



SUB 175/2000
FIRST MINISTER'S OFFICE

DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER & FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT

From the Minister's Office

19 January 2000

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To: First Minister
Deputy First Minister

cc Executive Committee
Mr Nesbitt
Mr Haughey
Mr Semple
Mr Shannon
MC

From: Sean Farren

Mr Lavery
Mr Campbell
Dr Gudgeon
Mr Howe

PROGRAMME OF GOVERNMENT

1. Thank you for your note of 22 December 1999 seeking a contribution from me to the Programme of Government
2. To set the context, my Department's work and policies must be shaped by the socio-economic environment within which it operates. The Research and Evaluation Branch within the Training and Employment Agency predicts a period of low inflation and low unemployment with a high level of economic growth reflected in the creation of new, skilled jobs in vibrant new sectors such as software and call centres. It is the responsibility of my Department to ensure that the workforce of Northern Ireland is sufficiently skilled and motivated to take advantage of the opportunities which will come. The time is therefore right to emphasise the need to upskill the labour force and indeed increase the number of people seeking employment. The measures which I have identified as appropriate to the Programme of



Government can make a significant contribution to these ends and promote the economic and social well-being of all of our people.

- 3. I have attached as Annex A a "first cut" list of what I see as the main Departmental issues which I would wish to include in the Programme. I have also identified a number of cross cutting issues where there is an overlap between my Department and others. I have not prioritised either list at this stage, or gone into a great deal of detail.
- 4. I look forward to the opportunity for discussion on these issues with you and Executive Committee colleagues.

DR SEAN FARREN MLA
Minister for Higher and Further Education,
Training and Employment

PROGRAMME OF GOVERNMENT

DEPARTMENTAL ISSUES

1. Vocational Education and Training – Post 16

To meet the social and economic needs of the community and provide a quality service, action is required to achieve greater integration of education and vocational training for the post-16 age group. In the context of Lifelong Learning and enhancing the employability of the NI workforce and meeting the future skill needs of the economy greater coherence of provision is required especially for the 16-19 age group. Parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications and greater co-ordination and planning in the use of resources will require an integrated approach to the funding of places and support of young people across further education, sixth form choices and vocational training. In the first instance a review of current funding mechanisms and programmes is required. Such a review may impinge on the Department of Education's plans to examine secondary education provision, in particular the extent of sixth form provision. Similarly the adult provision requires review to ensure a continuity of skills creation and workplace learning which involves the effective use of existing initiatives and programmes and encourage greater adult participation in learning.

2. Domestic Higher Education Provision

Lord Dearing's recommendations and the increasing demand for places in higher education is causing the Department to re-examine the scope for

additional places and to consider how the further and higher education sectors can best meet this need. This will reflect a more holistic approach to tertiary education in the Province.

3. Student Support Review

It is the Department's intention to review the current system of student finance to ensure that those engaged in study have adequate support and experience no undue hardship as a result of their decision to continue their education. The Department will wish to explore how the available funding can best be targeted and thereby ensure that access to further and higher education is widely available to all sections of society.

4. University Research Funding

The Department is aware of the importance of University research to future economic prospects and is committed to enhancing the role of the universities within the local economy. It is the intention of the Department therefore to seek ways of increasing the level of funding for the university research infrastructure and of promoting public (and private) research and development in Northern Ireland to help create the circumstances for sustained economic development. The recent Northern Ireland Economic Council report will require a considered response from Government.

5. Lifelong Learning

The Department recognises the need to increase the skills levels of the Northern Ireland labour force in the interests of promoting regional competitiveness and a knowledge-based economy. The Department, therefore, wants to develop strongly the concept of lifelong learning and to

draw on the work of the Skills Task Force and the University for Industry to influence the uptake of education and training opportunities. In particular, the Department sees the need to reform basic skills education in light of the findings of the International Adult Literacy Survey and to upgrade the vocational and occupational skills of those already in the labour force.

CROSS CUTTING ISSUES

1. Strategy 2010

Strategy 2010 identifies the need for improvement in educational standards in the lower ability ranges and that technical education is not providing the levels of skill industry needs. This Department along with others will need to respond to this in order to support the vision of a fast growing, competitive, innovative and knowledge-based economy. To do this, Government will need to foster the integration of economic and educational policy and promote collaboration between business and the education and training sectors to deliver the skills and capabilities needed by business. It will also need to raise the prestige of technical education and ensure students are given a better appreciation of the attractions of a career in industry.

2. Welfare Reform

(i) ONE

The Training and Employment Agency will continue to develop its joint working arrangements with the Social Security Agency, and to introduce 'ONE', the single work-focussed gateway to benefits,

delivered in partnership with the SSA and other organisations. This work will focus on integrated, co-ordinated service provision and will be designed to provide a more efficient and effective service to meet the employment needs of all benefit claimants. Systems will be introduced which are responsive to an individual's needs and will remove duplication of effort between Government Agencies. New technology and innovative working procedures will be used to cut across organisational boundaries.

(ii) Student Support Review

The review of student support identified in the Departmental Issues section could also be set within the context of the Welfare Reform Agenda.

3. Vocational Educational and Training (VET)

The review of VET for 16-19 year olds should be set within a context where the Department of Education examines the 11+ and the structures of secondary education.

NI Childcare Strategy

The delivery of the NI Childcare Strategy is a joint responsibility of DHFETE, DHSS&PS and the Department of Education. DHFETE's role will ensure that training and information about job opportunities are available to prospective employees and that employers have an adequate pool of qualified labour available to them. It also includes the support of a campaign to promote the balancing of work and home responsibilities.

4. Equality

Many measures within the Department's remit will directly impact on the achievement of overall equality and equity policies. Widening access, effective targeting of student support, a comprehensive set of training programmes and an integrated tertiary sector are key in this respect.

5. North/South – East/West Relationships

The Department will proactively seek to develop relationships through the North-South Ministerial Council and the British Irish Council to promote co-operation and learn from best practice. As a result, it will make best use of resources by drawing on the experience and expertise of all in the fields of higher and further education, training and employment.