

Transforming careers support for young people and adults in Northern Ireland

Executive Summary

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Acknowledgements

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dmh associates

In 2008, Dr Deirdre Hughes OBE established dmh associates to encourage collaboration and fresh thinking in careers, education and skills policy, research and practice. The outcomes from the organisation's work are designed to inform and influence policies, research and practice in the UK, Europe and internationally.

Our expertise includes: consultancy, evaluation, evidence and impact assessment, literature reviews, qualitative and quantitative research, digital and labour market intelligence / information (LMI). We provide a full range of activities each tailored to meet specific organisational or individual needs.

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Acronyms

ALC	Area Learning Communities
ATE	Apprenticeships and Technical Education
BIT	Behavioural Insights Team
CAF	Careers Advisory Forum
CAs	Careers Advisers
CDI	Career Development Institute (UK)
CEIAG	Careers education, Information, Advice and Guidance
CIAG	Career Information, Advice, and Guidance
CG	Career Guidance
CGD	City and Growth Deals
COIU	Careers and Occupational Information Unit
CRL	Careers-related Learning
DfC	Department for Communities
DfE	Department for the Economy
DE	Department of Education
EA	Education Authority
EET	Education, Employment and/or Training
ETI	Education Training Inspectorate
FE	Further Education
FSM	Free School Meals
HE	Higher Education
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMD	Indices of Multiple Deprivation
ITPs	Independent Training Providers
KS	Key Stage
LLW	Learning for Life and Work
LMI	Labour Market Intelligence
LMPs	Local Labour Market Partnerships
LSIP	Local Skills Improvement Plans
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NI	Northern Ireland
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SEND	Special Education Needs and Disabilities
SES	Socioeconomic Status
SF	Sixth Forms Schools/Colleges
SSA	Sector Subject Area
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
UUEPC	Ulster University Economic Policy Centre
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VQs	Vocational Qualifications

Executive Summary

Context

In mid-November 2021, the Economy Minister, Gordon Lyons, announced an independent external review into the delivery of career guidance. The Department for the Economy (DfE) currently provides an all-age careers information, advice, and guidance service designed to help individuals make choices and about their career paths. DMH Associates, led by Dr Deirdre Hughes OBE, undertook research from mid-November 2021 – early March 2022 examining the current all-age DfE career guidance offer situated within a wider careers ecosystem that operates across Northern Ireland and further afield.

“Career guidance describes the services which help people of any age to manage their careers and to make the educational, training and occupational choices that are right for them. It helps people to reflect on their ambitions, interests, qualifications, skills and talents – and to relate this knowledge about who they are to who they might become within the labour market” (OECD et al, 2019 and 2020).

Prior to the pandemic, career guidance was receiving increased attention from policymakers, reflecting a concern that the skills developed in initial education might not be well aligned with emerging labour market needs, generating costly skills mismatches and skills shortages. In the aftermath of the pandemic, policymakers, educationalists, employers, and community organisations must together find new ways of motivating and informing young people and adults on the social and cost benefits of career development and how their skills may be easily transferred to new settings. International evidence shows that government investment in career guidance brings prosperity for individuals and windfalls for government. Even if only a relatively small proportion of individuals improve their career decision-making skills, the education, social, wellbeing and economic gains are likely to far outweigh the costs, as illustrated in the main report.

The Careers Service has a current budget of £6m with circa 100 Careers Advisers employed as civil servants in the DfE. They are professionally trained, mainly at post-graduate level, who operate throughout all regions in Northern Ireland. This investment responds to education and labour market concerns and is there to deliver its services across a population of 1.9m in Northern Ireland. The service supports education, training providers and employers, young people aged 14+ in schools and colleges, and adults regardless of their work status.

Northern Ireland has similar levels of need for career guidance compared to other UK regions, considering standard metrics for education and employment trajectories. This similar need for career guidance can be contrasted with the very different annual amounts of dedicated public money invested by Scotland (c. £50m, via Skills Development Scotland CIAG budgets) and Wales (c. £29m, via Careers Wales and Working Wales)¹.

1 England is excluded from this comparison, since its marketised approach to career guidance is structurally different from the government delivery body approach chosen in the other nations.

When adjusted for population size and budget structure, significantly less public money is invested in career guidance in Northern Ireland than in Scotland or Wales.

From the outset, there is clear recognition that, at these levels of resource, the DfE's Careers Service simply cannot deliver the level of personalised, one-to-one support that many thousands of young people, adults, and employers might want and expect. Nonetheless, there are strong foundations to build upon, with strategic partners across Northern Ireland each playing their unique part.

Aim

To make recommendations to improve the targeting, timeliness, effectiveness, and efficiency of all-age career guidance in Northern Ireland.

This report is the culmination of a process designed to capture the views, experiences, and ideas of differing stakeholders within and outside the DfE's Careers Service. Between mid-November 2021 – mid-February 2022, over 4,117 individuals contributed to the research.

Method

To inform and develop a robust evidence-base, the research team:

- held consultations with Careers Service staff and trade union representatives;
- surveyed young people aged 14-18; adults 18+ in work, out of work, school leaders, careers teachers and subject teachers, and parents;
- disseminated a template for scribes to complete, where necessary, to help capture the voices of vulnerable young people adults;
- set up a 'Have Your Say' Call for Evidence aimed at employers, professional associations, community and voluntary sector organisations;
- met with employers and professional associations, school and college leaders, careers teachers, community and voluntary representatives through 1:1 online meetings and focus group sessions;
- met with vulnerable young people and adults, including those with learning disabilities, experienced care leavers and youth justice system leavers;
- reviewed international, national, and regional exemplar best practice career guidance delivery models; and
- conducted a financial analysis of the DfE's Careers Service including high-level comparisons with Wales and Scotland to support reflections on Northern Ireland's approach to career guidance.

The findings in this evidence-based paper are designed to contribute to a new beginning. We all recognise the transformative impact of Northern Ireland’s education, training, career guidance and employability support on the lives of individuals, families, and communities. And there is an urgent imperative to continually improve them.

Drivers for change

Northern Ireland has experienced two once-in-a-lifetime shocks that have occurred simultaneously, alongside ongoing megatrends in life choices, education and work that are changing society for everyone. Like young people, adults changing careers either by choice or through redundancy need help to understand the opportunities available in the current and future labour market. They need and want to know how their individual talents, skills and experience could be further developed to ensure they benefit from new opportunities.



The pandemic

The pandemic has impacted on all aspects of societal wellbeing. Whilst the negative impacts of the pandemic are well known, there are now more job opportunities and more people working now than prior to the pandemic. However, Skills Barometer figures show adult under-employment is an issue, with over 10% of those aged 16-24 seeking to increase their working hours.



Brexit and the NI protocol

A recent survey of firms in Northern Ireland, conducted by Manufacturing NI, found that the availability of workers, rather than Brexit and the Northern Ireland protocol, was the most pressing issue for most businesses. NIESR forecasts that the output of the local economy will be 1.5% above its pre-pandemic level by the end of this year.



Demographics

Today’s children and young people are tomorrow’s adults driving the future economy and societal wellbeing. The demographics of the nation’s population have been shifting, placing growing demands on the education, careers and skills system. There is a major requirement to stem the flow leaving Northern Ireland and harness all the talent and skills available.



A changing labour market and nature of work

Skills shortages affect several key sectors. Labour market intelligence must be able to reach more people. There is growing evidence of people attempting to change the way they work to better control and direct their own work hours. Alongside this, there is an urgent need to increase innovation and productivity in the workforce. Career is by its nature uncertain. There are no guarantees that entry to an organisation or profession will translate into stability in the long-term.



Education Reform

There is an opportunity to reframe and refocus educational experience for students towards a more holistic ‘career readiness’ approach. From learning individual subjects and passing exams to becoming more ‘life ready’ through personalised, collaborative experiential learning with regular exposure to and experience of a changing in the world of work.



Growing poverty and inequality

With persistent poverty and other forms of disadvantage, the current system inadvertently produces unequal outcomes. Also, prices are not only rising mostly in areas where low-income households spend a disproportionately high amount of their income (fuel and food), but also on essential items. This has significant social and or health-related consequences. Finding opportunities has never been more important.



Industry 4.0

Many jobs and people's lives are being transformed by new forms of disruptive and social technology. New jobs, skills requirements, mooted 'metaverse' workplaces, AI and machine learning advances are emerging. Some skillsets are 'at risk' of becoming obsolete. Digital skills are essential, regardless of circumstance. Steps are needed to address the 'digital divide'. Technology can support learning in diverse settings and be available 24:7 responsive to career exploration and discovery. However, human support is also necessary, particularly to those most in need.



Climate change

A new Bill in Stormont may result in new legislation to introduce a 2050 net zero target for Northern Ireland, along with an independent Climate Change Commissioner's office. The transition to a green economy requires a workforce with the right skills. This includes not only skills in the low carbon and environmental goods and services sector, but also those needed to help all businesses use natural resources efficiently and sustainably and to be resilient to climate change.

These drivers demand transformation and a road map for recovery and, in many cases a departure from what has gone before. There is a major opportunity to focus on strengthening the talent economy in Northern Ireland, underpinned by a high-quality careers eco-system. This should inform, support, and connect citizens of all ages and abilities to relevant and sustainable learning and work opportunities on a lifelong basis.

The Northern Ireland careers support eco-system is struggling

To address both challenges and opportunities, it is essential to achieve a culture change in all-age career guidance and careers education in post-primary schools, further and higher education, and in local communities. There should be a mutually agreed set of principles and priorities introduced offering universal support, with a strong emphasis on place-based approaches, complemented by online careers information, advice, and guidance (CIAG) supporting local people and local economies. Those working in the careers eco-system should work together to agree how best to achieve this to support transitions, improve social inclusion and social mobility. **A strengthened Northern Ireland careers eco-system, through a more strategic collaborative approach, should draw together experience and expertise from across the whole system to maximise the impact of its collective resources.**

We have identified inspiring and innovative UK and international exemplars of careers policies and practices for wider consideration outlined in a separate ‘stand-alone’ report. Based on stakeholder feedback from 4117+ individuals, easy-to-understand common language should be adopted by local, regional and national delivery agencies across Northern Ireland’s careers ecosystem, e.g.

- 1. Embed careers in the curriculum.**
- 2. Enrichment careers activities for all.**
- 3. Employability and skills development.**
- 4. Enterprise, self-employment, and entrepreneurship.**

Theme	Recommendations	Priority ²	Key steps
<i>Primary school children, parents, and teachers</i>			
Start career-related learning early in primary schools.	<p>Career-related learning (CRL) needs to start early in Northern Ireland primary schools. A UK and international evidence-base indicates this helps broaden horizons, reduces gender stereotypes, and increases children’s aspirations and motivation to learn.</p> <p>Rec: 1 – The DfE should include high-quality CRL resources in a new rebranded all-age national careers portal supporting parents in career conversations with their child(ren).</p>	<i>High</i>	<p>It is noted this is primarily the responsibility of the Department of Education, therefore outside the remit of this commissioned research.</p> <p>Embed high quality CRL resources into a new world-class rebranded all-age national careers portal.</p>

² High denotes to be actioned within 9-12 months, High-Medium denotes to be actioned within 18 months, Medium denotes to be actioned no later than 24 months.

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<i>World-class digital and blended approaches to careers support services</i>			
<p>A new world-class rebranded all-age national careers portal with differing entry points for specific groups including young people, adults, parents, employers, apprentices and entrepreneurs.</p> <p>Employer and professional bodies, FE and HE providers have expressed a willingness to contribute and update programmes of study and/or opportunities for young people and adults.</p>	<p>Rec: 2 - The DfE with education, employers, and community strategic partners, should co-create the content of a new rebranded all-age national careers portal, led by the Careers Service. A partnership arrangement should set out plans for sustainability of the new national careers portal. Exemplars of good/interesting UK and international careers policies and practices should inform the commissioning and design principles.</p> <p>Clarify and agree within DfE Communications that a new all-age national careers portal must be freed up from the current nidirect portal which is generally perceived as “insufficiently inspiring” despite its rich content. Its full potential is restricted by the existing standardised website and constraints within the nidirect editorial style guide. There are some examples where this new approach has already been achieved in Northern Ireland in response to employer needs e.g. the Matrix website.</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Involve employers, professional bodies, behavioural insights experts, trade unions and parent groups in the early planning and development of the modern all-age national careers portal with an expectation they will bring added value resources and experience to feed into the content and sustainability plan going forward. (Refer also to UK & international exemplars report).</p> <p>Set up DfE careers portal and digital technology team to horizon scan for digital innovations.</p> <p>Harness the expertise that exists in 6 further education colleges, 2 universities and the Department for the Economy to make more accessible high-quality all-age career guidance resources, including professional expertise, quality assurance approaches, skills assessment toolkits, employer engagement, mentoring, virtual reality (VR), artificial intelligence (AI) and gamification of the world of work.</p>

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<i>Careers education and career guidance in post-primary schools and Area Learning Communities</i>			
<p>Introduce greater flexibility and accountability within ALCs in meeting young people, parents, and employer needs within post-primary schools. This must be part of a wider education continuum that supports young people’s career readiness, digital, employability and enterprise skills.</p>	<p>Rec: 3 – The DfE, DE and the Education Training Inspectorate (ETI) should formally agree setting up and closely monitoring the performance of new ‘test and learn’ career guidance pilots in selected Area Learning Communities. These should be designed to deliver ‘an enhanced career guidance offer’ embedded within the curriculum, new freedoms for utilising Careers Adviser expertise, alongside simplifying and synchronising working links between post-primary schools, STEM, employability, and enterprise hubs to avoid duplication of effort and maximise impact of resources.</p> <p>For the pilots, all aspects of careers education and career guidance should be within an agreed set of common quality standards, training, monitoring and accountability framework. This should include: the responsibilities of the DfE, DE, ETI, EA, post-primary schools and Area Learning Communities (ALCs), including the allocation of DfE resources, with short, medium, and longer-term jointly agreed priorities and goals.</p>	<p><i>High</i></p>	<p>Support and strengthen thematic career guidance pilots, including employer and enterprise links, the 10X Economy, the Skills Barometer 2021, young people and parental engagement, leadership, and best practice in inclusive careers education and CIAG.</p> <p>Embrace new delivery methods in post-primary schools/ ALCs with local employer, enterprise, and professional body strategic partners to include career competitions and out of school/ college careers activities and publish findings mapped across the key sectors in the 10X Economy.</p>

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<p><i>Careers education and career guidance in post-primary schools and Area Learning Communities</i></p>			
<p>A new ‘blended’ career guidance delivery model and careers education (including face-to-face and online careers activities starting earlier in the curriculum) in post-primary schools.</p> <p>Parents and employers report they expect young people to have access to skills assessment tools from an early age.</p>	<p>Rec: 4 – The DfE, with its strategic partner the DE, should formally introduce a new blended career guidance delivery model in post-primary schools, to complement careers education (including face-to-face and online careers activities starting earlier in the curriculum) with an agreed action plan for critical steps forward by 1st June 2022.</p> <p>This should include all post-primary schools working in genuine partnership with the DfE, taking responsibility, and each playing their part in helping to identify those students who need most assistance (through a transparent triage system), and regularly introduce students and parents to the differing levels of local and national careers support available to them on a lifelong basis.</p> <p>The Education Training Inspectorate (ETI) should include the totality of career guidance as defined above within its inspection framework for post-primary schools. It should assess the extent to which all post primary schools offer young people and parents a ‘blended careers offer’ with a range of delivery methods including skills assessment tools, new digital technologies, and a published careers programme in a standard format, including access to Careers Advisers’ expertise. The inspection framework for schools and colleges should reflect this requirement, alongside the DfE’s approach making skills assessment available 24:7 to all young people (and adults).</p>	<p><i>High</i></p>	<p>Begin a new chapter in Northern Ireland’s post-primary schools with a move away from ‘blanket interviewing’ towards more enhanced targeted career guidance activities starting earlier in post-primary schools e.g. more groupwork, raising awareness of and providing increased access to skills assessment, 1:1 career guidance (where appropriate), virtual and experiential learning, and high-quality 24:7 integrated self-help careers resources within a new rebranded all-age national careers portal.</p> <p>Develop a robust triage system tailored to all young people’s unique circumstances. This should not stigmatise young people as being ‘at risk’ because they are not going to follow an academic route, instead it should be highly responsive to all young people’s circumstances which are likely to change over time.</p> <p>Address the deficit in not including career guidance in post-primary schools’ formal inspections.</p> <p>Make the current joint investment by DfE and the DE to provide every post-primary school with a high-quality skills assessment tool³ for teachers and students work to good effect. Currently this is only being used by 42% of post-primary schools.</p>

3 Xello is a free resource for students and teachers in schools/colleges, including lesson plans for teaching Year 8 – Year 12.

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<p><i>Careers education and career guidance in post-primary schools and Area Learning Communities</i></p>			
<p>The present system gathers huge amounts of data not always analysed. There is significant scope to make better use of data, raise awareness of labour market intelligence (LMI) and address skills mismatch and skills shortages in the NI economy.</p>	<p>Rec: 5 - The DfE, DE, Education Authority working with ALCs should co-publish data on annual trends in anonymised student occupational interests, young people’s exposure to and experiences of the world of work and how this aligns to the realities of local labour markets and the 10X Economy.</p> <p>DE, the Education Authority and ALCs should agree at least a minimum work experience offer for students which includes exposure to growing and emerging sectors in NI.</p> <p>These developments should be made available in standard format that can be shared across the careers eco-system.</p>	<p><i>High-Medium</i></p>	<p>Establish a new regional system for analysing trends linked to young people’s career aspirations and how this aligns to the ambitions of the 10X Economy and make this type of anonymised data more readily available to those within the careers eco-system.</p> <p>Explore options for career action plans and how these can be best applied with young people and adults.</p>

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<p>Adults and young people in communities e.g. FE, HE, vocational training, other community/third sector providers including City Deals and local Labour Market Partnerships</p>			
<p>Deliver careers guidance in the heart of the community – making it visible and aligned with local economic strengthening and enterprise initiatives.</p>	<p>Rec: 6 – The DfE Careers Service knowledge and expertise should be embedded more fully within Local Councils e.g. City Deals, local Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs), and local community employability and entrepreneurial initiatives. This should make the Careers Service more visible and impactful working in the best interest of local citizens and employers. This is particularly important given the low rate of economic activity in Northern Ireland⁴.</p> <p>Rec: 7 – The DfE with the DfC, Local Councils and local LMPs should explore opportunities for match-funding arrangements to target specific adult and youth priority groups working in strong partnership with community agencies to achieve increased employer and enterprise engagement linked to the ambitions of the 10X Economy.</p>	<p>High-</p>	<p>Increase joint investment for local career guidance support for adults, including a focus on re-engaging on skills assessment and job search activity.</p> <p>Jointly create an explicit ‘career guidance offer, particularly for adults. Career guidance needs to be made available for people in work as well as those in education. Link this campaign to TV, radio, and social media channels. Lessons can be learned from Working Wales #ChangeYourStory and other successful initiatives.</p>
<p>Regional and local strategic partnerships in communities.</p> <p>Once graduates have left higher education it is unclear where career support should be accessed.</p>	<p>Rec: 8 - The DfE should develop core principles, expected outcomes and a blended career guidance delivery model defining what individuals in all DfE funded provision can expect. It should set and make explicit targets for local and regional community strategic partnerships with place-based approaches in local communities as this is what most young people and adults want and need, alongside an easy-to-use content-rich all-age national careers portal.</p> <p>The DfE, FE and HE providers should focus together on targeted campaigns for those most in need of careers support and agree a standard offer of ongoing careers support available to specific groups including sixth form, FE and HE students.</p>	<p>High-Medium</p>	<p>Acknowledge the pandemic has significantly weakened DfE Careers Service ties to community organisations and seek to strengthen its blended career guidance offer and visibility in working closely with local and national agencies, supporting vulnerable and marginalised groups.</p> <p>Set targets for strategic place-based partnerships and online support.</p> <p>Agree a series of targeted campaigns set within specific 2022 – 2025 timelines.</p>

4 E.g. Sep-Nov 2021 Labour Force Survey data shows 70% of NI is economically active compared to 76% in England.

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<p>Adults and young people in communities e.g. FE, HE, vocational training, other community/third sector providers including City Deals and local Labour Market Partnerships</p>			
<p>Careers and Occupational Information Unit, UUEPC Skills Barometer, labour market trends and digital horizon scanning expertise.</p>	<p>Rec: 9 - Build on the success of the DfE's Careers and Occupational Information Unit (COIU), DfE economists, Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC), FE Curriculum Hubs, and 10X Economy strategic partnerships (including other professional bodies that represent employer needs) to co-produce more excellent, economy driven careers information and LMI bulletins that can be accessed both online and within post-primary schools and other local community agencies.</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Raise the profile of the COIU and 10X Economy strategic partnerships (including other professional bodies that represent employer needs) and further develop digital horizon scanning to strengthen young people and adults' access to trustworthy CIAG.</p>
<p>Multi-agency one-stop centres, including new 'State of the Art' multi-agency places and online spaces for all-age career guidance.</p>	<p>Rec: 10 – The DfE should integrate specialist Careers Advisers within multi-agency one-stop shop arrangements working deep in local communities alongside Health and Social Care Trusts, other public, private and third sector organisations that have established close working links.</p> <p>The DfE and DfC should assess local delivery arrangements within City Deals, local LMPS and Economic Development plans to review existing capital spend projects and add a social value clause to ensure 'State of the Art' multi-agency places and online spaces for enhanced careers education, CIAG, employability and enterprise experiences made readily available in selected local towns and cities.</p> <p>The DfE should publish 'success stories' and 'pockets of excellence' where Careers Advisers and key community organisations have together made a positive impact on young people and adults' lives, particularly those furthest away from the labour market to inspire more community partnerships.</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Assess the efficacy of retaining the existing DfE Careers Centres in Belfast and L'Derry e.g. what is the likelihood of increase in footfall? are the premises fit for purpose to support multi-agency working? Is there duplication of resources at a local level?</p> <p>Draw inspiration from UK and international exemplars and set out a vision and new roadmap for world-class 'State of the Art' multi-agency 'places and online spaces' that make lifelong learning, career readiness, digital and employability skills fun, engaging and accessible for all, including career cafes, pods, skills and enterprise workshops, live events, coaching, mentoring, etc., co-designed by key stakeholders in local communities within the careers eco-system.</p> <p>Explore options for connecting and engaging with Northern Ireland's Youth Parliament so that the voices of young people can feed more regularly into a new DfE Careers Service design and delivery model.</p>

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<i>Adults and young people in communities e.g. FE, HE, vocational training, other community/third sector providers including City Deals and local Labour Market Partnerships</i>			
Advocate and broker new work opportunities for under-represented groups in the labour market.	<p>Rec: 11 – DfE Careers Advisers should work in partnership with employers, enterprise hubs, the DfC and key community strategic partners to ensure that those with disabilities, health problems, caring responsibilities, people with low qualifications and older people are fully supported with professional career guidance to help achieve their full potential and contribute to NI economy.</p> <p>Employers should embrace the flexibility required to access these untapped labour reserves, in line with the Skills Barometer 2021 recommendations (p.51).</p>	<i>High</i>	<p>Actively promote career guidance support to all those looking to upskill to improve their chances of securing, retaining or progressing in employment. Supporting the working age population to develop skills in demand should be a key focus.</p> <p>Limit rises in long-term unemployment, by building on the Department for Communities’ Work Ready Employment Services programme and fast tracking previously furloughed workers into DfE career guidance support.</p>

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<i>Employers, professional bodies, trade unions and Careers Advisory Forum</i>			
Partners in the careers eco-system supporting the talent pipeline for micro-and small-medium-sized employers and entrepreneurs, as well as large companies.	<p>Rec: 12 - The Careers Advisory Forum, supported by DfE and its strategic partners should host an employers, education, professional bodies, and trade unions’ formal event to jointly review and discuss UK and international exemplars of careers, employability, and enterprise initiatives.</p> <p>The Careers Advisory Forum should conduct an independent review of the implementation of the agreed priorities and actions by 1st June 2023, in line with the research recommendations.</p>	<i>High-Medium</i>	<p>Review and prioritise key thematic areas for further development within the careers eco-system e.g. the New Brunswick, Canada Virtual ‘Centres of Excellence’ that focus on sector-specific online experiential learning, an all-age careers portal, virtual reality, AI and gaming, multi-agency one stop centres, CPD systems of support, etc.</p>

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<p><i>Professionalisation within Northern Ireland's careers eco-system</i></p>			
<p>Careers Adviser 'specialisms' rather than 'generic'.</p>	<p>Rec: 13 - The DfE should re-introduce specialist Careers Advisers bringing more focused expertise, specialist knowledge and agility to respond to the 10X Economy goals, employer, education, other local community provider and digital requirements. It should further upskill and train Careers Advisers in use of digital technology applied in careers practice e.g. the metaverse, virtual reality, gamification, chat bots, social media, etc.</p> <p>The DfE should examine closely with the UK Career Development Institute's (CDI) the Careers Adviser apprenticeship pathway and qualification to help attract new recruits to the Service i.e., recruit some apprentices who will bring diversity and social inclusion into the workforce.</p>	<p><i>Medium</i></p>	<p>Strengthen the capacity and expertise of Careers Advisers and build in new channels for sharing specialist knowledge within DfE.</p>
<p>Careers education, career guidance and employability training, and quality standards are inconsistent between DfE, DE, EA, ETI, CCEA and DfC.</p>	<p>Rec: 14 – DfE, DE supported by the CAF and key strategic partners should explore options for introducing a requirement for shared careers education, career guidance and employability continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities, including the formation of a new NI Careers and Lifelong Learning Academy.</p>	<p><i>Medium</i></p>	<p>Include all CAF organisations, particularly community and voluntary agencies, to explore ways of breaking down existing barriers to joint CPD.</p> <p>Explore options for strengthening initial teacher training programmes in Northern Ireland's universities to include careers education and career guidance theory, research and best practice, similar to best practice in the North-East of England and further afield.</p> <p>Focus on careers innovation and more data driven approaches, including Masters' and PhD research scholarships similar to arrangements in Scotland, that inform and influence the strengthening of the careers eco-system.</p>

Theme	Recommendations	Priority	Key steps
<i>Professionalisation within Northern Ireland's careers eco-system</i>			
A Careers Strategy and Career Guidance Framework.	Rec: 15 - Refresh the existing Careers Strategy and replace this with a Career Guidance Framework agreed between DfE as policy lead, DE and DfC which sets out the strategic aim, policy commitments, principles and expected outcomes of the all-age, future proof careers guidance system to ensure the Northern Ireland Talent Economy and world-class all-age career guidance supports the national economy and creates a more hopeful and prosperous future for all citizens of Northern Ireland.	<i>High</i>	Examine all options as part of a strategic review for a new Career Guidance and Careers Education vision set beyond 2023 for the future positioning of careers education and career guidance each uniquely placed to support the nation's economic recovery and the people of Northern Ireland in being able to access an all-age world-class cost-effective resource.

Northern Ireland has a unique opportunity to change the current careers education and career guidance system radically for future generations. Largely all the component parts of the system sit within central government control. With agreement at a strategic, political and policy level – careers guidance can be placed closer to where people need it – in schools, FE, HE and in many other local community settings – supported by an all-age modernised world-class national careers portal.

2021 has been a year - not just a moment - of incredible change. Northern Ireland is now in a period of major transformation. By enabling people of all ages to access self-help, brief-assisted and professional expert careers support, when and where they need it, tailored to their specific needs and individual circumstances, this will help significantly improve education, social, wellbeing and economic outcomes. Those in the careers eco-system have a unique opportunity to take collective action based on these recommendations. A final remark from an employer:

“We’re a small and talented nation with people and skills as our biggest asset for economic recovery. I truly believe if we all come together collectively, we can position Northern Ireland as offering world-class careers support to young people and adults. Let the work begin and let’s all aim high!”