

Chairperson: Prof. Robert Bowman

Please reply to:  
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Ms Aine O'Neill  
Department for Employment and Learning  
Lesley Buildings  
61 Fountain Street  
Belfast  
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17<sup>th</sup> September 2010

**Re: Success Through Skills 2 Consultation**

Dear Ms O'Neill

The Institute of Physics in Ireland welcomes the opportunity to submit a response to the Department for Employment and Learning's Success Through Skills 2 Consultation.

The Institute of Physics in Ireland is a scientific membership organisation devoted to increasing the understanding and application of physics in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It has over 1800 members, and is part of the Institute of Physics.

The Institute of Physics has a world-wide membership of over 37, 000 and is a leading communicator of physics-related science to all audiences, from specialists through to government and the general public. Its publishing company, IOP Publishing, is a world leader in scientific publishing and the electronic dissemination of physics.

The Institute is broadly in agreement with the strategy outlined and particularly welcomes the highlighting of the importance of skills in the physical sciences to the Northern Ireland economy. Full details of the Institute's responses are attached.

If you require any further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact the Institute at the above address.

Yours sincerely,



Prof. Robert Bowman  
Chairperson  
Institute of Physics in Ireland

## SUCCESS THROUGH SKILLS 2 CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

1. This strategy sets out where Northern Ireland is now and where it needs to be if we are to compete globally and build a fairer prosperous society. Do you agree with the analysis and the aspirations?

Yes

No

Comment:

*The Institute of Physics broadly agrees with the strategy, particularly in relation to the pivotal role of the physical sciences to the N. Ireland economy. As evidenced by the MATRIX report of the Northern Ireland Science and Industry panel, and the Oxford Economics skills reports, the demand for skills in the area of physical sciences will increase significantly in the coming years.*

*Equipping students and the workforce with key skills in this area is essential to promote both the provision of high level jobs and innovation throughout the economy. At present physics based technologies supports around one million jobs in the UK, or 5% of all jobs. In addition these are highly productive jobs with a Gross Value Added (GVA) per employee at £69,000 - 70% higher than the UK average. Given Northern Ireland's current low GVA per employee, as noted in the strategy document, it is clear that it is growth in this type of employment which is essential for the region.*

*The Institute particularly welcomes the specific strategic goal to increase the numbers qualifying with Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths subjects by 25-30% in 2010.*

2. This strategy builds on the actions from Success through Skills 1 recognising that there needs to be a step change in the skills levels of the workforce in Northern Ireland. Do you agree with the range of actions outlined in this document?

Yes

No

Comment:

*The Institute agrees with the measures proposed and notes that much of the action requires co-ordination across several government departments and agencies – eg in areas such as services and information on careers in science and technology and in building links between education and industry.*

3. Given the pressures on public finances which actions do you believe will make the most difference and should be priority?

Comment:

*The Institute considers that actions on Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) related skills must take the highest priority. All of the reports cited within the strategy document, highlight the essential nature of such skills to the N. Ireland economy. To facilitate this and to act as a driver for change, the IOP would strongly recommend the full implementation of the Northern Ireland STEM Review proposals and in particular would say the rapid appointment of a chief science advisor or champion is vital to ensure a strong, fully co-ordinated approach to the implementation of proposals in this area.*