

EDF ACTION PLAN - PROGRESS REPORT – DECEMBER 2004

Strategic Priority Area - Knowledge / Productivity Growth

Objective – “To generate wealth by maximising opportunities for, encouraging greater collaboration between, and increasing the capabilities and international competitiveness of, NI companies.”

<i>Key Outcomes</i>	<i>Additional Action</i>	<i>Current Position</i>
<p>The successful attraction of inward investment in high technology / knowledge-based areas.</p>	<p>1. Government, local government, industry and trade unions to work in partnership to maximise their collective efforts by organising one major, high-quality business summit each year linked to a comprehensive, high-profile awards ceremony - EDF</p>	<p>EDF worked closely with InterTradelreland (ITI) to arrange the <i>All Island Competitiveness</i> Forum, held in Belfast on 3 June 2004. The Forum was attended by key business leaders in Ireland, North and South, and provided an opportunity for networking between business, academia and the policy world as well as hearing U.S. and European experts' views on the challenge of competition and collaboration with a view to tackling global opportunities.</p>
	<p>2. Local business leaders and their representative organisations to proactively seek opportunities for greater communication with similar organisations outside Northern Ireland and to promote the benefits of doing business here – Business Alliance</p>	<p>Business Alliance members continue to develop new relationships with similar organisations outside NI and promote the benefits of doing business in NI. Some key activities included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The World comes to Belfast conference (June 2004); - Memorandums of Understanding with Metro Denver Chamber, the World Trade Centre Denver and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry; - A joint NICCI/Dublin Chamber of Commerce Trade Mission to the US in October 2004; - Meetings of the CBI/IBEC Joint Business Council; - The establishment of a European Innovation Data Management Centre in Belfast; - A study tour to Sweden; and - Attendance at the Celtic Fringe Dinner. <p>The above list is a sample of the activities undertaken by the Business Alliance and is not exhaustive.</p>

Strategic Priority Area - Knowledge / Productivity Growth (Cont'd)

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<i>Key Outcomes</i>	<i>Additional Action</i>	<i>Current Position</i>
The successful attraction of inward investment in high technology / knowledge-based areas (Cont'd).	3. Further Education Colleges to meet the increased demand for skilled technicians through a Higher National / Foundation Degree as a progression from a relevant and robust vocational A-level equivalent programme – FE sector	The FE sector continues to focus on programmes to meet the demand for skilled technicians and a policy for HE programmes in FE is currently being developed. Foundation degrees have been introduced to address specific skills gaps, in identified skill shortage areas, at "higher technician" and "associate professional" levels. Foundation degree programmes have now been introduced in Information Technology and Communications, Construction and Built Environment as well as Hospitality and Tourism. In addition, for the 2005/06 academic year, FE colleges also hope to deliver Foundation degrees in the Caring and Education sectors.
An improvement in the international competitiveness of indigenous Northern Ireland business.	4. Best practice guidance to be produced to advise local firms on how to develop joint initiatives and strategic alliances and to identify opportunities to create and benefit from effective collaborative arrangements – Business Alliance	Business Alliance members have assisted in the production of a number of guides including Best Practice Explained (which can be obtained from the CBI website) and published articles on doing business in India and China (copies available from IoD NI). Research has been initiated with Belfast International Airport to review air freight requirements in NI and establish opportunities for greater collaboration with businesses. Business Alliance members are also actively exploring the establishment of strategic alliances for technology and innovation transfer to NI SMEs and the possibilities for joint initiatives with a wide range of organisations including NORBIC, Belfast City Council, Investment Belfast, South Belfast Partnership, InterTradeIreland and Bio Med Ireland.
	5. Business competitiveness to be defined and promoted widely within local companies to raise awareness and enhance understanding – Business Alliance	A paper on business competitiveness has been drafted and will be disseminated in early 2005.

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<i>Key Outcomes</i>	<i>Additional Action</i>	<i>Current Position</i>
An improvement in the international competitiveness of indigenous Northern Ireland business (Cont'd).	6. Further Education Colleges to offer an increased number and range of relevant vocational and training programmes, including an expansion of foundation degrees, on a full-time and part-time basis in areas such as e-Commerce – FE sector	FE colleges continue to increase the range and numbers of vocational training programmes including the introduction of National Diplomas/Certificates. E-commerce modules are also now available in many of the Foundation Degree courses. The further expansion of Foundation Degrees into other vocational areas, especially skill shortage areas, will continue in future years (see Action 3 above).
	7. Companies to be encouraged to search locally for suppliers or seek to encourage / create local supply and look locally for collaborative ventures (e.g. marketing, R&D, joint production etc) with local partners (including FE colleges, universities) – Business Alliance	Business Alliance members were involved in arrangements for a local procurement conference, which was held in Limavady in March 2004 and supported a number of networking events, including ITI's Network and Getwork programme which aims to bring SMEs into contact with large purchasing organisations throughout Ireland. Members have also been actively exploring potential collaborative ventures in R&D.
	8. A culture of investment focusing on competitiveness to be encouraged with equal promotion of best practice techniques and of investment that needs to be undertaken by companies (e.g. in Plant and Machinery, R&D, Workplace Training) to achieve best practice & competitiveness. Case studies to be used to encourage greater company investment – Business Alliance	Business Alliance members have arranged company visits to enable business leaders to learn from the experience of other companies and have employed additional staff to encourage investment focused on competitiveness. To date visits have been carried out to Adria and Bombardier and further visits are planned to Belfast International Airport and Huhtamaki. Four local Case Studies have also been completed. A new programme manager was engaged by CforC, during 2004, to expand competitiveness activities in the areas of innovation and clustering.

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<i>Key Outcomes</i>	<i>Additional Action</i>	<i>Current Position</i>
An improvement in the international competitiveness of indigenous Northern Ireland business (Cont'd).	9. Business representative organisations and trade unions to provide continual feedback to Invest NI to ensure programmes of assistance are appropriately targeted and are meeting the strategic needs of companies and the Northern Ireland community, especially those who are economically inactive – Business Alliance / NIC/CTU	Business Alliance and trade unions representatives engage regularly, through Board and other meetings, with Invest NI and have provided feedback to ensure programmes of assistance are appropriately targeted.
	10. Business representative organisations to encourage member companies to participate in Invest NI trade and export activities – Business Alliance	Business Alliance members regularly help organise and lead trade missions to countries in Europe, Asia and North America. During 2004, for example, trade missions were led to India, the United States, Hong Kong and China. In addition, members have helped organise a number of cross-border trading seminars. During 2004, trading and procurement seminars were held in Limerick, Galway and Cork and more than 75 companies took part. In 2005, seminars are planned for Waterford, Dundalk and Drogheda and the feasibility of taking the programme to Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow and Birmingham, is also being investigated.
The creation of strong clusters coupled with enhanced networking.	11. The concept of clustering to be clearly defined and communicated widely within local industry to raise awareness and understanding - CforC	CforC has employed a project manager to raise awareness and understanding of the benefits of clustering. To date 20 Cluster Facilitators have been trained, a Cluster Facilitators Forum, with 34 members, has been established and 10 Best Practice Workshops, to inform public/private sector about the benefits of Clustering, have been held. CforC also organised a NI delegation that undertook a study visit and attended the Competitiveness Institute Conference in Ottawa to develop new linkages and review strategies.

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<i>Key Outcomes</i>	<i>Additional Action</i>	<i>Current Position</i>
The creation of strong clusters coupled with enhanced networking (Cont'd).	12. The focus of the clustering effort should be clarified and, in particular, the cluster approach of CforC and the sectoral approach of Invest NI should be linked and integrated to ensure both are complementary – CforC and Invest NI	CforC and Invest NI have met regularly to discuss cluster strategy and, in particular, how the cluster approach of CforC and the sectoral approach of Invest NI should be linked and integrated to ensure both are complementary. This work continues to develop. A presentation on clustering was delivered to the senior management in Invest NI, in November 2004, and recommendations from the Ottawa Study Visit have also been submitted to senior management in Invest NI.
	13. The process of clustering and encouraging collaboration between companies in areas of mutual benefit (e.g. joint marketing, R&D etc), encouraging local supplier linkages and sharing of knowledge to be promoted in as many industries as possible - CforC	CforC is currently working with 6 Clusters; Polymer Recycling, Wood Plastic Composites, Healthcare Informatics, Wearable Technologies, Seagate Supply Chain and Textiles 'Protrans' Innovation. These clusters encompass more than 70 companies and organisations and involve three types of cluster activity; New Product Development, collaborative R&D and supply chain enhancement. CforC has also identified another 22 Cluster groups throughout N.I. involving in excess of 300 companies and organisations.
	14. Business representative organisations to encourage companies to share knowledge with other companies with whom they are not in direct competition – Business Alliance	In addition to the clustering activities led by CforC, Business Alliance members have arranged company visits to enable business leaders to share experience and learn from best practice. Company visit programmes will continue to be a key feature of Business Alliance activity.
An increased level of technology transfer including the promotion and dissemination of international best practice and benchmarking.	15. Existing benchmarking activity across a range of organisations to be co-ordinated in order to maximise impact and effectiveness – Business Alliance	Business Alliance members have discussed with Invest NI how benchmarking activities can be better coordinated to maximise impact and effectiveness. As a result of these discussions a benchmarking strategy has been agreed.

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<i>Key Outcomes</i>	<i>Additional Action</i>	<i>Current Position</i>
An increased level of technology transfer including the promotion and dissemination of international best practice and benchmarking (Cont'd)	16. A series of focused investigations to be undertaken over the next three years to assess the value derived from current benchmarking practices – Business Alliance	Business Alliance members are working with Invest NI to assess the value derived from current benchmarking practices. This will include a review of international benchmarking databases to review trends and key indicators across sectors.
	17. Promotion to business leaders of the importance of investment in structured programmes of management development – Business Alliance	Business Alliance members and NICVA continue to promote the importance of investment in management development. Business Alliance members have actively supported the Management Leadership Network, which aims to enhance the business leadership of organisations in the manufacturing, service, voluntary and community sectors in NI. Business Alliance members were also directly involved in organising the NI Unlimited conference on leadership in June 2004. The purpose of the conference was to challenge leaders from the key sectors to consider what actions are necessary to unlock the true potential for the future of Northern Ireland. The Management Development Programme, run by NICVA, aims to develop and improve the managerial skills of 400 managers in the voluntary and community sector over 3 years.
	18. The need to improve internal work organisation to be incorporated into trade union training courses and addressed in meetings between trade unions and employers – NIC/CTU	The need to improve internal work organisation is incorporated as a learning outcome in various trade union courses. For example one of the objectives of the Union Representatives Stage 2 Course is to “Identify and apply information to workplace issues and problems”. Arrangements are also being finalised for the provision of a new Access Certificate in Employment Law Course, commencing in January 2005, which will include a unit in Information and Communication Technology.

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<i>Key Outcomes</i>	<i>Additional Action</i>	<i>Current Position</i>
<p>An increased level of technology transfer including the promotion and dissemination of international best practice and benchmarking (Cont'd)</p>	<p>19. Further Education Colleges to work with and support firms, trade unions and other organisations to help improve management / production capabilities via initiatives including College Business Partnerships – FE sector</p>	<p>FE Colleges have been working with and supporting firms and other organisations in the public and private sectors to improve management/production capabilities via initiatives such as Fusion and the Knowledge Transfer Programme (KTP). Fusion is targeting 40 projects p.a. for each of the next three years. Fusion has also been extended to large companies and is targeting 10 projects over the next 3 years. Through ANIC, 5 Manufacturing Technology Partnership field officers are linking companies with Centres of Excellence in the FE Colleges.</p>
	<p>20. Promotion of improvements in internal work organisation emphasising: the need for both employers and workforce to recognise that quality is a key competitiveness issue; that best practice involves personnel at all levels being enterprising and innovative, putting forward ideas for new / incremental improvements in products / processes / design; and the adoption of an innovative work environment which rewards such behaviour at all levels. Case studies should be used – Business Alliance and NIC/ICTU</p>	<p>Business Alliance members organised Best Practice Network meetings throughout NI and plans are in place to develop a partnership with NI's Colleges of Further & Higher Education, to assist with dissemination of best practice. Business Alliance members are also working with Invest NI, through the NI Quality Awards, to show that quality is directly linked to and can assist improve competitiveness.</p> <p>NIC/ICTU have examined the options for further developing the Union Reps Stage Two Course to offer participants the opportunity of achieving the Institute of Leadership & Management “Introductory Certificate in First Line Management”. NIC/ICTU are also working closely with a number of employers (e.g. the Royal Group of Hospitals and Coca Cola) to develop partnerships designed to meet the objectives under this priority. Initiatives have also been undertaken with a number of trade unions and employer bodies concerning the development at Victoria Square, which presents an opportunity to provide work for disadvantaged sections in the community and also to provide on-site IT training and issues affecting literacy and numeracy.</p>

Strategic Priority Area – Innovation and Creativity

Objective – “To create an innovation culture and environment within which NI companies develop knowledge and ideas and then adapt and exploit them.”

Key Outcomes	Additional Action	Current Position
<p>An increase in the links between business, universities and further education. In particular, an increase in the levels of commercially focused applied research by business, universities and Further Education.</p>	<p>21. Business representative organisations to be provided with details of R&D activities undertaken by universities so that they might better inform local companies of the R&D and Innovation facilities universities can offer – HE and FE sectors</p>	<p>A new Business Education Forum has been established involving members of the Business Alliance and representatives of the HE and FE sectors. This new body has provided an effective means for the exchange of information between the business and education sectors.</p>
	<p>22. Establish a high-level liaison between business organisations and further and higher education representatives to meet regularly to develop and monitor common policy issues – Business Alliance</p>	<p>The Business Education Forum meets quarterly and key issues explored to date include an ANIC paper on Science and Technology, local Technology Transfer and how best to align research and scientific support needs of NI businesses with universities’ research programmes.</p>
	<p>23. When the above actions have been implemented, attention should focus on the following:</p> <p>Companies (especially SMEs) to explore the potential to exploit the research / knowledge base of the two NI universities (and FE colleges) using the institutions as a R&D and Innovation service / consultancy provider e.g. through establishment / use of Centres of Excellence – HE and FE sectors</p>	<p>Companies (especially SMEs) are being encouraged to explore the potential to exploit the research / knowledge base of the two universities (and the FE colleges) through a range of initiatives. For example, partnerships have been established between local stakeholders and the universities, such as the Omagh University Partnership and the <i>University Knowledge Club</i>, which is marketed through Business Associations and District Councils. The universities are also pro-actively marketing the Knowledge Transfer Partnership programme, which is particularly suited to the needs of SMEs, and delivering university Business & Community Fellowship lectures to audiences of SMEs, as appropriate. The universities have also improved their websites to provide easier access to information on business services.</p>

Strategic Priority Area – Innovation and Creativity (Cont'd)

Objective – “To create an innovation culture and environment within which NI companies develop knowledge and ideas and then adapt and exploit them.”

<i>Key Outcomes</i>	<i>Additional Action</i>	<i>Current Position</i>
An increase in the level of company R&D activity.	24. R&D and Innovation to be heavily promoted and companies to be encouraged to undertake and spend more on commercially relevant R&D and Innovation. Case studies to be used to promote awareness of how best to secure commercial advantage by undertaking new or building on existing good quality research – Business Alliance	Business Alliance members have concluded that the most effective way they can contribute to the achievement of this action is through awareness programmes at individual company level, PR activities and tailored initiatives. A programme, in conjunction with the University of Ulster, has been initiated to benchmark continuous improvement in new product development. Three local companies have signed up to be linked to three UK companies and Brighton University.
	25. Business representative organisations to act as an information link to companies on R&D and Innovation matters and increase promotion of R&D and Innovation through newsletters and event programmes – Business Alliance	Business Alliance members have been keeping their members informed on matters relating to R&D and Innovation through their respective newsletters and monthly email updates. In addition, Business Alliance members have been involved with a number of events, such as the Robust Design course and the La Salle workshops that raise awareness and also improve linkages between companies and the NI universities.
Enhancing the status of innovation and creativity.	26. Develop an agreed medium-term action plan to take forward the <i>Unlocking Creativity Strategy</i> – DCAL	Following a period of consultation with stakeholders, DCAL launched the related action plan <i>A Creative Region</i> in October 2004. Copies can be accessed via the DCAL website.

Strategic Priority Area – Enterprise

Objective – “To create a culture and environment which supports and encourages enterprise and entrepreneurial activity.”

<i>Key Outcomes</i>	<i>Additional Action</i>	<i>Current Position</i>
Increasing the level of start-ups.	27. All sectors to debate, collectively develop and support an agreed set of proposals as the basis for lobbying to secure special tax allowances for Northern Ireland – EDF	EDF agreed the Terms of Reference for a research project to inform the debate on special tax incentives for NI. A research project Steering Group (which comprises members of EDF and representatives of DETI, DFP and OFMDFM) is currently overseeing this project.
	28. Banks to promote greater use of DTI’s Small Firm Loan Guarantee Scheme – Business Alliance	There has been a very low take up of the Small Firm Loan Guarantee (SFLG) scheme, in NI and indeed the UK as a whole. At the request of HMT/DTI a review of the SFLG scheme was undertaken and a Final Report of the Review was published in October 2004. The report includes a range of recommendations designed to maximise the support that the scheme offers to small firms. These include an expansion of the levels of funding available to individual SMEs; raising the turnover limit for eligible SMEs; focusing the scheme on supporting high growth start up and young firms by introducing an age limit on eligible firms; and a radical reduction in the bureaucracy surrounding SFLG. UK Government has committed to implementing all of the Review’s 38 recommendations.
	29. Awareness of franchise opportunities to be increased – Business Alliance	Business Alliance members have initiated discussions with InterTrade Ireland and Dublin Chamber of Commerce regarding the development of a programme of information events in Northern Ireland and Dublin to promote the benefits of franchising. The possibility of the development of a cross-border information bank of franchising opportunities and franchise purchasers is also being explored.

Strategic Priority Area – Enterprise (Cont’d)

Objective – “To create a culture and environment which supports and encourages enterprise and entrepreneurial activity.”

<i>Key Outcomes</i>	<i>Additional Action</i>	<i>Current Position</i>
Increasing the level of start-ups (Cont’d).	30. To exploit new market opportunities / gaps in markets, the contacts of the social partners to be used as a source of information from GB / ROI and elsewhere on new business opportunities (e.g. export opportunities) that may be open to existing NI firms or new start ups – EDF to feed info to a central information source coordinated by the Business Alliance.	Business Alliance members are facilitating 11 enterprises to trial and develop On-line Smart Communities. Over 50 companies are participating with the Smart Communities, enabling them to progress new business ideas and share information rapidly. ‘On-Line Smart communities’ are being piloted in N.I. by OFMDFM’s e-Government unit.
A rebalanced financial incentives package and an increased role for private equity finance and business angels.	31. Business representative organisations to organize seminars and presentations to promote the use of business angels – Business Alliance	Business Alliance members have held briefing sessions with Business Angels.
	32. Business representative organisations to be fully conversant with, and actively promote, Invest NI’s Business Support Principles and DETI / Invest NI’s Venture Capital Strategy – Business Alliance	The Invest NI Business Support Principles and the Venture Capital Strategy have been finalised and are available from the Invest NI website. Business Alliance members have published interviews with the Chief Executive of Invest NI and compiled information on the support programmes. Business Alliance members’ websites also contain links to the Invest NI website.

Strategic Priority Area – Enterprise (Cont'd)

Objective – “To create a culture and environment which supports and encourages enterprise and entrepreneurial activity.”

<i>Key Outcomes</i>	<i>Additional Action</i>	<i>Current Position</i>
The creation of a more supportive culture for enterprise (including business / education links) and greater celebration of the achievement of successful Northern Ireland entrepreneurs.	33. Business representative organisations to work to secure a stable funding environment for existing enterprise agencies (such as the Northern Ireland Business Education Partnership (NIBEP)) and provider bodies, such as Young Enterprise – Business Alliance	Business Alliance members have worked regularly and closely with a number of provider bodies including, Young Enterprise NI, Sentinus and Young Foresight. NIBEP ceased to exist with effect from end of October 2004. DE, supported by DEL and DETI, will put in place new arrangements for Government support of business education activities in line with recent changes agreed for the school curriculum.
	34. Business representative organisations to actively encourage local companies to accommodate placements – Business Alliance	Business Alliance members actively encourage local companies to accommodate placements. For example, 55 sixth formers, throughout NI, were placed with firms as part of IoD's Director Shadowing Scheme and were presented with certificates during Enterprise Week, November 2004.
	35. Greater involvement / commitment by business in promoting enterprise in schools (eg through NIBEP). Successful case studies to be used to highlight the benefits of greater enterprise – Business Alliance	During 2004, Business Alliance members increased the number of pupils that participated in its Director Shadowing Scheme by 15% and met with Young Enterprise to discuss sponsorship and a junior award of excellence/entrepreneurship. Members also assisted in the establishment and running of a pilot Young Foresight Project.
	36. A scheme to be established to provide college principals with boardroom experience – Business Alliance	A scheme to provide college principals with boardroom experience is being actively pursued, in collaboration with Business in the Community. Business Alliance members also met with University and Further Education representatives to establish a strategy for moving forward and further engagement is planned.

Strategic Priority Area – Enterprise (Cont'd)

Objective – “To create a culture and environment which supports and encourages enterprise and entrepreneurial activity.”

<i>Key Outcomes</i>	<i>Additional Action</i>	<i>Current Position</i>
<p>The creation of a more supportive culture for enterprise (including business / education links) and greater celebration of the achievement of successful Northern Ireland entrepreneurs (Cont'd).</p>	<p>37. The trade union movement to liaise with Concordia to consider what role Local Strategy Partnerships (LSPs) could play in creating a more supportive culture for enterprise – NIC/CTU</p>	<p>Congress will place this on the agenda for the next Board meeting of Concordia. Concordia has already undertaken considerable work and a major conference was held recently in Belfast. This conference was addressed by senior Government figures from both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Congress and the other social partners are currently considering the first stage of the mid-term evaluation on the role of Local Strategy Partnerships. This is also an issue that Congress is pursuing at the Regional Partnership Board.</p>
	<p>38. Further education colleges to explore the inclusion of, for example, a module in innovation, creativity and enterprise for FE and HE students which can be accredited - DEL</p>	<p>A Certificate of Enterprise has been developed to promote business enterprise awareness and skills in students in Further & Higher Education. The course has been designed to be broadly comparable to one GCSE AS Level at Level III and to one GCSE at Level II. At present the certificate is only targeted at Further Education students but, when it is accredited within the National Qualifications Framework, it will be opened to anyone or any institution. DEL is also progressing a pilot Vocational Enhancement Programme (VEP), involving FE Colleges and school pupils. The pilot aims to develop a framework that will support local collaboration between schools and FE colleges to expose 14 -19 year olds exposure to a range of learning that ensures they are aware of all the career choices available to them.</p>
	<p>39. Department of Education to consider CCEA proposals for a revised statutory curriculum with a view to introducing education for employability recommendations – DE</p>	<p>The Education Minister has accepted proposals from CCEA and, as a result, Learning for Life and Work will become a core part of the curriculum. Work has commenced on drafting legislation to implement the revised curriculum from September 2006, and some piloting has already commenced.</p>

Strategic Priority Area – Outward Looking

Objective – “To further enhance the ability of Northern Ireland companies to compete successfully in international markets and encourage NI entrepreneurs to take a more global view of business opportunities.”

<i>Key Outcomes</i>	<i>Additional Action</i>	<i>Current Position</i>
An increase in exports from Northern Ireland, especially from SMEs.	40. Going beyond the current trade missions programme, increased use of a collaborative (e.g. sectoral / cluster) approach to joint marketing of products by companies to be investigated and promoted. Case studies of collaborative approaches in other regions to be publicised - CforC	Invest NI, NICCI and CforC have jointly organised research into opportunities for collaborative supplier / marketing opportunities in ROI. CforC hosted Bio Northern Ireland and supported InterTradeIreland to develop a Bio-Ireland cross border cluster group. In the ICT sector, discussions with Momentum to develop cross border clusters have focused on innovation. With Invest NI support, NICCI reported on opportunities for trade promotion in the EU Accession States of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. A NICCI report has also been completed on the existing market and business information available to NI companies interested in exporting. NICCI worked Dublin Chamber of Commerce to deliver a mission to Atlanta in October 04 and a series of 6 sourcing seminars and organised 3 sourcing missions to Cork, Limerick and Galway.
An increase in Northern Ireland firms' market intelligence capabilities.	41. A clear and concise document to be produced to advise the business sector of the market intelligence resources available – Invest NI	Invest NI circulated a document on market intelligence sources to client companies and other interested parties at end March 2004. Copies are available on Invest NI's website.
	42. Details of potential emerging markets to be collated and disseminated - CforC	CforC is in discussions with international contacts to identify technology transfer opportunities from, and to, NI. Notable examples are CforC / NITA links to Lithuania, CforC links to the Czech Republic and Boomer Industries – Poland. In addition, NICCI visited Liverpool Chamber to find out how they develop market information / visits and a report was subsequently presented to Invest NI on Liverpool's Chinalink Project. Work is ongoing with Invest NI on developing markets in Germany and the new EC accession countries.
	43. Business representative organisations to promote awareness of existing market intelligence information / sources to their members – Business Alliance	Business Alliance members have engaged in a number of activities including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the IoD Business Information Service, which provides market intelligence and business information free to all UK members; – the CforC e-Competitive News, which is distributed quarterly; and – discussions with Invest NI as to how best to utilize their overseas offices and related market intelligence.

Strategic Priority Area – Outward Looking (Cont'd)

Objective – “To further enhance the ability of Northern Ireland companies to compete successfully in international markets and encourage NI entrepreneurs to take a more global view of business opportunities.”

<i>Key Outcomes</i>	<i>Additional Action</i>	<i>Current Position</i>
An increase in Northern Ireland firms' market intelligence capabilities (Cont'd).	44. On implementation of the above actions, steps should be taken to address gaps in market intelligence, for example, for certain products or sub sectors - CforC	CforC is developing two initiatives to address gaps in market intelligence, a Process Survey Tool (PST) for marketing and sales and a pilot marketing and sales course, certified by the Institute of Commercial Management. PST's help companies assess the level of maturity of a process or function and give clear indications on how to improve to reach next levels of maturity.
Expansion of the business of tourism, i.e. an increase in the number of visitors and revenue earned from tourism.	45. Best use should be made of the new Cultural Desk in the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington in order to promote the Cultural Tourism product – All sectors	All sectors actively pursue opportunities to make use of the Cultural Desk in Washington and also the NI Executive office in Brussels.

Strategic Priority Area – Equality of Opportunity / Social Inclusion

Objective – “To maximize and support the integration of disadvantaged individuals / groups into mainstream economic activity.”

<i>Key Outcomes</i>	<i>Additional Action</i>	<i>Current Position</i>
An improvement in the employability of disadvantaged groups.	46. DEL, working closely with industry and business representative organisations, to develop a more cohesive strategy for encouraging employers to actively help the more disadvantaged in Northern Ireland into work - DEL	DEL has progressed / supported a number of key actions including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the establishment of an Employers Forum for Strabane and Derry; – the establishment of a similar forum in Belfast, in partnership with Business in the Community (BiTC) and Bombardier; – piloting an Employment Liaison service; and – piloting the Diversity Matters in partnership with Disability Action and other organisations, representing public private and voluntary sectors and funded by the Equal Community Initiative programme, which aims to promote co-operation and a partnership approach to diversity issues in the workplace.
	47. The trade union movement is to consider how it might contribute to the employability of disadvantaged groups by arranging for this to be discussed by the Congress Equality and Disability Committees – NIC/ICTU	The employability of disadvantaged groups is an on going component of the work of both the Congress Equality and Disability Committees. Congress worked with DEL, City Bridges and BiTC to publish a disability guide for the workplace, which was launched in November 2004. A guide for trainers is also being produced in conjunction with this publication and will be made available to trainers. A new course, “Introduction To Equality”, developed by ICTU in partnership with the Equality Commission and BIFHE, will be provided from February 2005.
	48. Employers to be encouraged to review arrangements for childcare provision – Business Alliance	Members of the Business Alliance and NICVA are represented on Employers for Childcare, which works with employers to enable suitable childcare arrangements to be made for staff. Key activities to date have included, case studies on family friendly policies, a seminar for local politicians, a seminar on employer supported childcare provision, 24 presentations to business/statutory sector and 7 presentations to employee groups.

Strategic Priority Area – Equality of Opportunity / Social Inclusion (Cont'd)

Objective – “To maximize and support the integration of disadvantaged individuals / groups into mainstream economic activity.”

<i>Key Outcomes</i>	<i>Additional Action</i>	<i>Current Position</i>
<p>An improvement in the employability of disadvantaged groups (Cont'd).</p>	<p>49. Steps to improve the employability of disadvantaged groups to be addressed in the development and implementation of the Integrated Local Strategies produced by LSPs – District Councils / LSPs</p>	<p>Councils and LSP's continue to support disadvantaged groups and a range of innovative programmes are targeting direct support towards the most marginalised groups and areas within NI, as identified by the Noble Indices. Council and LSP programmes combine to provide improved community infrastructure, mentoring, capacity building, entrepreneurial activity, education and skills levels, etc, to a range of sectoral groupings including women's groups, single identity, cross-community, disabled groups etc, many of which are located in dispersed rural communities and New TSN areas. Some notable examples are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Positive Steps Learning Centre – A women's organisation targeting disadvantaged groups was provided with funding to move to new premises, which provides disabled access, on-site crèche facilities and greater opportunities for gaining qualifications and skills for employment. – Broughderg Rural Development Association – A community development organisation located in a dispersed and deprived rural community received financial assistance to convert an old church building into a modern community, workspace and learning facility. – Northern Ireland Tenants Action Project – Employment of a part-time worker to provide support to 4 urban estates and associations within Cookstown to assist them with low level support and capacity building. – Youth Support – Employment of a Youth Development Worker to compliment the work of SELB in providing capacity building support to disadvantaged young people across the Cookstown District.

Strategic Priority Area – Human Capital – Enhancing Capabilities and Skills

Objective – “To ensure that the Northern Ireland workforce is equipped with appropriate skills to support the current and future needs of the economy.”

Key Outcomes	Additional Action	Current Position
A reduction in the % of the workforce with no qualifications and the number of young people and adults with literacy and numeracy problems.	50. The trade union movement to consider how its resources for life-long learning and from the Union Learning Fund might be used to contribute to a reduction in the percentage of the workforce with no qualifications – NIC/ICTU	In preparing for the 3 rd round of the Union Learning Fund (ULF), NIC/ICTU supported trade unions that had not previously made applications. 6 projects were funded in the 1 st round and 5 projects in the 2 nd round. 9 of these projects included a focus on essential skills. NIC/ICTU also works closely with the FE sector to develop strategic partnerships and with community providers such as WEA, BURC and EGSA.
	51. Trade union training programmes, and participation in life-long learning programme, to be reviewed to ensure consistency with reducing substantially the number of young people and adults with literacy and numeracy problems – NIC/ICTU	All NIC/ICTU tutors are trained to identify potential literacy and numeracy skills requirements and to encourage participants to consider opportunities available at FE colleges. NIC/ICTU has also examined the scope to include Essential Skills awareness in the basic Union Learning Representatives (ULR) training programme; considered how to further incorporate Essential Skills into all TU training; and continues to identify and refer participants. During 2004, NIC/ICTU has trained more than 50 ULRs. NIC/ICTU works closely with EGSA to ensure that ULRs are supported after initial training.
	52. Employers to be encouraged to review their responsibilities for staff development and to explore the cost of staff training relative to productivity gains – Business Alliance	Business Alliance members have met with Invest NI and DEL to discuss skills strategy. Consideration has also been given to the potential scope for developing a points system that would lead to a recognised university certificate on learning and applying Business Excellence improvement tools & techniques. Invest NI ran a pilot ‘Return on Investment’ programme with ten companies, which had received Company Development Programme funding. This pilot demonstrated a positive return on training programmes and Invest NI will encourage all companies, planning to spend in excess of £100k on training, to undertake a Return on Investment analysis of their training programmes.

Strategic Priority Area – Human Capital – Enhancing Capabilities and Skills (Cont'd)

Objective – “To ensure that the Northern Ireland workforce is equipped with appropriate skills to support the current and future needs of the economy.”

<i>Key Outcomes</i>	<i>Additional Action</i>	<i>Current Position</i>
An increase in the level of skills in ICT and growth sectors.	53. To promote a culture of competitiveness / investment within NI business, the benefits of upgrading skills to be promoted through case studies to encourage companies to spend more and undertake more training to raise skills as part of a strategy to improve business competitiveness – Business Alliance	Members of the Business Alliance worked with CCEA to review the GCSE curriculum in order to identify ways to incorporate technical subjects and skills, which support business improvement. Work was also undertaken to develop an employee Skills Transfer Package.
	54. District Councils to work towards making their areas e-enabled – District Councils	District Councils continue work with DETI to roll out Broadband to all key provincial towns as well as many smaller towns, villages and rural areas. Bids are being prepared for a range of projects including Electronic Building Control applications and Electronic Property Certificate applications. NILGA carried out research to assist the development of a NI wide Local Authority e-Government Strategy. This revealed that a number of Councils are providing online services in areas such as dog licensing, building control application forms, facility booking, and grant applications. Work is progressing to develop the Strategy further.
The promotion of leadership skills and the encouragement of individuals to reach their full potential through the use of role models / coaching / mentoring.	55. Trade union training programmes, and participation in Learn-direct, to be reviewed to ensure consistency with promoting leadership skills and encouraging individuals to reach their full potential – NIC/ICTU	NIC/ICTU is in discussion with the University for Industry (UFI) to consider how their relationship can be further developed and formalised to ensure that ‘learndirect®’ products are made more accessible to Trade Union members and people in work.

Strategic Priority Area – Human Capital – Enhancing Capabilities and Skills (Cont'd)

Objective – “To ensure that the Northern Ireland workforce is equipped with appropriate skills to support the current and future needs of the economy.”

<i>Key Outcomes</i>	<i>Additional Action</i>	<i>Current Position</i>
<p>An increase in the links between further education and schools to enable pupils to experience a range of skills sampling before leaving school and the creation of a more relevant curriculum which integrates creativity throughout.</p>	<p>56. Imaginative links are being developed between the schools and the FE sector for Year 11 and 12 pupils. Such links should be extended to include pupils in the higher ability range who could be involved in project work involving creativity and innovation. In addition, collaboration could be developed between 6th forms and Further Education Colleges to offer a range of entrepreneurial and creative opportunities to explore wider choice of career paths – DE / FE sector</p>	<p>Phase 5 of the Key Stage 4 Flexibility Initiative, which commenced in September 2004, has seen increased numbers of schools and pupils participating and linking with FE colleges. Progress on the development of collaboration between schools and FE colleges will now be taken forward in the context of the outcomes of the Post Primary Review and the FE Review both of which advocate much closer working between schools and FE colleges. £1.2 million has been allocated to participating schools to help cover additional costs.</p> <p>DEL and the FE sector have also taken forward a number of lay initiatives in support of this action, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – piloting the Vocational Enhancement programme; – developing and piloting a Certificate of Enterprise; and – piloting a new Occupational Standards qualification for year 12.

Strategic Priority Area – A Competitive Physical Infrastructure

Objective – “To secure for Northern Ireland a well-developed and internationally competitive physical infrastructure which meets the needs of existing businesses and attracts inward investment.”

<i>Key Outcomes</i>	<i>Additional Action</i>	<i>Current Position</i>
<p>The development of more competitive energy markets.</p>	<p>57. Establish options and a timescale for reducing energy costs - DETI</p>	<p>DETI published its Strategic Energy Framework (SEF) on 30 June 2004. The goals of the SEF are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reduce energy costs; - build competitive energy markets; - protect our future by enhancing renewables and sustainability; and - secure a reliable energy supply. <p>A proposal to deliver a 10% reduction in electricity tariffs for business users received a negative reaction from the European Commission. Alternative options for securing EU support for the proposal are being considered by DETI in conjunction with DTI, UKREP, NIAER and the Departmental Solicitor’s Office.</p> <p>In early October 2004, DETI and the NI Authority for Energy Regulation (NIAER) completed the implementation of postalisation of the Northern Ireland gas network. The policy was implemented to help facilitate the extension of the gas network in Northern Ireland and, along with NI Executive funding, lead to the completion of a gas pipeline to Coolkeeragh outside Londonderry also in October. The pipeline made possible the construction of a new 400 Megawatt Combined Gas Turbine power station at Coolkeeragh and will make gas available to a number of towns along the route of the pipeline.</p>
<p>The implementation of the Regional Transportation Strategy and the development of Northern Ireland’s air and sea ports as key gateways.</p>	<p>58. There should be continued liaison with the Department for Transport to convey the importance of addressing the particular needs of Northern Ireland relating to air access links - DRD</p>	<p>The Air Transport White paper was published in December 2003 and DRD will implement policy as it applies to Northern Ireland and review policy and legislation as necessary. DETI/Invest NI have established an Air Route Development company with the aim of promoting the development of new air routes to NI. DRD has responded to a consultation paper issued by the Department for Transport on the protection of regional air services to London.</p>