



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Employment and Learning

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Review of Youth Training:
Department for Employment and Learning

28 May 2014

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for Employment and Learning

Review of Youth Training: Briefing by Department for Employment and Learning

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Robin Swann (Chairperson)
Mr Thomas Buchanan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Sammy Douglas
Mr David Hilditch
Mr Fra McCann
Ms Bronwyn McGahan
Mr Pat Ramsey
Ms Claire Sugden

Witnesses:

Mr David Broadhurst	Department for Employment and Learning
Ms Yvonne Croskery	Department for Employment and Learning
Mr Jim Russell	Department for Employment and Learning

The Chairperson: I advise members that the Department has asked that the briefings be taken in a different order from that set out on the agenda. It will give a different flow to the evidence sessions.

Our first departmental briefing will be on the review of youth training. I welcome Yvonne Croskery, the director of the youth policy and strategy division. Congratulations on your promotion, Yvonne. I also welcome Jim Russell, the deputy director of the youth policy and strategy division, and David Broadhurst, the head of the review of youth training. Folks, it is over to you.

Ms Yvonne Croskery (Department for Employment and Learning): Thank you very much, Chair and members, for making us welcome this morning. I am very new to my role. The reason that we asked to reschedule the agenda, Chair — we are very appreciative to you and the Committee for doing that — is that we feel that the flow will move much better when we share youth training with you and its inextricable links with apprenticeships. We have provided you with some slides this morning. Are you happy for us to walk through the presentation, or would you prefer to move straight to questions?

The Chairperson: Rather than walk through it, could we run through it?

Ms Croskery: I will give you a whistle-stop tour, if I may. Today is about me and my colleagues outlining the progress that we have made to date on youth training. We are keen to outline our next steps, provide you with an opportunity to ask us questions and maybe share your opinions. Today is about dialogue, and we would like to be able to engage with you and take your views back as well. We are working to the target for a proposition to be in place for September 2014 for presentation to the Assembly. So, we will continue our dialogue with the Committee throughout that period, and, after

that, we will go to a public consultation with a view to finalising around the end of 2014 the policy proposals that we all signed up to. I have to say that we are on schedule to deliver that.

It would maybe be good to refresh you on the purpose of the original review of youth training. It was about aiming to ensure that our youth training provision at level 2 has sufficient breadth and depth to allow our young people to either progress into an apprenticeship or to move into work, further education programmes or sustainable employment. We saw from the very outset that the review of youth training is inextricably linked to apprenticeships, and, while there has been quite a bit of focus on and we have progressed further with apprenticeships, we are now moving very swiftly with the review of youth training. One feeds into the other, and it is very difficult to move in isolation. My new portfolio includes United Youth. Jim is with me today, and he is heading up United Youth, which is the umbrella body for all our youth activities. He will talk you through how that will sit, and I think that it will become clearer as our presentations progress today.

I will not spend much time on the headline information, such as the economic and statistical context, because I think that you are all quite familiar with that. We still have a very high youth unemployment rate, which is at 18.6%, and we still have quite a high percentage of young people leaving without five GCSEs at grades A to C. We need to focus on work as well and on moving our young people into sustainable employment. More importantly, however, we need to focus on getting them the skills — the GCSEs or equivalent skills — so that they are employable, can stay in employment and can progress through a seamless progression pathway. That is what we have been working through in the review.

I will not waste an awful lot of time on the existing provision, because I feel that we covered that in quite a lot of detail at the two previous briefing sessions. We have Skills for Life and Skills for Work at entry level and level 1. I know that the Committee was concerned about the links with what we deem the harder-to-reach category and those who are lower down level 2. We have our Skills for Work at level 2. Further education provision is covering our entry level, level 1 and level 2, and then we have apprenticeships at level 2. So, that is the cohort that we are looking at at the minute.

So far, in the findings that we have been looking at, we found that we have a plethora of different interventions. Through this review, we seek to bring that all together and to come forward with something meaningful for young people that will be of a high calibre and that will offer them a seamless progression route right through from pre-entry level so that, if they have an occupational route that they choose to go down, they can see where they are going. We also want to provide a curriculum that is broad enough to let that young person move and progress right through that lifelong learning journey.

I have given a whistle-stop tour of where we are, because I am mindful that you have become quite familiar with this since we have been doing the review. I will pass over to you, David, so that you can set out where we are with the literature review.

Mr David Broadhurst (Department for Employment and Learning): I will set out briefly what the literature review has found thus far. We have been looking at reports from across Europe, such as Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports, and, from most of that research, we have found that common components in what makes a good youth training offer are being identified. One of the key things coming through is the necessity for well-structured work placements. All the research is saying that that is essential. The development of employment and enterprise skills, professional technical qualifications and things like that are coming across in all the research. In everything that we read, we see that those things are being repeated again and again. The importance of robust independent careers guidance has come up repeatedly, in that the young people maybe need to be more directive with careers guidance and there needs to be better signposting for them. Slightly closer to home, the English model talks about level 2 qualifications in English and maths being important for those who have not yet achieved it.

We have also been on national and international visits. The Minister and the team recently visited the Netherlands and Denmark. That was based on recommendations from the OECD that said that their systems are probably as close as we could get to ours and that they are examples of best practice. The Netherlands visit was an excellent example of work placements and progression routes. Its MBO system is very much built on progression routes from level 1 to level 2 to level 3 to level 4. You have to progress from each level. For example, you have to achieve level 1, which is roughly equivalent of our level 1, before you can move on to level 2, and you have to achieve level 2 before you can move on to level 3. We are thinking about the idea that the progression routes are clearly set out and that they have lines that you must cross.

They found that Denmark is set up around work placements. It manages its vocational training through sector-based trade committees that help to set the requirements of each qualification in each sectoral area. Again, that is something that we think might be good for here. Next week, the Minister and the team will go to Scotland to do some research. Scotland is an example of an area that has very good local employer engagement, and we will look to see how it does that best. It does it in a much more regional area, as each area is tailored towards its local group.

Organisations on the expert panel, such as Belfast Skills Development and the South West College, have given us information on what they think would make good youth training. For example, Belfast Skills Development highlighted working in collaboration. That was its key thing. In the Belfast area, the college works closely in collaboration with local training providers and workplaces. South West College presented on the importance of mentoring and getting people from level 1 through to level 2 and giving them the support to do that and to step up.

That is a summary of our research, which is ongoing. I will pass over to Jim to talk about the new structures.

Mr Jim Russell (Department for Employment and Learning): We have created the new youth policy and strategy division in the Department. The review sits under the wing of that division, as does the review of apprenticeships and the work that we need to do on the United Youth programme going forward. The Committee will be aware that funding for the youth employment scheme (YES) and the initiatives that are running under the Pathways to Success strategy runs out at the end of next March. We hope to pull all that work together under the wing of this new division under Yvonne's leadership. We will try to pull together a framework of provision that meets the needs of all young people, whether they are kids who struggle and are currently regarded as NEET or people at the other end of the scale who may be well capable and can manage their way through education and training for themselves.

Some of the work that we have done on United Youth and things that we are learning from the Pathways to Success strategy reflect some of the words that David and Yvonne already used this morning, including progression, quality, work placements, mentoring, etc. We see that there are so many linkages between these initiatives and so many things that we can learn from one another that we should bring them together into one place and, hopefully, produce something that is coherent and that people can understand and navigate their way through so that, with the right help, they can progress. So, hopefully, you will see that picture beginning to emerge as we build this over the next number of months. The restructuring that we have done will help us with that.

Ms Croskery: This takes on board some of the views that you have articulated to us about the need for that coherence and for things to be joined up. We have been listening very carefully. We see United Youth as a broad church and a means to do that, with all the different components and choices for the young person underneath that mean that they do not repeat what they have already learned or gained but have a range of choices moving towards their occupational area, pathways and goals. It is about making sure that it is seamless and that, right from entry level, they can see how it takes them to the next step. We will talk a wee bit more about that. We have provided you with a diagram, because we think that it will help you to visualise how far we have got with this review and, more importantly, where it sits with apprenticeships. One is inextricably linked to the other, as you will see as we go forward.

Mr Russell: Some of the ideas that are emerging from the apprenticeship review read across into the other work. We will pick those up when we come to the apprenticeship review.

When we go out to talk to people about these issues and the different reviews, we tend to get a lot of the same feedback about what works and what would be good ideas. So, it makes sense to bring them together in one consistent piece of work.

Mr Broadhurst: I will give an update on stakeholder engagement thus far. You will probably be aware that we held stakeholder engagement events at the start of the year. We held four with about 180 attendees from among voluntary and community providers, young people themselves and employers. We had a call for submissions and got a number of responses to that. We recently refreshed the expert panel. Previously, we were using the apprenticeship expert panel for youth training, but the Minister took the decision to have a youth training-specific expert panel. That panel has met twice thus far.

I will summarise the stakeholder feedback thus far. Again, a lot of common themes are coming through it all. It confirms that provision has to be highly credible, that there has to be quality and that it has to get people up to level 3. One of the things coming through is that the provision has to be recognised by young people and employers as something that they want to do. We have to sell it to them, and it is coming through that we are maybe not doing that at the minute. There was a consensus that it needs to be broader than just getting people qualifications. There was also a consensus that employers are key to making it work. That refers back to the research and the literature review. Employers are key to providing work placements and giving input into what they need and how they want to take it forward.

One of the things coming through from our event with young people is that they want to be pushed a bit more. That is something that we maybe need to follow up with the young people. A number of the young people who were at our event thought that they were not being pushed or being taken to the level that, they thought, they were capable of. The other thing that came through is that youth training needs to be sold to young people better. They are not aware of all the opportunities in youth training. So, it needs to be clearly set out what they will get from it, how it will benefit them for their future careers and how it will move them up the ladder.

Ms Croskery: I will just run through the recurring themes. The need for robust vocational qualifications is a theme that has crossed every piece of work that we have done so far. There is a plethora of qualifications and pathways there. As this review progresses, the findings are leading us to look at a root-and-branch review to try to get a broad hybrid qualification for young people that opens the door to higher education, that allows seamless progression routes and that has sufficient breadth. By that I mean the equivalent of a baccalaureate. We see something along those lines at the level of five GCSEs covering English, maths, ICT and possibly some language skills. That is only the very periphery of what we see so far.

We are making progress, but, from the feedback that we got, we see that the young person aspires to have a qualification that has rigour and recognition and that opens doors. At the minute, we appear to have a plethora of different routes, some of which are perceived to be of more value than others. We want to look at building a new qualification and a new focus that allows that breadth. Obviously, you know that any employer will want somebody who is both literate and numerate. We need to be working very strongly on those skills.

A lot of young people may aspire to start their own business, so if we want to move the Northern Ireland economy forward, we need entrepreneurial and enterprise skills. We need more SMEs. All that needs to be very firmly built in.

Quality is key. Above all, young people want quality provision so that what they achieve has value and opens doors. We really need to be looking at that. We also need to think about how we want to monitor arrangements with work placements. Where impartial careers advice is concerned, we can say that there are very strong links between careers advice and the findings of the work that we have already done on the review of apprenticeships. Some of the findings of the review of apprenticeships align closely with some of the findings of this review. There is scope for synergies there, and we may talk a wee bit further about that.

At the risk of absolutely boring you to death, we have provided you with a diagram of the future system. I will let you look at that at your leisure. The arrows set out where all the different levels and progression routes sit and where they take you to.

The Chairperson: Members, that is on page 87 of your pack.

Ms Croskery: I would like to move to the next model for discussion. One of the things that we in the Department have been very taken by is the model of traineeships in Australia. We are going to do a bit more research; David has not quite shared that with you yet. We are very taken by the fact that they have a thing called a traineeship. It is not like a traineeship in England, where someone does a bit of work-based learning activity. This is where a young person at the equivalent of level 2 who is in employment will do a rigorous programme with the breadth that I talked about. It is for a young person who already knows what occupational area they aspire to enter. After they have got their entry level qualifications, this is the next step in that progression route. They will be in a job and will take forward a new form of learning in this new hybrid or type of baccalaureate that will give them a breadth of numeracy and literacy, as well as an achievement that, at the end, allows them to move seamlessly into an apprenticeship and further learning through further education or to progress in their own job. It

is a lifelong learning journey, where the young person bags this traineeship while they are in work, and it allows them to seamlessly progress into the apprenticeship at level 3 and beyond.

As you see in the diagram, we then have another cohort of the youth training programme. In fairness, at 16, it is very hard for you to know what you want to do. Not all young people will know what occupational area they aspire to. We see a broad new provision for those young people along the lines of what we shared with you before. It will look at that young person and build that work placement into the programme. We see all this fitting under the banner of United Youth, with a series of other modules specifically designed for young people that they will be able to select. We are going to be doing an awful lot more work to design this for young people. We will work with Jim and his team to make sure that we look at real, active engagement with young people so that we can hear their voice in all this. There will be opportunities as part of that modular approach, and they can do those programmes if they know the occupational area that they want to go into. You can start right at the bottom of the ladder with NEETs and say that we want to have a modular approach so that that young person can choose, in their entry level qualifications, what they need to do to move into a traineeship, the broad learning programme or normal mainstream FE. As well as those robust qualifications, it will have a series of choices covering citizenship and volunteering, and making sure that it is employer led. The biggest message in all that concerns getting the employers around the table here for the work placements. Again, we see inextricable links with what we are doing with apprenticeships. That is because if we have some of those sectoral groupings, there is real value added in using them to help get the placements and the tasters. We see the links with our YES programme, which already has a series of wonderful opportunities. So, it is about bringing all that together under this banner so that the young person has a suite of choices to make and, depending on the robust, independent careers advice and the transitional arrangement that we are talking about — the careers review is looking at that — they will get robust advice at key stages to make sure that they are making the right choices.

We want to have a curriculum with a seamless pathway so that it is abundantly clear where the young people aspire to go and the doors are open for them to do that. We do not have that at the moment, so that is what I see as the big piece of work for us moving forward. It will be a brand new offer. It will offer the young person who has secured a job at level 2 the ability to work in that traineeship, gain that broad qualification and aspire to progress in the occupational pathway of their choice. It also opens it up for the non-employed young person who, at 16, 17 or 18, is not 100% sure what they want to do but needs the breadth. The qualification opens a series of doors, not just one door. It does not shoehorn you into one neat area.

I think that the diagram is helpful in letting you see the links. We are at the stage now where we want to show you the level we have reached and what we think it looks like. We want to hear your thoughts on it. What do you think? Do you feel that we are going in the right direction? Obviously, we are all about progressing. We know that, economically, we need to move our people in Northern Ireland into higher skilled jobs, and we need to start with our young people. We see this as a route for that, and we see the umbrella that I tried to present through the diagram as a wonderful opportunity to do that.

If it is OK, I will very quickly move into the next steps, and then I would love to have a conversation with you to hear your views on that. David has shared the research and best practice. We are at the critical stage, and a lot more work is being done. We are very taken by Australia, and we think there are a lot of things we can learn from Scotland as well. We are looking closely at that at the moment. There is going to be continued stakeholder engagement. Jim is very bought on the need to make sure that we capture the voices of our young people, so we will see a big piece of work on that, with real dialogue to find out what they think. That is because they are best placed to tell us what they need. We have got a wee bit of a flavour of that already. We see a definite need for more engagement with employers. We are going to be working on that as well, because without them, it will not work either for work placements or the level 2 jobs that we need to be able to secure to get our people into employment.

Obviously, we will continue to engage with our expert panel, as David articulated. That work will be ongoing throughout the summer. It is also important that we take your views and consult you, as our supergroup. So, we will be doing that throughout the period. We will start to firm up some proposals. We envisage a high-level policy statement in June on youth training, which is inextricably linked to our review of apprenticeships. That aims to give comfort to the wider public and obviously to the members here today that there will be linkages from entry level and level 2 right through and that we are very mindful that this needs to be a seamless process. Similar to the review of apprenticeships, we will then produce an interim report for consultation in September, if all things go according to plan. Without further ado, I will just open up the floor to you.

The Chairperson: Thanks for that, Yvonne. You reinforced what we have always been saying about the importance of employers in the scheme. There is the traineeship at level 2 or pre-entry and then the apprenticeship level. First, how do you find enough employers to take up all those positions, and secondly, why would an employer take up a traineeship or an apprenticeship? What are the different appeals?

Ms Croskery: In our apprenticeship report, we presented the net benefits to the employer of taking an apprentice. It is quite clear to be seen that, after the first year, the return on the investment is significant, given the home-grown talent that that organisation —

The Chairperson: I understand that with apprenticeships, but why would they take up somebody in your level 2 programme or your youth programme?

Ms Croskery: With this programme, they will be able to get the skills that they need. Every organisation needs a range of skills and jobs. We believe that they can start at grass roots level with the hand and technical skills to make that business more efficient. The young person will be coming with new ideas and new scope. We will be looking at how we might best incentivise all that. It is a challenge, as part of this review, to look at how we join it all up. We need to be looking at incentives. We are looking at that, are we not, Jim, in United Youth? Those are some challenges in what we need to do. However, in answer to your question, we believe that the majority of employers will be able to see the benefits of taking a young person on to their organisation by seeing quite quickly what they can deliver. Remember, these are people who have the basic level 1 qualification, and they will be bringing many gifts and skills.

Mr Russell: We have had absolutely no difficulty getting employers to offer opportunities to young people in the youth employment scheme. That has not been the issue. The issue has been getting young people to take them. That is why we are so keen, this time around, to hear what the young people's issues are. We think that employers see the value in this. They will want to build their workforce, and they will want to build their business. With the youth employment scheme, we said, "Look, we're in difficult economic times. Every business wants to grow and survive. At the present time, you might find it difficult to invest, because you can't see where the future is going to take you". Coming in with support through the youth employment scheme and through this type of initiative might help employers prepare to take advantage of opportunities that are not there at this point in time but that might emerge in the future. We think that we have a solid story to tell employers, and we think that they will respond. The task for us will be to make sure that young people are up to the task when the opportunities come along. That is the challenge.

Ms Croskery: You have to look at the fact that the employer is getting a young person in their organisation who is getting off-the-job training. That adds a significant amount of value. Maybe that is about the Department working in collaboration with the key partners — government, obviously, employers and providers — to get out the message that we are providing the training costs for the person in the traineeship to become proficient and to contribute to that organisation and its profitability. There is a job of work for us to do on all this.

The Chairperson: Jim, you talked about employers taking advantage, although it was not directly linked to this. What are you going to put in place to stop employers taking advantage of the young people so that they do not merely move the young person from traineeship to apprenticeship without creating full-time jobs?

Ms Croskery: We will put checks and balances, as well as monitoring, in place.

Mr Russell: If someone is an apprentice, they are employed; you are an employee if you are on an apprenticeship. The model for level 2 training, work-based learning and work experience is the same sort of model that we have with the youth employment scheme. There are no long-term commitments; it is part of a programme. If it is not right and not meeting the young person's need, they can leave. We monitor it, and if we think that the young people are not getting the right support or are being taken advantage of, we can pull them out.

Ms Croskery: Those with a traineeship in employment will have a contract of employment. As part of the policy development, we will need to bottom out whether that is for a fixed term and what our barometers are. We will need to look at what we see as the key performance indicators for the likes of a traineeship so that the young people end up gaining their qualifications. That would be one

barometer, as would progression, obviously, and moving forward or staying in sustainable employment. That is for that one arm.

Jim talked to you about the other arm, which is the non-employed route. Obviously, we will look at making sure that one of the barometers will be the achievement of the qualification and making sure that they get the work-based learning opportunities to make the choices. We will also look at putting in checks and balances with the careers adviser. We see careers as having a key role in making sure that the young person is not exploited or repeating what they have already done. So, we have a lot of work to do. Be clear about this: this is very high-level. We have reached this point, but we fully accept that we have a lot more work and thinking to do, and we hope that you will come on the journey with us.

The Chairperson: Will the contract of employment for the traineeship be between the young person and the Department or the young person and the employer?

Ms Croskery: The young person will be employed. A traineeship is a job. At the minute, we have level 2 apprentices, and they are in a job. This is really a traineeship at level 2 with a new type of curriculum, but on an employment basis. How long it lasts and whether it is a permanent job or is for a fixed period are all things that we need to bottom-out.

Mr Russell: It may well be that you have both options; one could be for a fixed term and one could be permanent. We would work it out.

Mr F McCann: Thank you for the presentation. It was fairly extensive. I have a number of queries. Let me ask about the level 2 training. What is the difference between that and what has been available up to now? I have to say that the scheme was heavily criticised by a number of employees and employers' organisations. What is the difference between that and what is on offer now?

Ms Croskery: We are looking at developing a new, broader curriculum for young people that includes employability, literacy and numeracy. We are looking at a broader curriculum. So, it is something new, Fra. It is not the same curriculum as we have at the minute. If I am right, could you be thinking about programme-led apprenticeships (PLAs)?

Mr F McCann: What I am talking about is that people were getting a qualification at level 2, and that employers were telling us that they did not recognise it; that they would not take those people into full-time employment, and that they were not qualified to the level that the employers would like. The Minister issued a statement to say that this was under review, and that he hoped to progress it to level 3 and beyond. I could never work out whether he was talking about advanced apprenticeships or youth training.

There seems to be a difference in the approaches that we were talking about: advanced apprenticeships, and where youth training was going. When I talk about level 2 training, I mean that people are being trained up and are then finding that they are qualified to a level that employers do not recognise.

Ms Croskery: We envisage that this will sort that out. We will work with the employers to develop a qualification that they and the sectoral organisation will sign off on and which ensures that the young person's qualification is recognised seamlessly for progression.

We accept that there is a plethora of opportunities and choices that young people are making at the minute. Through this review, we are seeking to bring those together, work with employers and develop a new curriculum that avoids it happening. The employer and the sectoral groups will have endorsed the qualification, so the young person will know that what they come out with at the end of their traineeship will allow them to progress most definitely into a level 3 apprenticeship or into level 3 further education, right up the ladder. That is why we are working on all these reviews. We want a seamless progression route that offers qualifications that are endorsed by the sectors and employers so that there is no risk of that ever happening again.

Mr Russell: We want to raise the bar and improve quality across the board, so that when employers get these young people they will think: "Yes, they are ready. They are capable of doing what we need them to do for us." We want to raise the bar and improve quality across the board.

We talk about progression. As Yvonne said, we do not want young people doing the same thing over and over again. That will not move them anywhere. We want to make sure that we progress them when they are ready to move. On the diagram, there are lots of arrows, but it is not always that simple. There might be a few circles in there, where people are at entry level or level 1 and are not ready to move quickly. We might have to do a lot of preparatory work with people before they are ready to progress. We will progress them at the right time. Part of the problem we have at level 2 is that it is a one-size-fits-all structure. Everybody goes in: it works for some; it fails for a lot. We do not want that. We want to fix the issues that we have identified with the current arrangements.

Ms Croskery: It needs to link to the occupational areas as well. I take your very point. If a young person is at the crossroads and is making a choice, if they are going towards a traineeship, it must allow for progression right through occupational area. Likewise, youth training needs to be broad enough and endorsed by employers so that we know that it has the recognition and kudos for the next learning stage, so that it opens the door for them.

Mr F McCann: The people who came in here and were heavily critical of two years for level 2 were the electrical engineers. If we brought them back next week and said, "Well, we've been told that everything has been sorted out. Do you endorse it?" and they say "no", what do you do?

Ms Croskery: We are working on the basis that that will not happen. The sectoral bodies will be signing off on those qualifications as part of the process.

Mr F McCann: So, the level 2 that we were told about no longer exists. People will be trained and educated to a level. I understand that there are people who that may not suit. We can talk about advanced apprenticeships, and that is crucial for new employment, but there are big traditional trades that people still want to be trained up in.

I keep quoting this friend of mine, and I have to say that he is not imaginary and that he does have this badge. He is an electrician and is so proud of the badge because it opens up every door for him — Sammy talks about welders, and it is the same thing. My friend would say that the training that people get at level 2 does not open doors for them. You need to go beyond that. He did three or four years' training before he got his badge.

Ms Croskery: Through this model, we believe that we are going to put checks, balances and sign-offs in place with the sectoral bodies and employers to make sure that does not happen any more.

Mr F McCann: What does that mean? Seriously, Yvonne —

Ms Croskery: It means that whenever they develop the —

Mr F McCann: I just do not know.

Ms Croskery: The qualification has to meet that sector's needs as well and they have a role.

Mr F McCann: But where do they get this training? Do they get it with employers or in training schemes?

Ms Croskery: If we get this right, the provider delivering the qualification that their young person ends up with has to open up the route to that occupational area.

Mr F McCann: I will move on, but I will come back to this in future meetings because it is a thing we certainly need to keep our eyes on.

Given the sad life I lead, I was going through a report last night called the McClure Watters report, and it talked about advanced apprenticeships. It stated that there were not enough computer numerical code (CNC) programmers, engineers, research and development engineers, production managers, plant engineers, welders and electricians.

After all these years of us sitting around this table, people are saying that this still exists. With all the millions spent, whether through DETI or DEL, we still cannot get it right. The report refers to problems at GCSE level and delivering science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects. Where is the connection there? The manufacturing and engineering sector employs 87,000 people in the North.

There are billions coming into the economy. What are we doing to ensure that people do not have to go outside the North to get the education and training they require?

Ms Croskery: I cannot say to you that I am the panacea to sort out all of this, but the model that we are trying to aspire to and develop here is going to bring employers together with government to look at how we might better match demand and supply. A job will be a job where there is a demand, but we need to get the curriculum right and give a broad enough curriculum so that we match demand with supply.

As you rightly say, there are all these jobs and young people, but if we are not giving them the right diet of a breadth of learning they are never going to progress in some STEM areas. That is why I talk about a baccalaureate. I do not know what we will call it. I do not know what it will look like in the end. We need to bring experts in to help us get it right. We need to work with employers. But we need to develop a breadth for that young person to open that door. They are never going to do it if they are leaving school without GCSE maths and English. That is the truth of the matter and that is what youth training is all about — building that learning block to open up the doors to some of the jobs you are talking about. We are going to work very hard with employers to try to get it right.

Mr F McCann: I am not daring to suggest that the Committee goes to Australia [*Laughter.*] From I was elected to the Assembly, and even in the council that I was on, even back then they were singing the praises of the Netherlands and Denmark. We are still saying that we need to look at how they run things. I thought that if they had good practice and good ways of doing things, those things would have been implemented a while ago. Will we be sitting here in another two or three years, if elected, saying, "Well, we talked about that three years ago or five years ago"?

Ms Croskery: I hope not, and it is my job to see that that is not the case. I cannot deal with the past, but I can tell you that we are looking at models and trying to take the best practice and put it into our system in Northern Ireland. I think that you, as a Committee, can see that from the work that we have done on the apprenticeship review. You can have confidence that we are doing our best to get this right this time. Your points are well made.

Mr F McCann: You know the old saying: the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

Ms Croskery: You are quite right.

Mr P Ramsey: Good morning, Yvonne; good luck in your new appointment. It is a big area for the Committee; young people's opportunities for work are something that we have a clear interest in. Can you give us some details on how the most vulnerable young people in Northern Ireland will be targeted? How will disabled young people, young people with a learning disability and young people leaving care, for example, be catered for in this new programme?

Ms Croskery: Jim, I will pass over to you for the United Youth element.

Mr Russell: The bottom box in our diagram talks about entry level and level 1 provision. We try to prepare young people to take advantage, at the right time, of what is in the offering that we are trying to put together. That will include trying to help young people who are making a transition from school, or care, to work, or even those who may be making the transition from prison back into society.

We try to help people manage those transitions effectively. That is the early work that we are going to pick up in developing the United Youth programme. We will look at how we can help young people who have the greatest difficulty in engaging with what is there at the minute, never mind what might be there in the future. We will look at how to help them engage with it effectively and stay engaged with it.

In the diagram, you will see the word "mentoring". We would like to see young people who have particular difficulties being mentored not just in the early stages of this process but right through from start to finish. We will keep them engaged and make sure that we meet their needs, and we will not allow anyone to fall out of the system because of some incident in their life that makes it difficult for them to access provision or to do the work that they need to do. So, yes, it is very much about making sure that we do not allow anyone to miss out on the opportunity that we are trying to create. That could be as bespoke as an individual.

Ms Croskery: We are at an early stage and at a high level in the direction of travel in which we are going, but, to answer your question more directly, there would need to be some arrangements for additional support to make sure that we have the intervention in place. In answer to your question, we will be looking at a range of interventions and additional support to encourage employers to give those young people a start. We will look at what additional support there is and see how we might better join up, through transitions, with a raft of other providers to make sure that we have everything in place. I know that that already takes place with some of our provision at the Training for Success level and in further education, but we will certainly have to have additional support for those young people. That will include mentoring and maybe even looking at incentives to try to encourage employers to give those young people a chance.

Mr Russell: Part of the Department's review of the disability employment service will look at how we might better transition young people with disabilities, including a learning disability, from the FE sector into work. That is a particular piece of work that they have decided to look at in detail. We are trying to identify and target young people who may have issues in trying to make those transitions from education to work or from education into training and make sure that everybody gets an equal opportunity to try to access what we are talking about.

Ms Croskery: Under the banner of United Youth, right from entry level — and you must remember that a lot of these people are on the very bottom rung; they are not at level 2 youth training stage, and we accept that — this is about trying to bring together the plethora of interventions in a seamless way, so that we engage with the hardest to reach and those with the greatest difficulties in entering the world of learning and work.

Mr P Ramsey: I have to say that I am not convinced. There is no mention of hard-to-reach or marginalised young people. There is no mention of the vulnerable, the disabled or those leaving care. For the record, 23% of young people leaving care get five or more GCSEs, whereas 77% of young people leaving mainstream school get that. So, I say in good faith to you, Yvonne, there is nothing here. To me, there is a bit of waffle going on here this morning. I am not happy about it, but I am not going to make a song and dance about it at this stage.

I have a further question. Will there be tracking of people whom I have described as the most vulnerable, including those leaving care, on entry, enrolment and how they fit in? Will that take place?

Ms Croskery: We will look at a tracking system for this new model in order to find out where these young people are going and how many of them are ending up with a qualification at the end, and how many are progressing. So, yes, in answer to your question, there will have to be —

Mr P Ramsey: It is not even mentioned here.

Ms Croskery: Can I just explain to you? In fairness, we are only three quarters of the way through this review. I have come here today to give you a high-level picture of how far the review has reached. As we progress, there will be more meat on the bones for the things you are raising. You have to come on the journey with me. First, I need to get the concept right about what we are looking at, where the two or three pathways are going, and how they fit under this banner. Once I have that, that is the meat that I need to put on the bones, which is how we are going to engage, what support we are going to give, what incentives, and what extra mentoring we are going to give to these people. I think you are looking for me to be as far forward as September, and I am not there quite yet. I have to get the fundamental principles right, so that I am travelling in the right direction and that —

Mr P Ramsey: I appreciate what you say, but there is not a meeting of this Committee in which youth training is mentioned at which I do not reference — Jim, you are there?— disabled people. I do not miss any opportunity to do so. I am very angry that it is not referenced here at all. That is not meat on the bones; that should come with equality. It should come with a determined output in targeting the same young people and you are not doing that.

As to going forward, you need to reflect on that and come back to us, certainly with more detail and more focused information as to how the vulnerable people in our society are going to be targeted. As I said before: somebody with a learning disability is four times less likely to secure employment as a young person. That is a damning statistic. Look at it please, Yvonne, and come back to me with more.

Ms Croskery: I hear very clearly what you have said and we will take that back with us and have a good look at it.

Mr Broadhurst: Let me just say that, while we have not done a lot of work on this, I have looked at it —

Mr P Ramsey: Not a lot.

Mr Broadhurst: I admit that. I went to meet Include Youth to talk about their transitions for learners leaving care.

Mr P Ramsey: That is a good organisation.

Mr Broadhurst: I was quite taken by their model. They support people for the first six months when they go into training. So, while we have not bottomed it out, we have started to consider that.

Mr P Ramsey: Well, do a wee bit more; not "not a lot".

Mr Broadhurst: I accept that. It is up there.

Ms Croskery: We hear your message very clearly. The portfolio was launched only on 1 May and we will be going back to look at that.

The Chairperson: It is important for me to say this while you are here. You say that you are three quarters of the way through and you are keen to get the Committee engaged. Now you are getting the Committee engaged, so you know exactly, when the final product comes —

Ms Croskery: Yes. What we are looking for here —

The Chairperson: You now know what we are looking for as well.

Ms Croskery: Yes. Thank you.

Mr Buchanan: I thank you for your briefing today. Certainly, it has given a bit of food for thought. I take on board what Pat is saying here. It seems to be that the vulnerable and disabled are being left out of this. However, I think that you have the vision right. The vision is going in the right direction, but the difficulty is in getting the model framed in and around that. That is the important issue. You must make sure that, within the model, you take into account all the young people and all the ones that Pat is talking about: the disabled and the vulnerable in society. Those are the hard-to-reach people, the ones that find it more difficult to get into employment.

There is one other thing I want to ask you about the work you are doing. How are the colleges and universities buying into this new thinking, and what about their flexibility, because they will have to be flexible in order to tie in with this new thinking and new system that you are taking forward. How do you find working with them at the minute?

Ms Croskery: We are going to have to take the further education colleges and universities on this journey with us. In signing off any new qualifications, they are part of the process. It will not work if they do not take part. They have to be part of this process so that it allows for a seamless progression. As I move to my next presentation, I think it will become a bit clearer as to how we are going to do that with some of the sectoral groupings we are looking at. Part of it will be looking at developing the curriculum with employers and sectoral bodies, the sector skills councils signing them off, but with the other providers, such as the colleges and universities, at the table so that everybody signs off on the new qualifications from the outset.

This is the link below it, OK? It is a pathway. It will not work if they do not sign it off. They need to be at the table so that the young person knows that they have something of worth at the end, that they can go to a college or university, and that the door is wide open welcoming them there with the qualification and allowing them to progress. That is the best answer I can give you to that.

Mr Buchanan: Have you done any work with them?

Ms Croskery: We are about to. We are on the cusp of that. We have been taking soundings. We had a detailed consultation with the apprenticeship review, with 71 or 72 responses, so we know that there are views and they are broadly supportive. I will move on to that in the next bit. In fairness, I cannot move any further until the consultation ends, we sign off our policy and then everybody is happy.

Mr Buchanan: I ask this because the universities can have barriers for young people who are training and looking to progress into some sphere of employment. The barriers are such that they have to go across the water to get into universities to do the same course. There is no difficulty in getting into universities there but young people cannot get into them here. To move this system and model forward that you are looking at, unless you can get those barriers broken down and get a bit more flexibility in the colleges and universities, it is not going to work.

Ms Croskery: We concur entirely with your thoughts. Be assured, and without prejudice, the consultation has just closed and I am coming today to feed back what we found from that. The vision moving forward is that they will be part of the solution in signing off this new curriculum right through. I am quietly confident that that will move in that direction.

Mr F McCann: We have talked about NEETs and the vulnerable, but we are in the midst of an inquiry into post-19 special needs education and training. When you are sitting down to look at this, are the serious difficulties for people who educate and train, and for parents, factored in?

Ms Croskery: We will have to factor those in and we are doing that.

Mr F McCann: Have they not been factored in already?

Ms Croskery: We have not reached that stage. At this stage, we are bottoming out the direction of travel at a very strategic level, about the two groups, the traineeship with a person being in work and the broad programme. Those other arrows will come. Yes, we are most definitely going to do that. Is that not right, David?

Mr Broadhurst: We are going to, yes.

Mr F McCann: As part of that process, when can we get feedback? It is heartbreaking sitting listening to educators, trainers and parents, and the barriers that exist there, which are much more severe than most of the barriers elsewhere. As part of this process, when can you safely say you can come back and say, "That has been included in this and this is what we hope to do with it"?

Mr Broadhurst: Probably towards September. It will not be over the summer.

Mr Douglas: Thank you very much for the presentation. Yvonne, I wish you every success in your new role.

Ms Croskery: Thank you.

Mr Douglas: I also back what Pat said. David, I think you mentioned Include Youth.

Mr Broadhurst: Yes.

Mr Douglas: They were before the Committee and we were hugely impressed with the work that they are doing. So, I am glad that you are linking with organisations such as that. I have a question but I want to give a wee bit of background to it. I was looking up some stuff on the Internet last night. Why were the skills for life and skills for work level 1 strands of Training for Success excluded from this review?

I want to give a bit of background to that. I wrote to the Minister, I think it was in March, and in his briefing to this Committee on 9 April, he acknowledged the following:

"We are not happy with the level of outcomes for Training for Success. That is one of the reasons that are leading us to drive the review of youth training because we want a much better product for our young people."

I have been hearing from some officials that the skills for life and skills for work level 1 are not being reviewed because the numbers are not significant. I do not know whether that is your view.

Six months ago, a review was carried out that said that, of a total of 4,327 participants on Training for Success, over 1,500 — or 36% — were on either Skills for Life or Skills for Work. The review showed that only 20% of Skills for Life participants progressed to the next stage of Training for Success, into colleges or into immediate or sustained employment. I am quite concerned that 27% were left with no qualifications whatsoever. This is a crucially important area. I know that we are three quarters of the way through, but can we include this in the review at this stage?

Ms Croskery: The terms of reference for the review were set by Minister Farry on 13 February 2013. At that stage, they did not include those two areas at level one. I have to say that it is unlikely that the terms of reference could be extended at this late stage, because we are working towards a goal of coming to conclusions by September. However, I can give comfort by saying that, through the component parts of the United Youth framework, we are looking at the broad church and the entirety. That will include those two areas. We will be looking at all our entry level and level 1 programmes to make sure that they join up. So, while those programmes will not be captured in the terms of reference of this review, because we are so far down the line, they will be captured under the wider United Youth banner. Is that right, Jim?

Mr Russell: Absolutely, yes. As I said, the Pathways to Success funding runs out next March. The projects running under that are being evaluated. We need to gather some of the learning from that to influence what we do at entry level and level 1 and in and around what is in the blue box at the bottom of the diagram.

Part of the reason why some of the young people who are on Training for Success do not achieve is that they are not ready for it. We may be asking too much of them at that point in time. We need to do some more work at the pre-entry level to prepare them to take advantage of it. A lot of the way to review this is to look at the people for whom it is not working. Let us see where we are going wrong with people who are not progressing. If people are progressing, great; you are doing it right for them. It is the folk that you are not getting it right for that you have to focus on and ask, "Where are we going wrong, and how do we fix it?"

Mr Douglas: Jim, the Minister said in February 2013:

"the review will consider how to best ensure that, in practice, every young person, post-16, has the opportunity to participate in a training programme". — [Official Report, Bound Volume 82, p6, col 1].

I thought that it was crucial to include these two key areas. If we are talking about a review that looks at the highest quality training, then we need to look at these two areas.

Mr Russell: Yes, of course.

Ms Croskery: In answer to your question; it is not within my remit to extend the terms of reference of the current review at this stage. Jim said that we are going to pick this up through United Youth because, come the end of March next year, we will not have a budget for some of our interventions, including the very programmes you are talking about. We have to look at it and take decisions about which ones we are going to run, which ones we can secure money for and which ones are delivering the best results. That will most definitely be looked at within that review; is that right, Jim?

Mr Russell: Absolutely.

Mr Douglas: Chair, for a belt-and-braces approach, would it be possible for us to write to the Minister and say that this is a key issue that has been raised? It is integral to the review that we look at this in line with what Yvonne said.

The Chairperson: Just to reinforce it.

Mr Douglas: Thank you for your answers thus far. My second question is a very quick one. At 18.6%, youth unemployment among 18-year-olds to 24-year-olds is still far too high. The good news is that, over the past number of weeks, there have been announcements of thousands of jobs. How do we link those job announcements and the end product with ensuring that that 18.6% get an opportunity?

Ms Croskery: That is the circle that we need to square. It is about matching demand with supply better and looking at longer-term demand and supply. As part of both the strategic oversight group for apprenticeships and the sectoral groups, we are looking at a way to better capture that so that we can have almost a pipeline whereby you start to prepare the young people for the right qualifications where there are going to be jobs. It is not good enough just to give them a diet of whatever we think is right and hope that it will be all right. We really need to be better at matching supply with demand.

I am not saying that I or the Department have all the answers, but we are looking at a model along the lines of what we call a skills barometer. I cannot say too much about it because it is at a very early stage of thinking. We accept that it is a problem. We want to look at how we might best look at a model that will link the employers and the jobs, not just now but for the future, so that we can start to skill young people at 16 with some of the programmes that we are talking about, that will actually give them a broad enough diet and curriculum and give them maths and English so that they can work on a science area. Let us face it, that is critical. Fra talked about electricians. You need to have a really good standard of maths to be an electrician. Those are the things that we are trying to do here. However, we need a model that looks at trying to bottom all of that out so that we start to get this pipeline of matching the young people and doing provision that allows them to move into those jobs, particularly those right at the bottom at entry level and level 1; isn't that right, Jim?

Ms Sugden: Thank you for your presentation. I am not long out of this process of getting qualifications and then experience. One of the things that I found in my own experience is that experience is key, to the extent that the qualification is almost a box-tick or rubber stamp and it is the experience that really gets you the job.

I want to talk about apprenticeships. Traditionally or typically, apprenticeships in Northern Ireland are associated with the trades. I am concerned about the experience of people in other areas. What types of employers are you working with? Can you give a broad range of that?

Ms Croskery: I am happy to do that. I can give you some wonderful news in that the Department's door has been almost knocked down by professional areas of our economy wanting to take on apprenticeships: financial services, ICT, the Civil Service professional and technical areas and the health service. There is a real diet out there. I envisage a time when we see apprenticeship nurses again. There really is a demand. There should be very few occupational areas where we will not have an apprenticeship. It will be informed by employer need.

To answer your question, we have been absolutely blown away. We can hardly keep up with the number of employers who want to talk to us about starting apprenticeships in new occupational areas that we were not in before and that are not in what is firmly known as "the trade". I am talking about professional and technical areas at level 3 and above. We need to move with that momentum very quickly. We are going to try to do that once we conclude our review. We see that the sky is the limit as regards jobs and employers.

The good thing is that we have had a number of pilots supported by the Department's higher-level apprenticeships. A number of companies have been blown away by the calibre of young people and, I have to say, their ability to perform at a similar level to some of the graduate recruits. Some very well-qualified A-level students are making the choice to go down the apprenticeship route as well. We have tested the ground. We know that there is need and demand based on the number of higher-level apprenticeships that we have at the minute and, as I say, the number of employers knocking on our door.

Ms Sugden: That is key from the point of view that we have an awful lot of students who go to university and get their degree, and that is it. You used to go to university, get your degree and then somebody employed you. Now, you do have to do the legwork. That is an experience.

Perhaps you will indulge me for another question. The issue of getting the students to buy into the experience and the ownership of it was picked up briefly earlier. I have done a number of internships, if you can call them that. One of my frustrations was that the only thing that an internship was good

for was your CV — the skills and the experience that was gained. I am going to take on interns during the summer because I want to give young people that opportunity. It is not about providing me with cheap employment in any respect. It is about developing their skills, because I recognise that that is what they need moving forward. How are you going to work with employers to ensure that it is not a case of — and I am thinking more of the professional skills, because apprenticeships are different in that they are working on the job, and that is how they are learning. In other professional areas, how are you going to encourage employers to give ownership to the young people that they take on?

Ms Croskery: We are working on a model whereby we have developed a curriculum for apprenticeships at higher levels that are signed off by the employer and the sectoral body and which, we are content, meet that broad range. I am not clear. If you just maybe —

Ms Sugden: For example, I did an internship, and I sat in a room and did nothing. How will you encourage employers to actually —

Ms Croskery: — give meaningful placements? We will put checks and balances and tests in place to do that. We are confident that we have enough employers who are keen to give experience. However, in answer to your question, we will have to have rigorous monitoring to make sure that young people are not exploited, or given an exchange or placement but are doing nothing. That is very worrying and concerning.

Ms Sugden: To me, it is very demoralising. That is the first instance when the young person drops out. They think: what is the point of this? Other than being able to put it on their CV, they are not gaining skills and they are not able to take ownership of the experience. That is really important.

Ms Croskery: It will be government's role to look at how we put in place checks and balances before we raise some of those experiences and check. We will monitor when the young person is there to see what product they have been given. In my view, it is likely that some of those placements might be as much as giving the person a piece of work that they own and deliver.

Mr Russell: As we said before, it is about making sure that everything we do has quality. At the minute, we get patchy provision. There are some placements that are of really good quality, and some that, as you say, is quite poor, where people are put in a room and not really given anything to do. That is not helping anyone at all. It will be about monitoring and setting standards that people have to meet if we are going to use them to provide some of these placements and work experiences.

Mr Hilditch: We have obviously covered a bit of ground there, particularly on the vulnerable side of things. You have an enormous task in front of you, and we appreciate that. I did not expect you to be here with an all-singing, all-dancing version this morning, but it is good that you are taking on board some of the issues that have been raised.

I will continue on the employer side of things. You mentioned the sectoral-based theme. Is that just during the consultation, or is there an idea that it should be taken forward?

Ms Croskery: If you are patient and wait until we move to the next agenda item, on apprenticeships, we will talk through that. That was one of the proposals. What I am saying today is that we can see inextricable links between outworkings of the review of apprenticeships that we can use for some of the youth training — the like of our work-based learning experiences, and how we can best engage with employers. I hope that all will become clear in the next presentation. In fairness, we have not consulted at all on youth training, as you know, other than with regard to stakeholder engagement and dialogue with young people and employers and providers. We have been working very hard at that, but we have not had any consultation on this. We can see inextricable links with some of the models and proposals that are coming forward on apprenticeships that we might be able to use for this as well, to give the employer a voice in there. We are looking at having one award, one qualification. We are going to look at a sectoral group, with employers signing off the curriculum; and we are building a new curriculum for level 2. Therefore, you would want them to do the same for this, so that it is seamless, and one is linked to the other and recognised.

Mr Hilditch: We have had numerous employers come before us with various representations and whatnot. There is enthusiasm to get involved. I just want to make sure that we are listening to them, just as we do in other sectors.

Ms Croskery: We are listening, most definitely. This will not work without employers at the table. The employers are the people who have the jobs.

Ms McGahan: Thank you for your presentation, and good luck in your new job. I have just a couple of points. In terms of stakeholder feedback, you engaged with the NEETs forum. The Minister was here recently, and he said that there is an additional £25.5 million that went into NEETs. Are you getting the sense that this money is not making an impact? What we would like to hear is, "Here's something that worked, let's build on it, let's put more money into it".

My second question is about the jobs fund which is administered by Invest NI. There is a grant of £1,500 for those who fall into the NEETs category. Have you any sense of whether that is working? Are people getting into sustainable employment?

Thirdly, in terms of engagement with employers, the Skills Solutions service receives requests from employers across a range of sectors. Also, you can get a number of sought-after occupations from the jobs and benefits office. Is there much of a disparity between the two, right across the North? Is that something that you have explored?

Ms Croskery: You asked a range of very tricky questions there. I will maybe start with the first one on NEETs.

Mr Russell: As I said earlier, the Pathways to Success initiatives are being evaluated at the minute, and we are looking to see what lessons we can learn from that. There is no firm evidence yet about what has or has not worked. Anecdotally, the scheme that is probably attracting the most attention and which has people the most excited is the community family support programme, which looks at an entire family's needs and tries not just to help young people access training and education but to help parents to think about work, training and their health. That seems to have started well, so we have expanded it quite a bit and rolled it out to a larger number of families.

We are hopeful that, as this year progresses and the evaluation rolls out, we will draw lessons from that and add those to the work that we are doing to try to create the United Youth programme, particularly in and around entry level and level 1 provision, which we talked about here, to try to make sure that we get the very best help at the start for young people.

As a Department, we take over when people who have left school and are 16-plus. A lot of what we have found from the early work in and around Pathways to Success is that we might need to do some intervention work earlier and start to think about young people when they are 14. Schools and teachers know the kids who are struggling at that point. Taking the academic route and getting five GCSEs at grades A to C is a big ask for some young people. We might need to think about getting in there and doing something different for them. It goes back to the point that this entry-level work — the Skills for Life and Skills for Work initiative — should have been part of this review to begin with, but we will pick that up. As Yvonne said, we have seen how we link this review with apprenticeships. We are now seeing how we need to link the work that we have done with Pathways to Success and the work that OFMDFM has done with some of its United Youth pilots with the level below this review.

Ms Croskery: Pathways to Success is being evaluated, and that work has been commissioned. The evaluation is looking at five programmes: the community family support programme; the collaboration and innovation fund; First Start; the local employment intermediary service (LEMIS); and the youth employment service. That will inform our work moving forward with United Youth by looking at exemplars of best practice, what worked well and what we want to replicate. In answer to your question about how effective it was in respect of its budget, outputs and results, all those things are being looked at. That has been commissioned.

Mr Russell: That work is being done by Inclusion. It got the contract for that review.

Ms Croskery: You asked about the jobs front and the £1,500 from Invest NI. Obviously Invest NI, and its money, is not under my bailiwick. However, we can make enquiries about that. You are interested to know how successful that has been and what its parameters of success are. I am not up to speed on that, so I would have to check.

Mr Russell: That is the one where it offers additional incentives to NEET young people to start their own business.

Ms McGahan: Which, I would have thought, would have been important for your review as well.

Mr Russell: Absolutely. We will tie up with Invest NI on that and see what results it has.

Ms McGahan: On the Skills Solutions service, in terms of the requests from employers right across the North in terms of demand for skills and then comparing that with sought-after occupations, which is information you would get information from the jobs and benefits office, do you see much of a disparity in the two?

Ms Croskery: Skills Solutions falls under another area of the Department. I am not up to speed on that to answer your question to the required level, but we are happy to take that away and come back to you separately.

Ms McGahan: That would be a way of engaging with employers.

Ms Croskery: It is a well-made point. You know that we are working at integrating our services between the jobs and benefits offices and Skills Solutions to have a seamless service for the employer, so I know that there is work going on on that. The Department will report back separately on that.

The Chairperson: OK. Yvonne, thank you very much for your presentation. David, I think that we are swapping you for Jeff. Is that right?

Mr Broadhurst: Yes.

Ms Croskery: Be assured that we will go back to the Department with all your views; they have been very clearly heard and understood. We have a lot more work to do. We need to go down a level in respect of helping the disabled and those furthest away. There has been some really good, helpful feedback. Thank you.