recent Publications:

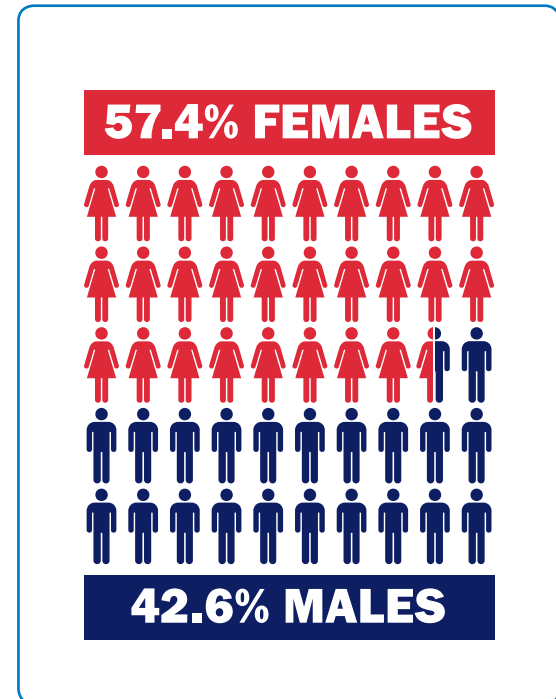
Enrolments

83.5% of the 54,460 students enrolled at NI HEIs in 2017/18 were from NI.



Qualifications

More females than males qualified from NI HEIs in 2017/18.



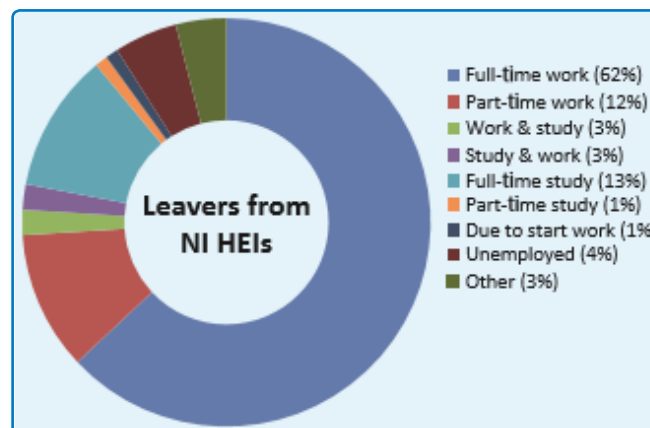
HE Statistics

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Recent Publications:

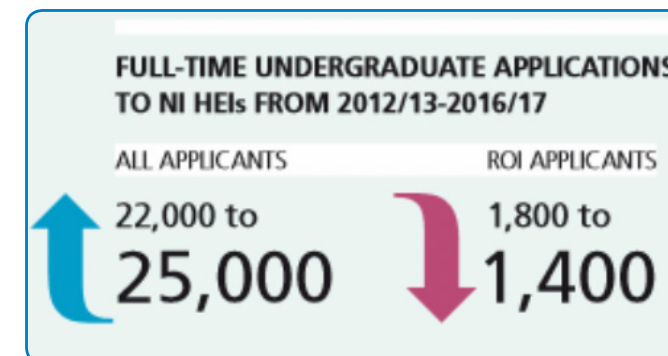
Destinations of Leavers

62 % of full time leavers from NI HEIs in 2016/17 were in full time work within 6 months after leaving higher Education



Cross Border Student Flows

1,400 students from ROI applied to study a full-time undergraduate course at NI HEIs in 2016/17



[Higher Education Performance Indicators](#)

[Higher Education statistical fact sheets](#)

University bases in Further Education Colleges

Project 10 aimed to pilot initiatives and approaches to increase access and participation in higher education provision locally. It was hoped the pilots would make participation in higher education provision more attractive and achievable to individuals who may not have previously considered upskilling to this level. As the focus of the project is accessibility to higher education, it was decided that the location of pilots should take place in those colleges located in areas which have less easy access to a university campus. Consequently, it was agreed that Project 10 would be delivered in Southern Regional College (SRC) and South West College (SWC). The following update and success stories were provided by South West College.

In 2015, the Department provided South West College and Southern Regional College, each with an award of £100,000 to go towards Rural Based University Education in the Southern Region. Based in the

rural community of Fermanagh and Omagh District Council (population circa 116k), South West College has sought to make progress in a wide range of areas. These include programmes for top-up degrees, foundation degrees and higher level apprenticeships; international and cross border links; digital and distributive learning enhancements and interchange; research and innovation integration; and leadership training with an emphasis on Enniskillen-based facilities.

Ulster University and The Queen's University of Belfast have been key partners on these objectives, while further Service Providers have also been engaged. There have been significant milestones along the way. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed by Ulster University and South West College along with First Minister Arlene Foster at Stormont Castle on 21 March 2016. While in 2017, Professor Alan Strong was appointed as a part-time Smart Region Collaborative Officer, with dual roles

of 'cementing relationships around Project 10' and 'developing the Smart Region concept as an agent for change and progress in the rural region'.

The crucial indicator of the success of Project 10, however, comes in the individual lives and careers of the students involved. We've caught up with some of the students who have been availing of higher education in rural areas to see how it has benefited them.

section
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University bases in Further Education Colleges – Case studies

Student Support

Student Support Branch

Student Support Branch is responsible for the implementation of the Student Support Regulations in respect of Northern Ireland, encompassing Student Loans, Maintenance Grants, Disabled Students Allowance, Childcare and Dependants' Grants. In the last academic year, we issued more than £425m of loans and grants to over 50,000 students.

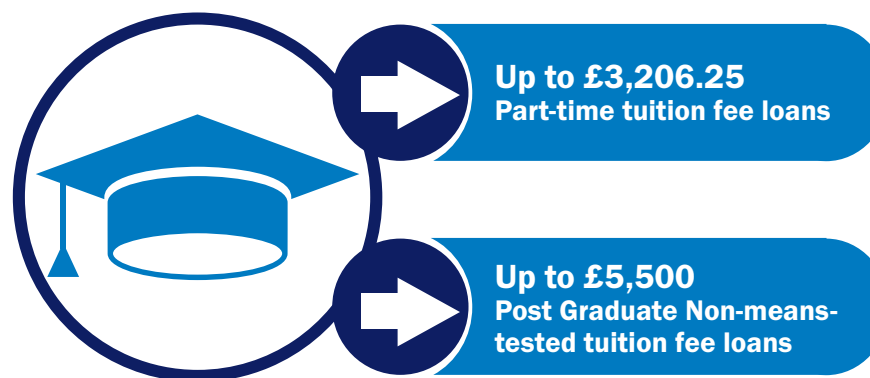
Over the last twelve months we've seen a number of changes within the HE division particularly within the Student Support Branch. Four staff have moved out/on and three new staff have come on board in what has been a busy year for the branch.

In terms of milestones within Student Support, from 1st August 2017 the Department introduced non-means tested tuition fee loans for Northern Ireland domiciled part-

time and postgraduate students. These new products give Northern Ireland students access to loans to help meet the costs of their Part Time and Postgraduate tuition fees for the first time.

The part-time tuition fee loan has been available from academic year 2017/18 in respect of 'in-attendance' and 'distance learning' courses completed in up to four times the full-time equivalent duration or less. Students in receipt of tuition fee grants will see their tuition fee loan level reduced accordingly. It is intended that the maximum part-time (and full time distance learning) tuition fee loan will track 75% of the maximum full-time tuition fee loan for NI students attending courses in NI. For academic year 2019/20, the maximum part-time tuition fee loan available will be £3,206.25 (which equates to 75% of the maximum £4,275 for full time students).

Since academic year 2017/18, students commencing Postgraduate



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Student Support

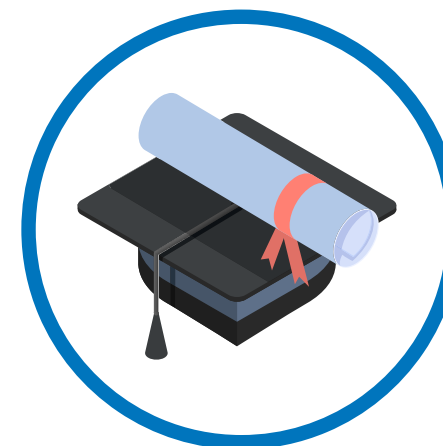
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Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma, or Taught or Research Master's courses have been eligible to apply for a non-means-tested tuition fee loan to help with course costs. The loan, of up to £5,500 per course, is available in respect of courses completed in three academic years or less. Courses may be studied on a full-time or part-time 'in attendance', or a full-time or part-time 'distance learning' basis. All students meeting these criteria are eligible to apply for one postgraduate tuition fee loan, regardless of whether or not they hold an equivalent or higher qualification.

In the first year of the loan being made available, uptake was good with around 1600 Part Time and 2000 Postgraduate students availing of tuition fee loans. The latest application data for the academic year 2018/19 shows that Part Time applications have risen to 5000 students and Postgraduate applications to almost 3000.

In addition to these new loan products, we continue to provide Full Time Tuition Fee Loans, Full Time Maintenance Loans, Full Time Maintenance Grants, Part Time Fee and Course Grants. We also provide a range of other allowances designed to provide additional assistance to students who need it, these include: Disabled Students' Allowances, Childcare Grant, Parents Learning Allowance and Adult Dependents' Grants.

For more information about Part Time Loans, Postgraduate Loans or any of our other student support, please visit the [Student Finance NI website](#).



Higher Level Apprenticeships

The Higher Level Apprenticeship (HLA) programme for Northern Ireland launched in September 2017, and provides opportunities at Level 4 and above, blending on and off the job training while ensuring quality and achievement of the full apprenticeship award. The apprentice is in paid employment while working towards an industry approved qualification, and the Framework lasts a minimum of 2 years. Off-the-job training at levels 4 and 5 is provided through the six local FE Colleges and the College of Agriculture (CAFRE), with the three local Universities providing training at level 6 and above.

The programme itself was piloted for a number of years before its launch, and to date nearly 2,000 participants have started a HLA, with over 800 employers providing the opportunity. The success rate to date has been 78.7%, which compares favourably to both ApprenticeshipsNI and part-time provision at level 4 and above. The Frameworks have been in 13 different sectors, with 52 different opportunities in 2018/19 across the 10 providers, in 32 different occupational areas.

HE Division works closely with the Higher Level Apprenticeship Team, including through a working group set up to review HLA Curriculum Development, Qualifications and Work based learning. The majority of HLA opportunities are at Level 5 and have a Foundation Degree as the core qualification.

The HLA programme is employer led and it is the demand from employers that determines the number of starts. For employers, it's a means to reduce skills gaps and increase productivity, specific to their needs. For the apprentice, HLAs provide the opportunity to “earn while you learn”, in employment from day 1, and no student loan while they work towards professional-level qualifications.

The Higher Level Apprenticeships programme utilises the [Skills Barometer](#) as a means to ensure curriculum is set to meet future needs and gaps – this has identified that skills demand will outstrip supply, particularly at Levels 4 and 5, with the mix of subject areas



Higher Level Apprenticeships

CONTINUED

across all levels out of balance with the needs of the economy, with particular shortages in Engineering, ICT and Sciences.

To view and apply for current opportunities potential apprentices can utilise [Connect To Success NI](#), a free online system used by employers to promote and advertise apprenticeships.

Further information on the available HLAs with each provider can be found on the [nidirect](#) website or via email at higherlevelapprenticeships@economy-ni.gov.uk or by ringing the Apprenticeships Helpline on **0300 200 7876**.



Pictured with Noel Lavery (right), Permanent Secretary of the Department for the Economy, at the Securing Your Success event to celebrate Higher Level Apprenticeships are apprentices Neil Hunter of Hovis and Sarah Gillespie of Fujitsu, also Higher Level Apprentice of the Year 2018.

section
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Access to Success – Widening Participation



Head of DfE Higher
Education Widening
Participation Branch –
Elaine Dolan

“The Department’s vision for widening participation is that any qualified individual in Northern Ireland should be able to gain access to higher education, irrespective of their personal or social background. Foundation Degrees, primarily delivered by FE Colleges, in conjunction with the universities, offer a close-to-home opportunity to access higher education, suited to those who may be facing additional challenges. Foundation Degrees are a recognised Higher Education Level 5 qualification in their own right but also offer articulation routes to specified Bachelor Degrees.

Recently, a colleague and myself met Hamish at an event at a local university. We were so impressed by his achievements in light of the life challenges he has faced, including successful completion of a Foundation Degree, that we asked him to share his story. Placed in care at 15 years old and at the point of starting his GCSEs this is Hamish’s inspiring educational journey to date.

We wish Hamish all the best in completing his education and with his future career.”

Hamish – my educational journey

“My school life was greatly affected in fourth year by a change in my home circumstances when I was placed in long-term care and moved approximately 30 miles from my home town. With the help of my educational welfare officer I chose to repeat fourth year and complete my GCSEs in my current school where I had a very positive support network. I then decided to attend SERC in Lisburn as I would be living independently for the duration of my A-Levels. I completed a BTEC level 3 diploma in Forensic Science as at that time it was an area I was very interested in and I also completed a BTEC level 3 in Business Studies which was equivalent to A levels. There was less overall teaching time than A-Level studies but it was very focused on the specific subjects which allowed me to commit to working part-time.

I heard about Foundation Degrees through SERC, as you can study at University level through a local college but with smaller classes and more allocated teaching time. I completed a Foundation Degree in Leadership and Management in Business as at some point in the future I would like to run a business of my own. My timetable consisted of 3 out of 5 weekdays of classes at between 16-20 hours per week. This was very beneficial as it allowed for one to one tutor support. In the second year of the Foundation Degree there was an opportunity to undertake a placement to implement quality improvement within the placement provider. The modules are very relevant and can change yearly depending upon what is being sought by employers with the aim to make you as employable as possible.

The Foundation Degree has helped me in my career plan as it gives a broad overview of many aspects of business. After completing it there were a number of options available to me. One option was to seek

Access to Success – Widening Participation

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Paul Walsh, Head of learning support at SERC said, “At SERC we are very keen that those who are working hard to overcome barriers are fully supported whilst they are learning. Every member of staff does everything they can to make sure that the students reach their full potential to secure successful careers.”

employment as you attain a Level 5 diploma in Leadership and Management from the Institute of Leadership and Management as well as the Foundation Degree which can make you an appealing candidate when applying for many management roles. Another option was to enter a BA Degree. I chose this option and am currently in my final year of study.

In terms of student support, there is a dedicated staff team in student support in SERC which is comforting to know. I was able to send an email or just pay the team a visit if I needed anything. SERC also issue regular emails to all students regarding jobs in general and specific fields which make you feel like they want you to succeed and help you to seek out specific opportunities through bringing in representatives from companies or suggesting opportunities they have seen. I can honestly say I did not encounter any barriers. A dream of mine is to run my own business and be my own boss but I’m still working on what

that business would look like and gaining valuable experience on running a business in the working world before I start a serious business plan!

My advice to young care leavers... go for whatever it is you want to do, look very carefully at what you need to attain to get where you want to go and create a map in your head in how you’re going to get there, for example, attain level 2, then 3 and then go onto a Foundation Degree and know what grades you need to achieve to get on to the next part of the plan. Having a clear plan that you can keep in the back of your head means you are always heading in that direction and any hiccups along the way can be overcome.

If you stay in Higher Education there are many resources available, particularly for young people from care, including financial and general support through the duration of your course up until aged 24. I would recommend finding more information on these from social

work teams. Personally I could not have survived the past couple of years without this support. Your social worker, personal advisor and senior social worker will be able to get this information for you. Search the internet or go to [VOYPICS](#) and see what is on offer for young people from care going into Higher Education. You will be surprised at the amount of dedicated resources Universities have including bursaries and one to one support from an assigned Widening Participation representative. Never feel embarrassed about making use of these resources. They are there to make sure you can get the best experience and education possible.”

Further Information

We would be delighted to have any feedback, suggestions or queries.
Please contact us via one of the following methods:

T: 028 90 25 7792

E: HE.StrategyProgrammeManagementOffice@economy-ni.gov.uk

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