



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Ian Snowden
Permanent Secretary/Accounting Officer
Department for the Economy

Stuart Stevenson, DoF

Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
BELFAST
BT4 3XX
Tel: (028) 9052 1208
Email:

Committee.publicaccounts@niassembly.gov.uk

26 September 2025

ian.snowden@economy-ni.gov.uk

Dear Ian

**MEMORANDUM OF REPLY: DEVELOPING THE SKILLS FOR NI'S
FUTURE**

At its meeting on 25 September 2025, the Committee considered the Department's Memorandum of Reply to the report Developing the Skills for Northern Ireland's Future.

The Committee has considered the Department's Memorandum of Response to our recent report on skills. Members wish to place on record their disappointment at the quality of the response, which they regard as weak, unclear, and in several cases wholly inadequate.

In particular, the Committee notes that half of the recommendations have either been only partially accepted or are subject to significant delays. Some implementation dates have been extended far beyond acceptable limits – in one case (Recommendation 8) to May 2027, which is beyond the lifetime of the current mandate. This is not appropriate and undermines effective scrutiny.

The Committee therefore seeks urgent clarification on the following key issues:

- Continuity between strategies – How will the Department ensure that the 2025 Skills Action Plan builds on, and does not repeat the failures of, the 2022 Skills Strategy? When will a fully quantified and costed action plan be published?
- Recommendation 4 (Governance) – Why has Executive endorsement been deemed unnecessary? What assurance can the Department give the Committee that governance arrangements will provide sufficient authority and accountability? Members would also like an update on the Cross-Departmental Ministerial Group which has been established to ensure that DfE and DE work collaboratively to implement joint Ministerial priorities.
- Recommendation 6 (Data sharing) – The response offers no commitment or timetable for a data-sharing agreement between DfE, DE and DoH. Given the urgent need to address the 19,000 young people not in education, employment or training, this lack of progress is unacceptable. Please provide a clear timescale and delivery plan.
- Recommendation 7 (Skills Council) – Why has the Department extended the review period from 6 to 12 months? The Committee expects an interim report on progress within six months.
- Recommendation 8 (Business engagement) – Please explain why evaluation has been delayed until May 2027. The Committee does not consider this timescale appropriate and requires justification for the delay, together with proposals for earlier reporting.
- Recommendation 9 (Industry alignment) – The Committee remains concerned that the Department’s approach is overly government-driven and insufficiently responsive to industry need, particularly in fast-moving areas such as AI. How will the Department ensure that industry voices shape skills planning? How will success be measured?
- Recommendation 10 (Careers education) – The response is subject to resources. Please confirm what resources have been allocated and what contingency planning is in place to ensure delivery.
- Recommendation 12 (14–19 provision) – The Committee is concerned that duplication has not been fully identified and that the response is ambiguous. Please set out clearly how duplication will be quantified,

how root causes will be addressed, and what role the per-pupil funding model plays in perpetuating the issue.

- Cross-departmental working – What formal structures exist to ensure alignment across DfE, DE and DoH, and how will progress be reported to the Committee?
- Disability and skills – How will the Skills Action Plan ensure full integration of people with disabilities into skills and employment programmes?

The Committee has requested a response by **13 October** to these particular issues and an update on all other recommendations in 12 months' time.

Members also agreed that if satisfactory clarification is not provided, the Department will be recalled to give further evidence before the Committee.

Yours sincerely,



Daniel McCrossan
Chairperson
Public Accounts Committee