

Appendix 1

Enabling Success Consultation – draft Belfast City Council response Presented to Development Committee – 18 March 2014

1. To what extent would you agree that these are the most relevant target groups for the strategy to focus on?

	✓			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

The Council agrees with the two target groups selected: the long-term sick and disabled and those with family commitments. The research suggests that these are groups that, with support, can make an active contribution to the labour market and that this development can both improve their economic prospects – and those of their families – and contribute to an overall improvement in the economic performance of the city and region.

Despite the fact that the Government's Economic Strategy identifies Belfast as the key driver for economic growth in the region and the NI Executive references the importance of Belfast to regional prosperity, the following challenges remain within the city:

- Belfast has relatively highly skilled residents but also has a high proportion of people with no formal qualifications. The Centre for Cities comparative analysis¹ of Belfast with 63 other UK cities placed the city at the bottom of the group
- Belfast's 'no skilled population' sits at almost 30% of those of working age. In some parts of the city, the level increases to almost 90% of the working age population. This is a widely recognised issue, for which finding a solution is key to maximising economic prosperity. Obtaining a level two qualification is out of reach for many Belfast residents
- The Integrated Economic Strategy for the city (currently at draft stage) recognises the progress made between 2001 and 2011 in skills attainment, where the proportion of Belfast's population with no qualifications decreased from 41% to 30.4%. The challenges of developing skills at levels 1,2 and 3 for Belfast residents is illustrated in the table below:

Qualification	Share in 2001 (%)		Share in 2011(%)	
	Belfast	NI	Belfast	NI
No qualifications	41.8	41.6	30.4	29.1
Level 1 qualifications	14.8	17.2	10.8	11.5
Level 2 qualifications	13.3	16.4	12.6	14.9
Level 3 qualifications	10.9	9	13.1	12.3
Level 4 qualifications and above	19.2	15.8	26	23.6
Other qualifications			7.1	8.5
<i>Source: Census 2011</i>				

¹ Presentation on Belfast: Future City Conference (May 2013)

- Inactivity in the labour market is currently the biggest drag on the Belfast's competitiveness, according to recent research commissioned by the Council². Benchmarked against 10 other cities, Belfast had the lowest levels of economic activity (41.6%) and considerably below that of Dublin (22.9%). This research shows there are 16 wards in Belfast with less than 50% of residents in employment
- An additional 15,000 people with no formal qualifications will come under Belfast city's jurisdiction in 2015.

The research contained in the framework identifies the differing skills baselines within the target groups. This points to the need for differentiated and targeted support services to facilitate their entry or re-entry into the labour market. In addition to pre-employment support, consideration needs to be given to the structural barriers preventing these people from finding work or presenting a disincentive for them to do so. The integrated nature of this framework is welcome, given the need to provide tailored packages of support dependent on individual needs.

We support the need for a range of jobs to provide an entry point for inactive individuals and the assertion that job opportunities require higher skills. A report commissioned by Belfast City Council in 2009 identified the scale of the skills challenge across the city and its potential to impact adversely on the city's economic growth. Some areas of the city had large volumes of residents with "low or no skills" levels and 6 out of 7 jobs in the future requires qualification levels in excess of this. A skills mismatch and the geographical concentration of those with low skills levels risks widening the social divide in the city. Finding a solution to these issues is key to maximising economic prosperity.

2 (i) Of the factors highlighted, which do you think are the most important to focus upon to reduce levels of inactivity?

Belfast City Council agrees with the factors identified that affect the employability in the target inactive groups relating to individuals, employers, local and regional levels as well as personal and household circumstances.

We consider that it is critical to put in place preventative measures that reduce the volume of individuals adding to the economic inactivity numbers – "breaking the cycle" as the framework has called it. However, for those already in this group – and the additional entrants into the group – it is critical that targeted support is made available at an early stage, given the research that suggests that, the longer a person remains out of work, the harder it is for them to re-enter the labour market. Equally, we consider that it is critical to ensure that this is not simply a supply-side mechanism but that efforts are made to build employer support and to develop, with them, a range of flexible approaches that help the individual back into work, while providing a productive asset for the employer.

² Research into the Competitiveness of Belfast, Oxford Economics (2011)

2 (ii) Are there any additional factors that should be considered?

The integration of the benefit system and the support mechanisms to help people back into employment is critical. This will have a particular impact on those with family commitments, given the cost-prohibitive nature of childcare provision.

From an employer perspective, it is essential to be clear about what is offered and what is expected of the employer. Their attitude to flexibility – without additional burdens of red tape – will be a critical determinant of success for this framework.

Wider issues such as accessibility and connectivity also need to be considered. In Belfast, many individuals are concerned at having to travel outside of their immediate vicinity to find employment and the lack of mobility (only 1 in 2 have access to a car) coupled with public transport limitations means that they find it difficult to do so. Yet economic projections suggest that the future economic development of the city (and wider region) will be focused on a number of areas around the city centre. Innovative approaches to addressing this challenge need to be explored, involving both cultural and operational issues.

3. Do you agree that the strategic goal is both challenging and realistic?

	✓			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

We commend DEL and DETI in setting an ambitious goal in contributing towards a stable and competitive employment rate of over 70% by 2023, through a reduction in the proportion of the working age population classified as ‘economically inactive’.

Belfast City Council has, for some time, been championing the development of a citywide employability and skills strategy and this was identified as a priority within the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy. An essential component of any strategy is a target to which all delivery agents are contributing. Given the specific challenges in Belfast – and the fact that the inactivity rate in the city has always been slightly higher than the regional average – we consider that this target will be particularly challenging within the city.

4(i) Do you agree that the objectives adequately capture the core issues that would need to be addressed to achieve the goal of the strategy?

	✓			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Belfast City Council agrees with the objectives identified in the strategy. The low levels of skills and the concentration by population in certain areas of the city mean that, unless specific and targeted interventions are put in place, future employment opportunities will remain out of the reach of many Belfast residents. Macro-level changes such as the welfare reform agenda are likely to lead to an increase in those with low or no skills levels seeking employment in a declining market.

Identifying specific target groups and putting in place mechanisms to help them back into the labour market will improve the chances of success. Consideration will need to be given to how the support for these groups is delivered. At present, the system is fragmented and there is no alignment between demand and supply; rather the regional service approach is applied. If this approach is to be successful it will need to be highly focused – including a focus on key local geographies where the challenges are greatest, with the option for differentiated approaches to meet employee and employer needs.

4. (ii) What additional strategic objectives could help to achieve a rate of >70% by 2023?

We believe that a local response to local issues is required and we recommend a city strategy partnership model which operates successfully in other parts of the UK. Clearly defined targets and outcomes are required to address long standing employability and skills issues within Belfast. This partnership approach could also contribute to:

- Improvement in the quality of life, health and education for people in areas of greatest need
- More cohesion of services to boost and develop confidence within communities
- Improved life chances for children and young people.

Evaluation of the city strategies approach identified a number of key lessons that may be relevant to any Belfast-specific approach. These include:

- The importance of giving initiatives time to make a difference, given the scale of the challenges to be addressed
- The need for national policy to work in the same direction as local policy and vice versa – to reinforce each other’s aims
- Recognition that different geographical scales are important for different types of interventions
- Discretionary funding can play an important role in helping partnerships to provide services to address local needs
- The importance of looking at the role of demand as well as supply in tackling worklessness.

We consider that these reflections are relevant in this proposed work.

5. (i) Do you agree that this is the best approach in terms of strategic management and co-ordination of the final strategy?

	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Please outline the rationale for your response in the box below

The Council agrees that a partnership approach is required, bringing together community, voluntary, educators and advisors, businesses and government organisations to work together to address employment barriers and inactivity. We consider that a more focused approach detailing specific targets and allocation of budgets would improve the overall programme’s effectiveness.

The issue of establishing baselines and targets was one of the key learning points from the city strategy experience and we believe the strategy could benefit from this approach. While interventions have targets, these are often around programme participation (inputs/outputs) as opposed to outcomes and longer-term impact. Outcomes can vary from initiative to initiative (the consultation proposes a call for projects) and this makes it difficult to gain a cumulative perspective on the impact of employability initiatives across a range of partners and programmes. To this end, it may be appropriate to consider establishing clear baseline information for any target intervention and to create appropriate KPIs, targets and outcomes measurements for the group (and any collaborative activity) that can be reviewed on a regular basis to note the progress made. This would mean a move away from the programme-based approach towards a target for the specific groups and location, give due consideration to health and deprivation levels. Consideration should be given to the geographical level at which this might be measured (possibly at the new district council level or below).

In Belfast, there is a Belfast Strategic Partnership (BSP) involving the council, the Public Health Agency (PHA) and the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. This partnership focuses on addressing health inequalities and the particular impact they have on a range of issues including access to learning and employment. This is a useful model to consider as a reference point and the lifelong learning sub-group of this partnership is currently looking at a number of targeted initiatives, including a “Belfast Works” initiative, based on the Glasgow Works model that is referenced in the consultation document.

5. (ii) Which key sectors and stakeholders should be represented on the taskforce to ensure that the strategic objectives are successfully achieved?

We believe that businesses, education providers, community and voluntary sector, health professionals and government organisations have a role to play to ensure that the strategic objectives are successfully achieved. The research paper that accompanies the strategy recognises the role that Councils will play from April 2015 under the reform of local government, where we will have statutory responsibility for urban regeneration and community development to enable social, economic and physical need in their areas most likely within the context of community plans. Belfast City Council is keen to work directly with other statutory partners to address this issue.

To make the best use of resources, the Council believes that economic prosperity and growth can be achieved by developing a locally based employability and skills strategy to address long standing employability and skills issues within Belfast. This commitment is outlined in the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy. We would be keen to work with DEL on the development of a city-wide strategy which would promote greater coherence between supply and demand with the aim of improving city competitiveness and supporting access to employment.

Given the wide range of organisations involved in this activity, it may be necessary to give consideration to a strategic group, which is supported by operational/working groups on some of the key issues. The strategic group should involve a small core of representatives but the working groups will allow deeper consideration of some of the key issues, including the operational implications of proposed initiatives.

6. (i) Do you agree that the research projects outlined are the key areas for further consideration?

	✓			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

We welcome the research programmes identified and would welcome further clarification as to when these pieces might be concluded in order to create the baselines that are critical for the progress of this work.

We would also recommend that, given the highly localised nature of the challenges and the specific approaches required for each of the target groups, information should be provided at local level – ideally at the level of each of the new direct councils and, if possible at ward level. Data capture at regional level only masks the significant disparities across areas and locations. We know, for example, that within the city of Belfast, there are significant disparities across the city in terms of benefit take-up and skills levels. As an illustration of this, the following statistics are of interest:

- Residents of the Water Works ward are twelve times as likely to be in receipt of Job Seekers’ Allowance than those living in Stranmillis
- The percentage of economically inactive residents in the Crumlin ward is almost three times as high as in Ravenhill
- 49.2% of the economically inactive residents in the Whiterock ward are in receipt of benefits compared to 1.7% of those in Stranmillis
- 87.7% of residents of the Crumlin ward have no or low skills levels, compared to 12.1% in Stranmillis.

We would also recommend that demand-side research is undertaken and regularly refreshed to ensure alignment between skills development/pre-employment support interventions and areas of employment opportunity. Joint research commissioned by the Council and Invest NI³ shows:

- An increase in the proportion of employment taken up by sectors such as administration and support, professional, scientific and technical and information and communication
- An increase in the employment between 2002 and 2012 in the finance and insurance sector
- The average growth rate in the manufacturing sector from 2008 – 2012 was 3.1%
- The presence of arts facilities in conjunction with TV programming and broadcasting, suggests the emergence of the creative industries sector in Belfast. Computer programming, the creative industries and the wider renewables or green industries present significant clustering opportunities for Belfast in the future
- The accommodation and food sector has a sizable opportunity to increase its productivity with an average growth of 2.0%. This sector has a vital role within the economy of Belfast, accounting for 5.8% of total employment with over 12,000 employees.

Across all the priority areas, we consider that it is critical that there should be a focus on ensuring that funded activities meet the needs of both employers and programme participants. While the focus of the programme is on supply-side measures to

³ Belfast Integrated Economic Strategy Stage 1: Economics and Policy Synopsis (April 2013)

address the challenges of economic inactivity and low skills levels, we consider that there is a need to work closely with businesses – particularly SMEs – to understand their employability and skills requirements and to provide solutions that meet their needs in a way that helps them improve their business productivity.

6. (ii) What other areas of research may be beneficial to consider and why?

The Council believes that the research proposed is valuable, but we are keen to see on the ground actions and initiatives developed and tangible benefits achieved.

As identified, there needs to be both demand and supply side research in order to ensure a greater alignment between the two. The demand-side work may include both statistical and attitudinal work, taking account of employers’ views as to ways to support people back into employment. On the statistical side, the projections set out in the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy should be regularly reviewed in order to ensure that they remain valid.

7. (i) Do you agree that the key themes will provide a suitable framework to address the main issues associated with economic inactivity?

	✓			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Belfast City Council welcomes the broad proposals set out in the framework and we are keen to see the action plan delivered upon to build momentum and to achieve results for both target groups.

8. (i) Which existing government service(s) work well in your opinion and why?

There are a number of services across government that are having some impact on economic regeneration in communities. Key characteristics of these initiatives include:

- Interventions that involve a wrap- around service provision – in this case combining careers advice, healthcare, benefits/budgeting advice, skills matched to real jobs and the provision of quality training opportunities. Strong mentoring support will create a sense of stability and help those further from the labour market more likely to make the transition to work. This approach would ensure that people are not ‘shoe-horned’ into jobs that they are unsuitable for – particularly those people with mental health issues as it would risk dropout and disengagement. By necessity, this involves partnership planning and collaborative working
- Consideration should be given to appropriate measurements to track progress and record success, as well as identifying issues of challenge and offering opportunities to re-focus support to meet the need. We would welcome the development of a monitoring system and the use of a shared database across

the local training provider network, which would allow them to track the progress of an individual as they engaged with various programmes available. A “revolving door” scenario whereby the hardest-to-help people move between being in and out of work and through various training programmes needs to be monitored and gaps in the system addressed. Consideration needs to be given to relevant targets and to the structuring of contracts with providers to ensure that those in need of support get access to the services that they require, as opposed to dealing only with those for whom it is easier to find a job. In this case, we consider that output targets should not be the only measurement used

- While pilot programmes are welcome and are often a necessary part of developing new policies, delivering short-term and small scale pilot programmes (for example 6-12 months) may not assist the long-term unemployed and those who never had a paid job to sustain employment. The lack of routine and stability may cause them to drift further away from re-engaging in work. A longer duration may be suitable for these pilots (minimum 18 months).

8. (ii) What are the main barriers to accessing existing government services and why?

The research in the consultation document suggests that one of the key deterrents to accessing government services for both employers and potential participants is the lack of awareness of what is available or the lack of understanding of what they can and cannot access. Employability support is a complex operational environment and this can lead to both duplication and instances of individuals “falling between the cracks”.

Choosing from a large menu of programmes can be difficult and confusing for people who have not been part of the labour market to navigate and make informed decisions on options that suit their needs best. A lack of clear information can create unnecessary barriers for the hardest-to-reach particularly at transition points in their lives and increases the risk of disengagement. The advice system must be able to identify and track people at risk of early disengagement, and provide wrap-around support to help those at greatest risk to secure sustainable employment or gain meaningful qualifications.

There is an onus on statutory and community partners who inform, advise and guide participants, to provide them with impartial up-to-date information. Success rates of training or employment providers in helping people into employment or to gain relevant qualifications must be made publicly available. This will build trust and confidence among users.

Potential clients need to be able to access the information from a variety of sources including the internet. It is recognised that internet usage is significantly lower amongst target groups who are already at risk of socio-economic exclusion⁴. In the EU, a quarter of the population have never used the internet. Future predictions indicate that 90% of new jobs created will require some level of digital literacy. There is a risk of further distancing people not only from sourcing training information on the internet but from qualifications and jobs if the ‘digital divide’ is not addressed.

⁴ Europe investing in human capital: let's get every European digital, **José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission**

Training should be built into the programme and a vehicle for this could be the Go On NI initiative which seeks to introduce people to the internet for the first time.

The cost of returning to work or training can place a financial burden on people who are already operating on a tight budget. Financial contributions towards transport, childcare, clothing and food can help make the transition to work or training easier for the client groups.

8. (iii) How can existing government services be linked more effectively to make them more user friendly and accessible to the customer?

The Council recommends that potential users are involved in reviewing information provision so that it best meets customers’ expectations and needs. Information must be provided in plain English and in a number of formats. Existing systems such as the NI Direct website can be better utilised to provide information to advisors on jobs and training programmes available but information must be accurate and updated regularly. Local partnerships should be encouraged in order to raise awareness of the programmes on offer so that participants can be signposted to the most appropriate service. In addition, we would welcome a simplification of the support system to make it easier for people to find what they need.

9 (i) Do you agree that competitive pilot testing is likely to be the most innovative and cost effective way to identify the best models of future intervention?

		✓		
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Belfast City Council recognises and accepts the rationale behind the proposed competitive pilot testing approach. However we would make the following comments and recommend that these are considered when developing this approach:

- An open call process can mean that only those best capable of making quality submissions are resourced, and that there is no alignment between demand and supply. In order to address this issue, DEL may consider opportunities for collaborative commissioning of services to meet agreed outcomes. This could both improve opportunities for success and ensure improved targeting of provision. In Belfast, the council would be keen to be a partner in this approach. Alternatively, we would suggest that DEL uses the baseline from the research that it intends to undertake in order to identify a number of pilot areas where the problems are most acute, taking account of factors such as variations within the urban and rural contexts. This will ensure that activities – while innovative in approach – are meeting an identified need
- Effectiveness and efficiency outlined in the consultation can only be achieved by pooling resources together from funds such as the European Social Fund and the Social Investment Fund, examining gaps in the labour market including the skills mismatch to jobs and building an programme. The strategy can be better delivered by integrating it into programmes that are already happening. While many of these projects do invaluable work, it is

difficult to measure their impact. We consider that a more focused approach detailing specific targets can improve the overall programme’s effectiveness

- If pilots progress, there needs to be a monitoring and evaluation framework in place that is operational throughout the life of the intervention. There also needs to be an opportunity to constantly review and refresh the offer, based on participant and employer feedback
- Pilot initiatives may cause confusion among employers and participants and risk adding to the already significant volume of employability and skills development initiatives. Consideration will need to be given to a communication and engagement strategy that meets the needs of both clients and businesses
- All of the examples of best practice identified involve not only employment and skills support but also a wider range of support mechanisms as well as initiatives to address structural barriers. Pilots will need to involve a range of partnerships and, given the often inflexible nature of government funding, consideration will need to be given to how resources can be set aside to meet expectations.

9 (ii) What specific proposals should be considered for pilot project testing and why?

There are a number of best practice examples identified and potentially all of these have some degree of relevance. In the Belfast context, we would welcome engagement in approaches to look at how to provide targeted, outcome-focused support services in target communities, improving the quality of life for participants and creating sustainable local economies.

10. (i) To what extent do you agree that a controlled use of employer subsidies is potentially the most effective way to increase employment opportunities for the target groups?

	✓			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Please outline the rationale for your response below:

We agree that incentives are a useful mechanism to secure employer buy-in to employment initiatives – particularly those focused on inactive groups. However, we would caution that the introduction of a range of differing incentives may cause confusion among employers and would support greater engagement with them to understand the nature of incentive that may be appropriate. Having said that, it may be that small businesses may require more support than large companies – it is a bigger undertaking for them as they have less support resources in the first place so taking on a formerly inactive participant will require a disproportionately greater commitment on their part.

In addition to the employer subsidy, we support the allocation of a training allowance for the individual as a means of ensuring that they build up their skills levels during their employment – both for their own benefit and that of their employer.

10. (ii) How should an employer subsidy be weighted in terms of the different target inactive groups and existing subsidy schemes?

As noted above, we feel that consideration needs to be given as to how the employer subsidy would sit with the existing range of support mechanisms for employers in this field, in order to avoid any further confusion.

However, we believe that employers will need support and training for their staff in coaching, supervisory and mentoring skills to be able to help and motivate potential clients. Equally, consideration should be given to the training allowance for employees in order to build up their skill-set.

10. (iii) How should an employer subsidy be structured to ensure that it promotes sustained employment for the target inactive groups?

As above, we suggest that some consideration be given to an enhanced subsidy for SMEs. Given the priority sector approach adopted by the YES scheme, it may also be appropriate to investigate whether this would work for this client group.

10. (iv) Do you agree that a guaranteed employment and skills progression route for the target inactive groups should be integral to an employer subsidy incentive scheme?

As above – we consider that the two mechanisms should operate in tandem.

10. (v) What other stipulations for employers accessing such a subsidy should be considered?

The Council agrees with the recommendations on financial incentives that have been suggested by DEL. Employers will also need support and training for their staff in coaching, supervisory and mentoring skills to be able to help and motivate potential clients.

10. (vi) What other alternative incentives could be considered in lieu of an employer subsidy?

The Council agrees with the recommendations on financial incentives that have been suggested by DEL.

11 (i) Do you agree that these are most relevant inactive groups to focus upon in terms of tackling labour market disadvantage?

The Council agrees with the research paper that accompanied the consultation which indicates that the groups identified are the most relevant inactive groups to focus upon in terms of tackling labour market disadvantage – in the case where people are able to work.

11 (ii) Which type of public awareness campaign would be most effective to promote the positive impact of employing older workers?

The Council believes that a television and radio media campaign would suit best to raise awareness among clients and employers - particularly among smaller and medium sized enterprises that form the backbone of the economy.

The public awareness campaign should be designed to piggy back on existing campaigns in association with older people's representative groups and would make the best use of limited resources. Free PR opportunities (press releases and social media) should also be used to make the best use of budgets. Evaluation of media campaign in terms of engagement and success is essential.

Direct contact with employers will be required. A method of contacting employers will need to be carefully planned before the public awareness campaign is developed and the roll out of programmes begin, in order to avoid a large number of duplicated enquires. Belfast City Council would be content to support this campaign in the city through outlets such as our "City Matters" magazine – available to all households.

11 (iii) Which key delivery partners should be considered to ensure that the impact of the public awareness campaign is maximised?

The Council considers that a partnership approach between DEL, DETI, DSD, Invest NI and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety should work together with older people's representative groups and advisors is required to develop, shape and lead the campaign. As part of a public awareness campaign, engagement is needed with employers in the public sector as well as the private sector to build support. As above, Belfast City Council would also be willing to support the campaign within the city.

11. (iv) What new measures should be considered to raise awareness levels of mental health issues in the workplace?

Belfast, as a city with high levels of deprivation also experiences higher than average levels of mental ill health Belfast. The Council's previous response to the Bamford Review emphasises its support for the principles of prevention and participation. New measures to tackle mental health stigma in the workplace will assist in fostering greater awareness; however, in developing measures it is important to take account of the evidence that work can both contribute to the development of mental ill-health as well as promoting increased positive mental wellbeing.

Any new measures must be multifaceted and be about awareness raising and behaviour change. As the consultation notes this needs to be both within the workplace and wider society. However, the key challenges are likely to be organisational specific and the financial costs associated with any new measures, particularly in smaller companies.

The range of potential measures can vary; for example, local authorities provide a range of services which can impact on people’s mental health – leisure, parks or community services etc. They operate a range of community-based services and facilities which would be well placed to be involved in the promotion of mental health and wellbeing within communities. They also enforce health and safety at work legislation in a range of workplaces and therefore have the potential to influence good working practices and subsequently the mental health of other workers.

The Council has a number of facilities, such as community and leisure centres, and operates a range of programmes and initiatives which taken holistically contribute to improved health promotion and well-being. It is therefore important that other services and positive contributions to health promotion and well-being which exist outside the traditional Health and Social Services field are taken into account

11. (v) Which key delivery partners should be considered to ensure that the impact of these new measures is maximised?

Key delivery partners identified in 11(iii) as well as partners in the public and private sector.

12. (i) Do you agree that better integration of health and work services is the key preventative measure for reducing in-flows into the target inactive groups?

	✓			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Integrating health and work services is an important preventative measure; however, based on the premise that early intervention is an integral aspect of preventative models; the role of the education sector forms a critical element to help tackle issues such as young people’s aspiration, motivation and attainment. We note the very limited reference to the Department for Education within the consultation and suggest that this is a significant oversight.

12. (ii) How do you see these two sectors integrating in the most effective way both in terms of supporting individuals and employers?

DEL will be required to have a strong leadership role to play in integrating all sectors and ensuring that front-line government staff has the necessary resources, training and budget to ensure that the programme is a success. The Belfast Strategic Partnership model referenced earlier in this response presents one potential model for consideration, given that all relevant partners are represented on the partnership.

12. (iii) Do you agree with an expert panel approach to explore the feasibility and affordability of expanding and integrating access to health services in Northern Ireland?

	✓			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Exploring the affordability and feasibility of future models and options will be critical in ensuring implementation and effectiveness. However it is critical that it is not only expanding and integrating access to health services but that traditional health sector shifts its focus towards supporting employment and employability outcomes and that there is greater awareness among healthcare professionals and employment support organisations of the broad range of support services available.

12. (iv) Who should be represented on the expert panel?

In addition to the representatives identified within the consultation, we would suggest that there is a need to ensure representation from Department of Education on the expert panel. The greatest inflow into the pool of the economically inactive are those young people with no aspiration, no qualifications and limited role models within their community. The role of schools in preventing the inflow into activity is critical.

12. (v) What other key preventative measures should be considered to reduce in-flows into the target inactive groups?

The Council has identified a number of key preventative measures outlined in the answer to question 8 and the need to better integrate health and work services.

13. (i) In addition to the approach outlined in the consultation document, what other ways are there to effectively reduce economic inactivity in Northern Ireland in a sustainable and affordable way?

The Council has identified ways to effectively reduce economic activity in a sustainable and affordable way in the answers to questions 8 – the need for a wrap around service that combines careers advice, healthcare, benefits/budgeting advice, skills matched to real jobs and the provision of quality training opportunities.

Skills must be matched to real job and training opportunities with a budget, targets, outputs and real outcomes established and monitored.

Consideration should be given to sub-regional working to take account of the localised challenges around these target groups. We are supportive of the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy’s proposal for an employability and skills strategy for Belfast and would be keen to work with DEL and other partners to set this in place. The issue of addressing inactivity would be a central theme of the strategy.

13. (ii) What should be the top three priorities for the NI Executive to effectively reduce economic inactivity?

Two of the priorities identified in the Programme for Government are Growing a Sustainable Economy and Investing in the Future and Creating Opportunities, Tackling Disadvantage and Improving Health and Well-Being. To effectively reduce economic activity action is required to address the following issues:

- The skills mismatch and the geographical concentration of those with low skills levels risks widening the social divide in the Belfast. Council research show that certain areas of the Belfast has large volumes of residents with “low or no skills” levels and 6 out of 7 jobs in the future requires qualification levels in excess of this. The Council has recommended a city strategy partnership approach that can respond effectively to local issues and the NI Executive. The Council has researched and identified the scale of the skills challenge across the city and its potential to impact adversely on the city’s economic growth
- The welfare reform programme is likely to have a significant impact on the employability arena and the levels of poverty in society, with a focus on “making work pay” as opposed to staying on benefits. Council research has identified the low levels of skills and the concentration by population in certain areas of the city. Targeted interventions and support mechanisms need to be put in place immediately with a defined budget, targets and outcomes identified
- The Council agrees that a partnership approach is required, bringing together community, voluntary, educators and advisors, businesses and government organisations to work together to address employment barriers and inactivity. We consider that a more focused approach detailing specific targets and allocation of budgets would improve the overall programme’s effectiveness.

13. (iii) In terms of prioritisation of government spending, do you feel that tackling economic inactivity should be a key spending area?

The Programme for Government’s ambitions around “growing a sustainable economy” will not be achieved without a targeted focus on the significant inactivity challenge in the region.

Belfast City Council has identified this as a priority within its draft Integrated Economic Strategy for the city and, in conjunction with Invest NI, we are considering practical measures to meet the challenge.