



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Development Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Consultation - DELNI Success through STEM Strategy
<b>Date:</b>	13 October 2010
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### Relevant Background Information

The Department for Employment and Learning (DELNI) recently issued its draft strategy for Success through STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) for consultation. This strategy addresses the decline in the number of young people leaving school with qualifications in STEM subjects. This is seen as a threat to the future competitiveness of the Northern Ireland economy. The strategy addresses how to make STEM subjects more attractive to young people and their parents and also how to encourage demand and rewards for people with STEM qualifications. Hence the strategy affects both the education and commercial sector.

### Key Issues

The Department for Employment and Learning, in conjunction with the Department for Education (DE) commissioned a review of STEM in June 2007. This review concluded in September 2009. The final report from the review identified 20 recommendations grouped under four key "imperatives". These are:

- Imperative 1: Business must take the lead in promoting STEM
- Imperative 2: Alleviate key constraints in the STEM "artery"
- Imperative 3: Increased flexibility in the provision of STEM education
- Imperative 4: Government must coordinate its support for STEM.

The draft strategy produced for consultation in September 2010 represents government's response to the above review. Following the consultation period, the strategy will form part of the Northern Ireland Executive's overarching strategy for the delivery of STEM skills. A copy of the draft strategy is attached as Appendix 1.

An increase in the uptake of STEM is seen as a central pillar of the Executive's commitment within the Programme for Government to create a dynamic, innovative economy.

In Northern Ireland, the percentage of young people studying STEM subjects at further and higher education level is higher than in England, Scotland and Wales. However, as with the rest of the UK, STEM enrolments at higher education level have fallen off slightly in recent years, although the figures for 2008-2009 do show some small uplift.

On a less positive note, over 8,000 people originally from Northern Ireland are registered on STEM related courses in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland. Research suggests that only one in three of this number will return to Northern Ireland on completion of their education. The report recognises that graduates are mobile and will be attracted by the offer of higher salaries elsewhere. This being the case, the point is made that the issue is not so much the potential supply of people with STEM qualifications, but rather the low employment returns on STEM educational investment in Northern Ireland compared to elsewhere.

The report suggests that there is a significant role for DETI to play in attracting new foreign direct investment and supporting indigenous business growth in new hi-tech sectors, in order to ensure an outlet for those with STEM skills. Anecdotally, we are aware of a major US IT company which had a recruitment drive recently and found it difficult to attract graduates with the appropriate software development skills. They widened the scope of their specification to include STEM graduates and were able to provide the necessary additional training once the employees were recruited.

Further anecdotal evidence suggests that the growing nucleus of IT and software development companies in the city is beginning to create a talent pool for skills and that there is significant competition between companies for skilled employees. This may help address the remuneration issues identified above.

The draft strategy identifies three priority actions which it considers to be central to the successful implementation of the review's recommendations in the short term. These are:

- Priority Action 1 – Coordinate Business Links: engaging with businesses – particularly SMEs – to ensure that there is more coordinated approach to articulating local demand
- Priority Action 2 – Manage STEM sector attractiveness: promoting STEM in primary and secondary education – including through the Careers Service – to encourage greater awareness of the employment opportunities available
- Priority Action 3 – Facilitate STEM CPD (continuing professional development): promoting better linkages between the education professionals and the business world to ensure better engagement and support.

The consultation summarises the work of the review and poses three specific questions to which consultees are asked to respond:

- Do you believe that the activities already taken and those articulated in this strategy will address these recommendations?
- If not, what else needs to be done?
- Given the pressures on public finances which actions do you believe will make the most difference and should be priority?

Our draft response, attached as Appendix 2, is framed around these questions.

**Recommendations**

The Committee is asked to :

- Approve the suggested response; or
- To suggest additional comments or changes that they feel need to be made.

**Decision Tracking**

Further to approval the agreed response will be communicated to the Department for Employment and Learning. No follow-up required.

**Documents Attached**

Appendix 1 – Success through STEM – Draft Government Stem Strategy  
Appendix 2 - Draft Belfast City Council response to the DELNI Success through STEM proposals