

Chapter 11

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND THE ECONOMY

11.1 In this chapter we identify the opportunities and benefits which can be opened up to young people and employers through the establishment of a broad-based, relevant curriculum, delivered through a Collegial system based on co-operation and collaboration between schools, FECs, TOs, employers and others.

11.2 The chapter also outlines the need for improved careers education and guidance for young people in school and how Collegiates, working in local partnerships with further and higher education institutions, training providers, employers and NIBEP, could be a significant source of expertise and support in identifying and meeting the needs of young people and the economy.

The National Qualifications Framework

11.3 We are convinced that the future of education and training at all levels will be strongly influenced by the growing recognition of, and support for, the National Qualifications Framework. Since the Framework's role is critical, it is important to understand its rationale, and potential application within Northern Ireland.

11.4 The 1991 White Paper, "**Education and Training for the 21st Century**",⁽¹⁾ set the agenda for policy on post-16 education and training. The 1996 Dearing Report, "**Review of Qualifications for 16-19 Year Olds**",⁽²⁾ extended the debate and, in particular, considered ways of consolidating and

(1) DES, DoE, WO (1991), *Education and Training for the 21st Century*, London: DES, DoE, WO

(2) Dearing, R. (1996), *Review of Qualifications for 16-19 Year Olds*, Middlesex: School Curriculum and Assessment Authority

improving the framework of 16-19 qualifications. Whilst Dearing had given some consideration to Northern Ireland's position, a joint review of the local arrangements for 14-19 education and training was carried out in 1996 by the Training and Employment Agency (T&EA) and DENI: their paper, "**A Joint Education and Training Strategy for 14-19 Year Olds**",⁽³⁾ recommended a more coherent education and training strategy for all fourteen to nineteen year-olds in Northern Ireland.

11.5 The National Qualifications Framework has five levels and three tracks. The following table lists the qualifications originally associated with the various tracks.

Level	Academic	Vocational	Occupational
5	Post-Graduate	-	NVQ Level 5
4	Degree	-	NVQ Level 4
3	A (AS) Levels	Advanced GNVQ	NVQ Level 3
2	GCSEs (Higher Grades)	Intermediate GNVQ	NVQ Level 2
1	GCSEs (Lower Grades)	Foundation GNVQ	NVQ Level 1

The Framework continues to evolve. As mentioned earlier, the curriculum at KS4, which provides the first major stepping stones to the various tracks of the Framework, is under review by CCEA, which has acknowledged that many post-primary schools desire greater flexibility at that stage. GCSEs are also under review. In England and Wales, Government has stated its intention to give pupils opportunities to take Vocational GCSEs in subjects like engineering and manufacture. Starting in 2002, these new Vocational GCSEs, announced in July 2000, will replace the current Foundation and Intermediate GNVQs in these areas.

11.6 There are other changes in hand, especially in the post-16 curriculum. In 1999, Government decided to introduce reforms in post-16 qualifications,

⁽³⁾ T&EA and DENI (1996), *A Joint Education and Training Strategy for 14-19 Year Olds*, Belfast: T&EA, DENI

following widespread consultation on its White Paper, “**Qualifying for Success**”.⁽⁴⁾ Advice from CCEA, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and Awdurdod Cymwysterau Cwricwlum Ac Asesu Cymru (ACCAC), the respective regulatory authorities for qualifications in Northern Ireland, England and Wales, had been influential, and together they explained the changes in their paper, “**Qualifications 16-19**”.⁽⁵⁾ The underlying purpose of the reforms was to address undue narrowness and lack of flexibility in the post-16 curriculum. In order to facilitate “mixing and matching” of academic and vocational studies, qualifications in both areas have been redesigned so as to place comparable demands on pupils. The Advanced GNVQ is being redesigned and renamed the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (Advanced VCE). Advanced Supplementaries (ASs) have been redesigned to be free-standing or to form the first half of an A level. Qualifications have been unitised in order to make it easier for schools to devise programmes to match the needs of individual pupils. This new package of provision is called **Curriculum 2000**.⁽⁶⁾

Destinations and Progression Post-16

11.7 At the end of compulsory schooling, young people have four major choices: they may stay on in school in sixth form; they may enrol on a full-time course in a FEC; they may enter a work-based training scheme; or they may enter employment. T&EA data illustrates that, in 1999, 47% of Northern Ireland’s sixteen year-olds stayed on in school, 21% proceeded to FECs, 20% to TOs, and 12% moved into employment or to other destinations.

11.8 The choice of destination largely determines the track, academic, vocational or occupational, which young people may pursue after compulsory schooling.

(4) DfEE, WO, DENI (1997), *Qualifying for Success, a Consultation Paper on the future of Post-16 Qualifications*, London: DfEE, WO, DENI

(5) QCA, ACCAC, CCEA (1999), *Qualifications 16-19*, London: QCA, ACCAC, CCEA

(6) QCA (1999), *Curriculum 2000 - Implementing the Changes to 16-19 Qualifications*, London: QCA

GCE A levels and ASs provide the early stages of the academic track post-16 in Northern Ireland. A levels are popular in both grammar and secondary schools. In 1998/99 there were one thousand, three hundred and twenty-four secondary school pupils and seven thousand, seven hundred and seventy-eight grammar school pupils in the final years of A level courses. FECs also offer A level programmes; including adults, they provided 15% of the total entries to A level examinations in 1998/99.

11.9 GNVQs, the major qualification originally associated with the vocational track, have taken off slowly in Northern Ireland schools. FECs have dominated provision. In the school sector, secondary schools have been more active than grammar schools in GNVQ provision; in 1998/99, of the eight hundred and eighty-nine pupils in the final year of Advanced GNVQ, only one hundred and thirty-two were at grammar school.

11.10 Success in the occupational track requires students to demonstrate occupational competence, and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) have been developed for the accreditation of that competence. These are based on standards set by industry. Data from the Northern Ireland Office of QCA indicate that thirteen thousand, three hundred and twelve NVQs were awarded in Northern Ireland in 1999/2000. FECs, and the recognised TOs, are the major players on the NVQ stage in Northern Ireland. The T&EA's Jobskills Programme provides the Government's guarantee of a training place for all sixteen and seventeen year-olds. Its three strands - Access, Traineeship and Modern Apprenticeship - are geared respectively to NVQ Levels 1, 2 and 3.

Relationships between Collegiates, Further Education Colleges and Training Organisations

11.11 As indicated above, approximately one-half of young people stay on in school beyond age sixteen. A further 41% continue in full-time education at FECs or with TOs. It is essential that this wide range of provision should be managed as effectively as possible, to ensure that all young people have equality of opportunity and access to the full range of academic, vocational and occupational courses, at age sixteen and beyond. In this context, we believe that Collegiates, FECs and TOs should have complementary roles.

Partnership in Progression

11.12 In Chapter 6 we set out the rationale for a more learner-centred approach to education, focused on new ways of learning and teaching. That philosophy does not cease when the young person leaves school. It is in the interests of young people that their progression from school to other provision, whether in FECs, TOs or universities should be as smooth as possible, and that complementarity and collaboration between these different providers are maximised. In our view, this 'seamless robe' will be essential if Northern Ireland's overall system of education and training is to achieve maximum effectiveness and efficiency in responding to the needs, abilities and aspirations of young people, and in achieving higher standards for all. Indeed we are convinced that Curriculum 2000 and the National Qualifications Framework will fail to realise their full potential without this collaboration and interaction. We have concluded that this will require regular and open communication between Collegiates and other providers, assisted by the influence and persuasion of the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning.

11.13 Smooth progression and complementarity can most easily be achieved in a system in which the various providers make distinctive and different provision. We are aware, however, that overlaps can and do occur amongst the various providers in Northern Ireland, and that these can be non-productive as well as providing sources of friction. The implications of this are described below.

Competition between Further Education Colleges (FECs) and Schools

11.14 Northern Ireland's FECs together constitute a powerhouse of education and training. Their courses are categorised as vocational and non-vocational, with the latter largely offered to adults on a part-time basis. The Department for Employment and Learning recently designated eight Centres of Excellence in FECs dealing with the five areas of Electronics (Telecommunications), Electronics, Manufacturing Engineering, ICT and Computing, and Hospitality and Tourism.

11.15 The present arrangements have given rise to several areas of overlap in post-16 provision in schools and FECs, mainly in A levels and GNVQs. As we have seen, in 1999, around one-fifth of sixteen year-olds decided to continue their full-time education in FECs. Advanced GNVQs constituted the single, largest component of FEC vocational full-time enrolments in the same year, and A/AS levels and GCSEs together accounted for a substantial number of enrolments. GNVQ provision in schools is growing and is dominated by secondary schools, but is still outstripped by that in FECs.

11.16 These overlaps in provision have generated considerable competition between the two sectors. However, whilst there is much anecdote and rumour about the effects and magnitude of that competition, supportive information remains elusive and, apart from the ETI Reports on Post-16 provision,⁽⁷⁾ we have had to refer to studies elsewhere to get a better understanding of the issues involved. Several cohort surveys in England have investigated the interactions between schools and FECs.⁽⁸⁾ Some of the findings are as follows -

- protectionism was found to be a motivating factor, with less than two-fifths of the respondents in a 256 school survey allowing college representatives on to their premises to talk to pupils;
- in a number of schools, vocational courses had been introduced specifically to retain pupils who might otherwise have been lost to other post-16 providers;
- several schools reported that they were continuing to run non-viable courses in order to retain the small number of pupils who had opted to take them;

(7) ETI (1998), *Post-16 Provision in Schools - Inspected 1997-98*, Bangor: DENI
 ETI (1999), *Post-16 Provision in Further Education - Inspected 1998-99*, Bangor: DENI

ETI (1999), *Post-16 Provision in Training Organisations - Inspected 1998-99*, Bangor: DENI

(8) Schagen, S., Johnson, F., Simkin, C. (1996), *Sixth Form Options*, Slough: NFER

- schools were concerned that they could not compete with the marketing resources of FECs;
- FECs were accepting pupils on to courses which were beyond their ability;
- FECs were concerned that schools had a captive pre-16 market;
- there was concern about the lack of a 'level playing field' or a common funding formula for schools, colleges and training providers at post-16.

11.17 We are aware that many of these factors are reflected in the local scene. For example, there are sixth forms where the numbers of pupils are very small, and we are aware that the differences in funding arrangements between schools and FECs can encourage overprovision, and also result in overlap in provision in some areas, thereby narrowing the real choice offered to young people.

11.18 Whilst recognising that it can be a stimulant to positive action, we have concluded that competition which causes duplication of provision is wasteful of resources and skills. We prefer collaboration and complementarity to competition. Indeed we consider that collaboration and interdependence, both between schools and with FECs and other providers, would be key factors in the effective operation of Collegiates.

Collaboration

11.19 We are aware that there is already much useful collaboration between schools and FECs in Northern Ireland. However, like the competitive issues discussed above, detailed information about the extent of that collaboration is not readily available. Some indication of its nature can be gleaned from school and college prospectuses which refer to collaboration in the provision of GNVQs, and in the provision of other qualifications in areas such as Word Processing, Basic Food Hygiene and First Aid. We are aware also that some FECs are working with schools which have sought disapplication of parts of the Northern Ireland Curriculum.

11.20 We are convinced that collaboration amongst Collegiates, FECs and TOs would offer many advantages to institutions and, more importantly, to their pupils and students. Collaboration would allow young people opportunities to mix with their counterparts from other organisations; to study in larger groups, allowing a wider and more stimulating debate; to work with different teachers and lecturers; and to experience the ethos and culture of different institutions.

11.21 A major institutional advantage would be the opportunity to gain access to resources which may not easily be obtained otherwise. The requirements of Curriculum 2000⁽⁹⁾ and the National Qualifications Framework have considerable resource implications. Whilst provision will continue to be made for those pupils who wish to focus on the more academic subjects, there will be increasing demands from others for mixed programmes of study which address better their capabilities and career aspirations. For example, a fourteen year-old who wants to pursue a career in the hotel and catering industry should be able to choose a Hospitality and Catering GCSE as part of a wider programme, involving practical activity in the workplace and vocational study at a FEC. Again, a young person might wish to study for a GCSE in Technology and Design alongside a NVQ in a TO, with the intention of entering a Foundation Modern Apprenticeship. We are convinced that the diversity of skills and resources required to provide the full range of opportunities will demand co-operation and collaboration amongst schools, FECs, TOs and employers. The establishment of a Collegiate structure of schools would be instrumental in meeting this requirement.

11.22 Collaboration could take many forms, including franchising and running courses jointly. Pupils in schools could spend periods in FECs or TOs, or FEC and TO staff could visit Collegiates. In all cases, learning could be supported and enhanced by ICT, and collaboration would build on existing good practice.

11.23 We recognise also that schools and FECs have a key role in developing the type of collaboration and co-operation that will be necessary if the requirements of Curriculum 2000⁽¹⁰⁾ are to be met. We have given much

^{(9)&(10)} QCA (1999), *Curriculum 2000 - Implementing the Changes to 16-19 Qualifications*, London: QCA

thought to the ways in which this might be encouraged and facilitated within the Collegial system. In particular, we considered the option of formally including FECs within Collegiates, for example, by the allocation of each FEC to a geographically adjacent Collegiate. We could see that this would have the advantage of reinforcing the working relationship between schools and FECs, but on closer examination we felt that such an arrangement would entail a number of practical and philosophical difficulties which might create tensions within Collegiates, and might even undermine the potential for collaboration. In particular, we took account of the fact that FECs are autonomous, corporate bodies, some of which are very large, and whose aims and objectives would differ from and extend beyond those of schools and Collegiates; that FECs operate under a different funding regime from schools, and this would be difficult to reconcile with our proposals for Collegiates' accountability (for resources); that the numbers of FECs did not match the proposed number of Collegiates, and that, in any event, there would be potential problems in seeking to restrict individual Collegiates and their constituent schools to collaboration with just one FEC, and vice versa. Indeed this would be at odds with our aim of widening choice and opportunity. We were conscious also that a significant aspect of the role of post-primary schools (and Collegiates) is their statutory responsibility for the final stages of compulsory schooling and, as such, the main focus for collaboration with FECs should be post-16 provision.

11.24 We concluded, therefore, that while it would be inappropriate to incorporate FECs within the membership of individual Collegiates, it would nevertheless be important to establish formal arrangements which would ensure co-operation and collaboration in the development of complementary provision.

11.25 In considering the nature of the relationship which should be developed between Collegiates and the further education sector, we examined the scope for practical co-operation and best use of resources. For example, as mentioned earlier, individual schools in a Collegiate might wish to focus on particular courses or curricular pathways, aspiring to achieve excellence and reputation in those areas, and, in so doing they might wish to develop their own resources, perhaps in Engineering, ICT or Business. At the same time, we are aware that DEL has already designated eight Centres of Excellence for further education, and the objectives of some of those Centres may overlap with those of schools who wish to specialise. We see this as a clear demonstration of the

need for collaboration. We are convinced that co-ordination and rationalisation of courses would be essential if effectiveness and efficiency were to be achieved. In this context, we would endorse the following comments by the Cross Sector Working Group which advised Strategy 2010 on Skills and Education -

"...the education and training delivery centres, whether in the form of schools, further education colleges, 'old' universities, 'new' universities, T&EA, etc, are in direct and open competition with each other. Driven by funding mechanisms and the absence of a system strategic focus, they compete for a market share in a marketplace where the "customer" is ill informed and inexperienced..."⁽¹¹⁾

11.26 For all of these reasons, we have been concerned to ensure that systematic and rigorous arrangements for the encouragement, planning, and monitoring of collaboration between Collegiates and FECs should be put in place. Chapter 10 describes the functions and membership of Collegiate Boards of Principals and Collegiate Liaison Councils. Those proposals are designed to provide the further education sector, and other key interests involved in the delivery of post-16 education and training, with a formal role in advising Collegiates about the development of collaborative working arrangements between schools and FECs. We would envisage that Boards of Principals would take the initiative in assessing and identifying the scope and needs for collaboration within their Collegiate, and would obtain advice and guidance from their Collegiate Liaison Council on how best to meet those needs. The proposed membership of the Liaison Councils is designed to allow Collegiates to draw on the collaborative experiences of the groupings of schools, business and FECs, which emerged from Strategy 2010, and which are supported by the NIBEP.

11.27 Accordingly, we recommend that the initial assessment and identification of needs for collaboration with FECs and TOs should be taken forward by the Boards of Principals of Collegiates, and that there should be regular and systematic opportunity for Collegiate Liaison Councils to support and guide the development and implementation of Collegiate policy in this area.

⁽¹¹⁾ *Cross Sector Working Group on Skills and Education (1998), Final Report, Pages 16&17, Belfast: DETI*

11.28 In addition, in order to establish the appropriate environment and basis for effective collaboration, we recommend that DE and DEL should, as a matter of priority, draw up a coherent strategy for the development and funding arrangements for post-16 education and training, taking account of the interests of schools, FECs, TOs and employers.

Relationships between Collegiates and Providers of Higher Education

11.29 Higher education, like other sectors of education, is having to adapt itself to the demands of globalisation and of rapid changes in society and in technology. The 1996 Dearing Review of Higher Education⁽¹²⁾ foresaw these effects when it recommended that higher education should undergo a further review within five years.

11.30 In Northern Ireland, higher education is provided by the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), comprised of the Queen's University of Belfast, the University of Ulster, the Open University, St Mary's University College and Stranmillis University College. FECs also provide higher education programmes such as higher national diplomas and modules of some degree courses. In 1999/2000 these institutions together enrolled eleven thousand, two hundred and fifty-five new full-time students and ten thousand, three hundred and ninety-nine new part-time students on undergraduate courses.

11.31 We are satisfied that universities and other providers of higher education have a critical and influential role in the development of the 14-19 curriculum, and the value which they place on these reforms will be crucial to their success. They need to acknowledge and demonstrate their awareness that a broader underpinning educational base will help them to improve the creative skills and

(12) Dearing, R. (1996), *The National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education*, Middlesex: School Curriculum and Assessment Authority

employability of their graduates. Our concern in this respect matches that of Strategy 2010's Working Group on Skills and Education -

"..... that as long as A levels are there as the "gold" standard we will not develop breadth within the curriculum. Key to change will be universities themselves changing their admissions criteria."(13)

11.32 With respect to admissions criteria, we are aware that the regulatory bodies, including CCEA, have been working with HEIs, FECs and schools to ensure that applications to higher education can proceed smoothly. In collaboration with Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), the regulatory bodies have distributed a booklet entitled "**The new national framework for qualifications; briefing for higher education**".(14) We recognise the value of these initiatives, insofar as they go. However, we would expect HEIs to do more than simply accommodate the broader educational backgrounds of future students within their admissions criteria. Parity of esteem for vocational education needs further endorsement by HEIs through the development of new higher education programmes and/or the modification of existing ones to reflect the needs of all young people, and to support Curriculum 2000(15) and the National Qualifications Framework. We see the new Foundation Degree as only one example of many such possibilities.

11.33 It is important that there should be close working relationships between HEIs, FECs and Collegiates to ensure, for example, that new initiatives and existing higher education programmes are properly articulated with post-primary programmes. Collegiates, HEIs and FECs would also derive mutual benefit from co-operation on matters related to careers education and guidance.

(13) *Cross Sector Working Group on Skills and Education (1998), Final Report Page 9, Belfast: DETI*

(14) *UCAS (2001), Changes to Post-16 Qualifications, A Briefing for Higher Education on Changes to Post-16 Curriculum in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Cheltenham: UCAS*

(15) *QCA (1999), Curriculum 2000 - Implementing the changes to 16-19 Qualifications, London: QCA*

11.34 In addition to raising the esteem of vocational education, the providers of higher education could do much to assist social inclusion. The new 14-19 curriculum is likely to encourage more young people from lower income social groups to aspire to further and higher education. HEIs, in collaboration with Collegiates and FECs, could do much to encourage and facilitate the fulfilment of those aspirations. We fully support the Widening Participation initiative of the Northern Ireland Higher Education Council (NIHEC), which calls for a co-ordinated approach to this matter from schools, further and higher education institutions and the voluntary/community sector.

11.35 We are aware that both Queen's University of Belfast and the University of Ulster have given much attention to these matters, and we understand that caution needs to be exercised when dealing with new qualifications which, in some cases, have yet to establish identity and credibility. Nevertheless we reiterate our concern that, without the support of the universities, broadening the curriculum to meet the different needs of young people and to ensure equality of opportunity, may have limited success.

11.36 It is for all of these reasons that we have proposed that the higher education sector should be represented on the Collegiate Liaison Councils.

11.37 **We recommend that all the providers of higher education should work with Collegiates, both at the individual level and within the Collegiate Liaison Councils, to encourage the establishment of Curriculum 2000,⁽¹⁶⁾ and to help raise the status of vocational education.** This could be achieved by a combination of adjustments to admissions criteria, modifications to existing courses and the design of new courses matched optimally to the output of schools.

Relationships between Collegiates and Employers

11.38 We are convinced that a new curriculum, with academic, occupational and vocational components, and with the flexibility and collaboration inherent in the Collegial system, would improve the match between education, training and

⁽¹⁶⁾ *QCA (1999), Curriculum 2000 - Implementing the Changes to 16-19 Qualifications, London: QCA*

the needs of employers. Employers are now looking for the rounded individual. The CBI's definition⁽¹⁷⁾ of employability is -

“Employability is the possession by an individual of the qualities and competences required to meet the changing needs of employers and customers and thereby to help to realise his or her aspirations and potential in work.”

The qualities and competences which make up employability are:

- up-to-date job-specific skills;
- values and attitudes - including a desire to learn and to apply that learning, to improve and to take advantage of change, regard for others, self-confidence, motivation and integrity;
- up-to-date and relevant knowledge and understanding;
- basic skills (literacy and numeracy);
- the six key skills (communications, application of number, information technology, improving one's learning and performance, working with others, problem-solving) sufficient for the needs of the work;
- other generic skills that are becoming increasingly “key” - such as modern language and customer service skills.

11.39 We realise that these qualities and competences must be addressed by the curriculum and by schools. However, we are convinced that employers themselves have considerable responsibilities. For example, they have powerful influences in raising the status of vocational education, and in improving pupils', parents' and teachers' attitudes to business and industry. It is essential that business and industry should demonstrate that there are well-paid and challenging opportunities and careers for young people, whether they have academic, vocational or occupational backgrounds.

⁽¹⁷⁾ CBI (2001), *Written Submission to Review Body on Post-Primary Education*, paras 10 & 11, Belfast: Review Body on Post-Primary Education

11.40 This will require good links between schools and employers. Many such links have been established over the last twenty to thirty years, and a variety of national schemes and organisations have been set up to encourage and facilitate them. In Northern Ireland, Sentinus (formed from a recent merger of NISTRO and Industry Matters), Young Enterprise, and NIBEP have helped to encourage and facilitate these schemes, with the assistance of employers, the Institute of Directors, the CBI, professional bodies, the education system, Government and others. Successful activities include work experience, employers advising pupils, school enterprises, teachers seconded to industry and curriculum development projects.

11.41 We place much value on these link activities, but we recognise the dangers of excessive overlap and the resulting inefficiencies. This was the reasoning behind the establishment in 1995 of NIBEP, one of whose responsibilities is the co-ordination of such activity across Northern Ireland. The Collegial system, with its interdependent structure, could make a substantial contribution to that co-ordination of effort. The Collegiate Liaison Councils could facilitate the provision of local link activities, with NIBEP providing support, co-ordination and monitoring. This arrangement would complement the thinking behind Strategy 2010's proposals that every school should become a focal point for business links, and that collaborative clusters should be formed, centred on schools and involving business, FECs and the wider community. Some twenty-six such clusters have already been established under the aegis of NIBEP.

11.42 We recommend that Collegiates, through their Collegiate Liaison Councils, should work with NIBEP and others to establish relevant and appropriate links between schools, local business, industry and employers.

Collegiates and Careers Education and Guidance (CEG)

11.43 CEG is an important interface between education and training, employers and the economy. Schools will want to afford their pupils full opportunity to reach their maximum potential, not only whilst they are attending school, but in their subsequent careers. We recognise the critical role that CEG has to play in that

process. CEG is a continuous process through which individuals are helped to consider choices and reach informed decisions about their next moves within and between education, training and employment opportunities. We expect that CEG will become an increasingly essential part of the school experience as Curriculum 2000⁽¹⁸⁾ and the National Qualifications Framework begin to take shape.

11.44 There is evidence that pupils are increasingly confused by the wide variety of academic and vocational qualifications, the various education and training pathways, and the many opportunities for progression to further and higher education. That confusion is exacerbated by the rapidly changing job opportunities and the skills which these demand. The world of work is changing rapidly. For example -

- technology is constantly advancing, and business is becoming increasingly reliant on ICT;
- the ability to create, distribute and exploit knowledge and information is central to economic success;
- globalisation has powerful and pervasive influences on business; production and trade are now internationalised; global financial markets are integrated in real time; there is growing environmental and political interdependency around the globe;
- increasingly people are changing their occupation several times during their lifetimes, and most will be required to retrain at least once in their working lives;
- jobs in manufacturing and farming have declined, and job opportunities in health, leisure and tourism, and catering have increased, but many of these are relatively low-paid, part-time and demand unsocial hours;
- overall, the proportion of non-skilled jobs has decreased.

(18) QCA (1999), *Curriculum 2000 - Implementing the Changes to 16-19 Qualifications*, London: QCA

11.45 We have concluded that, taken together, these changes in the world of work, in the structures of business and industry, and in patterns of work, demand a more effective and up-to-date CEG delivery system. The present arrangements, whilst giving schools the ultimate responsibility for the delivery of CEG, require them to work with the T&EA's Careers Service. Whilst that co-operative arrangement has had some success, we agree with Strategy 2010's⁽¹⁹⁾ recommendation that the current system of careers guidance should be enhanced in order to facilitate more informed decision-making on the part of students, parents and teachers. It is essential that those offering the advice have adequate related experience and are appropriately trained and educated. We note that the T&EA has already set in hand a review of careers guidance, and as part of this Review we suggest that consideration should be given to the full delegation of responsibility for the delivery of careers guidance within schools to Collegiates, supported by a transfer of resources from the Careers Service of T&EA.

11.46 We are aware that CCEA's review of the curriculum⁽²⁰⁾ has proposed several changes which could impact on CEG. The present Northern Ireland Curriculum includes careers education amongst the educational themes. However, research has shown that these themes have had limited impact in schools. Partly in response to the need to raise the profile of CEG, CCEA have proposed the introduction of a programme of Education for Employability, the aim of which would be to ensure that all young people develop personal qualities, skills, knowledge, understanding and attitudes which would give them a strong foundation for lifelong learning, work and citizenship in a rapidly changing environment. Education for Employability would cover work in the global economy, career management, and skills and qualities for work. We support this proposed development.

11.47 We are satisfied that the Collegiate structure would offer significant opportunities for improving CEG in schools. Each Collegiate would have a large body of staff with wide and varied expertise and experience, and its constituent schools would also bring with them their various contacts with employers,

⁽¹⁹⁾ NIED SSG (1999), *Strategy 2010, Section 9, Paragraph 9.6.6, Belfast: DETI*

⁽²⁰⁾ CCEA (2000), *Northern Ireland Curriculum Review, Phase 1 Consultation, Belfast: CCEA*

trainers, and further and higher education. Opportunities for the sharing of resources, such as careers teachers and careers information, together with the potential transfer of resources from the Careers Service to the Collegiates, would provide a very strong basis for enhancing the status, effectiveness and efficiency of CEG in schools.

Collegiates and the Economy

11.48 Governments are increasingly looking to their education and training systems to provide the knowledge and skills required to meet international competition. The development of human resources is of particular significance in Northern Ireland where lack of natural resources, peripherality, the decline of traditional industries, and political uncertainty, have combined to present formidable barriers to economic advancement. In spite of a faster than average economic growth during the 1990s, Northern Ireland, with a GDP per head which was 80% of the UK average in 1997, still lags behind the rest of the UK. In its pursuit of the necessary economic growth, Government increasingly expects education at all levels to be more relevant to the needs of the economy. For example, a 1996 DENI Research Briefing "**Education and Economic Development**"⁽²¹⁾ drew the following conclusion -

"Standards of education and training in Northern Ireland compare unfavourably with other industrialised countries and must be raised if the local economy is to maintain and improve upon its competitive position".

More recently, Strategy 2010⁽²²⁾ offered the following comments -

"Economic Development Strategy must inform education and training policy, funding and delivery mechanisms. While education is as much about personal development as it is about earning a living, nevertheless people, governments and employers have a right to expect education to be 'fit for purpose'."

(21) Armstrong, D. (1996), *Education and Economic Development: Empirical Evidence and Regional Perspectives*, Bangor: DENI

(22) NIED SSG (1999), *Strategy 2010*, Section 9, Paragraph 9.6.2, Belfast: DETI

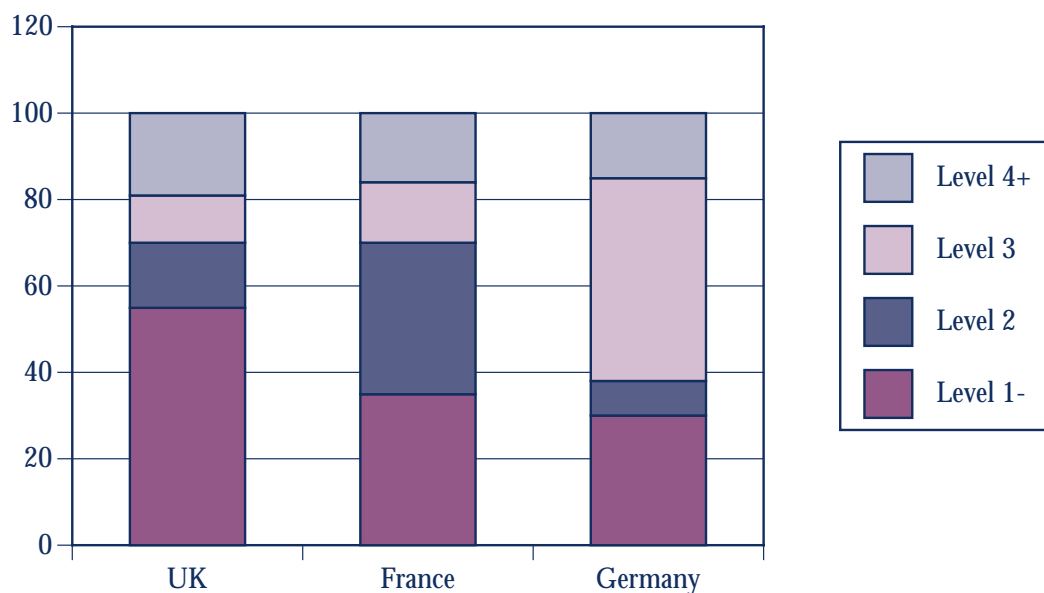
11.49 Those criticisms conceal the fact that, in terms of numbers of participants and qualifications gained, Northern Ireland's education system has been performing well. Post-16 participation in full-time education in Northern Ireland's schools and FECs has improved dramatically over the last few decades. The percentage of young people leaving school with no formal qualification has reduced by more than a factor of five over the same period, and, participation in higher education is greater here than in any other region of the UK.

11.50 However, even with these successes, the percentage of the population of Northern Ireland, and of the UK as a whole, with low level qualifications is much higher than is the case for many of their competitors. Table 1 shows that, in the UK, a higher proportion of the population is qualified to degree level and above than in France and Germany. However, the proportion with low level qualifications is high in the UK, and the proportion with Level 2 and 3 qualifications - people with intermediate skills such as craftspersons and technicians - is relatively low.

Table 1

Proportion of the Population with Designated Qualifications

Source: DfEE Skills Audit; 2000



11.51 The NIEC's paper on "**The Knowledge Driven Economy**"⁽²³⁾ states that Northern Ireland compares unfavourably to the UK average on indicators relating to the productive application of knowledge. Rates of innovation and enterprise are lower in Northern Ireland. Increasing the number of pupils with qualifications will not be sufficient in itself to meet the needs of this new knowledge-driven economy, in which the ability to create, distribute and exploit knowledge and information will be increasingly important. The knowledge and skills acquired by pupils will have to be more relevant to modern needs. The joint-departmental paper on "**Unlocking Creativity**",⁽²⁴⁾ mentioned at Chapter 2, emphasised this point -

"Northern Ireland's young people consistently obtain more qualifications and higher academic grades than young people elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland has always been very good at equipping its young people with academic qualifications. To thrive in an economy defined by the innovative application of knowledge, they must be able to do more than absorb and replay information. Learners and workers must be able to apply what they have learnt in new and unusual ways."

11.52 We are confident that the proposed Collegiate structure could play a significant role in facilitating and developing the partnerships and collaboration which are necessary between schools, FECs, higher education, and employers. Together they constitute a powerful tool for converting Northern Ireland from a low-skilled and low-productivity economy to a knowledge-based, high-skilled and high-productivity economy.

Summary

11.53 The establishment of Collegiates would have major implications and opportunities for other education and training providers, for employers and for the economy. Close liaison would be required to ensure that Collegiates'

⁽²³⁾ NIEC (2001), *The Knowledge Driven Economy: Indicators for Northern Ireland*, Belfast: NIEC

⁽²⁴⁾ DCAL, DE, DETI and DHFETE (2001), *Unlocking Creativity: A Strategy for Development*, Belfast: DCAL, DE, DETI and DHFETE

programmes blended easily with those of other providers of education and training. Where there are overlaps of provision, especially with FECs, collaboration would be preferred to competition. This would be facilitated by the role of Collegiate Liaison Councils and the development of a joint Departmental strategy for the co-ordination, funding and delivery of post-16 education and training.

11.54 Providers of higher education have vital influences on the post-primary education sector, and it would be important that they give a positive steer to Collegiates and their varied programmes and qualifications. Changes to admissions criteria and the provision of new tailor-made courses by HEIs would play a key part in opening up access to higher education.

11.55 The Collegiate structure would facilitate the introduction of a more effective and responsive system of CEG - a system that should support Collegiates in their drive to improve learners' awareness of the importance of lifelong learning. Working with NIBEP and others, Collegiates would provide centres for constructive links with local employers and the community.

11.56 A Collegial system, Curriculum 2000⁽²⁵⁾ and the new qualifications framework, together would have the potential to match the knowledge and skills of learners more closely to the needs of the economy. They would enable greater responsiveness to the needs of employers and the economy through the proposed Collegiate Liaison Councils, through their interactions with employers and the community, and their direct involvement in a more effective CEG system. In addition, with their focus on collaboration, both internal and external, Collegiates would be in a strong position to raise the attractiveness and status of vocational education.

(25) QCA (1999), *Curriculum 2000 - Implementing the Changes to 16-19 Qualifications*, London: QCA