

QPANI



**Response to the Draft  
Programme for**

**Government 2011 -  
2015  
February 2012**

#### Introduction

The Quarry Products Association Northern Ireland welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Review of the Regional Development Strategy. Founded in Northern Ireland in 1998 the Quarry Products Association NI now represents over 95% of the quarry products industry. Our membership includes major, medium and smaller sized companies directly employing over 3700 people with an annual turnover of over ½ billion pounds.

The Quarry Products sector is a key essential industry that contributes significantly to the quality of life of every man woman and child in Northern Ireland.

The quarry products industry has a long and proud history of

1. Providing secure, long term employment in rural areas designated by Government as targeting social need.
2. Being a massive net contributor to the Northern Ireland Economy and a major investor in local communities.
3. Not receiving hand-outs or benefiting from Invest NI assistance similar to that given to overseas companies who stay for a short period then leave.
4. Having the majority of our companies, both large and small, family owned with their roots firmly established in Ireland.
5. Fulfilling our Corporate and Social Responsibility by investing significantly in the Environment and in protecting the health and safety of all who work in and visit our sites.

#### QPANI Comments

The QPANI welcome the opportunity to comment on the draft Programme for Government 2011 - 2015.

We welcome the Executive making the Economy the top priority in the PFG and the Commitments that stated particularly,

- £50 million loan fund to aid liquidity of small and medium sized enterprises
- To have 90% of large scale investment planning applications made within 6 months and that applications with job creation potential are given additional weight.
- Deliver 8,000 social and affordable homes
- Improve the thermal efficiency of the HE stock.
- Upgrading of the Coleraine to Derry railway line.
- Investment of £600 million in water and sewage infrastructure.
- Upgrading of key road projects and improvement of the road network.
- £500 million to promote sustainable modes of travel.

We fully recognise the significant financial constraints the current economic situation and the Governments comprehensive spending review has placed on the Executive. This in our view makes it all the more important that we maximise benefit out of every tax payers pound we spend.

QPANI recognise the progress the Executive has already made,

- The significant reduction in road deaths to the lowest levels since 1931.
- The construction of 53 major capital school projects completed representing an investment of £492 million in the schools estate.
- Investment of more than £1 billion in improvements to the water infrastructure.
- Investment in major road schemes such as the A1, A2 and A4, Westlink and M2.
- Improvements in our recycling rates and waste management infrastructure.
- Increasing electricity generated from renewable sources. However we are concerned that not enough joined up Government and quick decisions are happening to ensure the timely upgrading of our electricity transmission grid.

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But, we believe much more could have been achieved. We would highlight;

- The failure of implementing the Review of Public Administration.
- The money wasted on the failed National Stadium project.
- Slow speed of much needed changes to the planning process.
- More use of innovative funding methods and revenue raising powers to invest in capital projects.
- Failure to carry out an independent review, similar to that carried out in Scotland and the Irish Republic, aimed at identifying current resources which might be transferred to capital funding.
- Our roads infrastructure spending still falls way behind that of our nearest competitors.
- We also believe the length of consultation period is too long given the urgent need for decision making in the face of the current economic problems.
- Failure to rebalance the economy during the “good economic times” a few years back.

We believe the single biggest challenge facing the Executive is raising additional revenue to fund the achievements of their commitments. This is not easy as the Executives freedom to borrow and leverage private sector investment is limited by HM Treasury rules. In other parts of the UK the local authorities have more power and responsibility and can therefore leverage in more private sector investment for building various types of infrastructure. Also in the rest of the UK there is greater private sector ownership of the infrastructure such as railways and water which means more investment from private sector sources. The Executive needs to consider how we create more “arms length / mutualised” bodies and agencies that have more freedom to borrow and leverage private sector investment.

As in other years our main criticism of this Programme for Government and the Investment Strategy is the lack of detail and balancing of the books. However as stated above we must recognise the financial constraints that face the Executive.

This Programme for Government will not address the infrastructure deficit that we face in Northern Ireland compared to our nearest economic competitors. Recent figures show that in Northern Ireland we invest 32% less per head of population in infrastructure construction than Scotland and 16% less than in England. This shows that our existing infrastructure deficit is set to grow.

The lack of money available in years 2, 3 and 4 of the current budget period for roads structural maintenance will result in a further deterioration of the condition of our road network.

Given the recent decision by the Irish Government to postpone their contribution to the A5 project QPANI would ask that immediate attention is given to reallocating funding to other priority roads, including sections of the A5, and construction projects that are “shovel ready” and will sustain the

maximum number of jobs and creates the widest possible economic ripple effect in the local economy.

Our view is that a major re-allocation of funds to projects that deliver significant benefits to the economy and the maximum creation of employment should be considered.

We would also urge the Executive and the Regional Development Minister to reallocate some £168 M of funds to Structural maintenance in years 2, 3 and 4 of the current CSR period to bring the SM expenditure over the four year budget period up to that outlined in the Departments SM funding plan. The economic ripple effect of investment of the redirected funds in these projects would be enormous and act as a real springboard for re-energising and growth of the local economy and the construction industry.

We welcome the recognition by the NI Executive that certain labour intensive activities such as facilities and roads maintenance, refurbishments and upgrades can employ twice as many people as other construction related projects that require purchase of land or specialist materials.

In terms of railway infrastructure the facts are that Northern Ireland is almost completely reliant on our road network for all our transport needs and that is not going to change in the foreseeable future.

There are a number of reasons for this notably

- Our rurally based economy.
- Small area and population
- Closure of most of our railway lines between 1950 and 1970.

However we must invest more in an integrated public transport system primarily in the greater Belfast area. QPANI welcome the continued support for the Belfast Rapid Transport System and the proposed £500 million in promoting more sustainable modes of transport. We would welcome more detail on how this is to be achieved and what projects the money will be invested.

We also believe that the PFG and IS do not go far enough on a number of issues such as changes to the procurement process and the supporting of local jobs with the introduction of social clauses into Government Construction projects.

We are disappointed that more focus has not been given to attracting alternative forms of funding and revenue generation to fund road maintenance and development.

The Executives online investment strategy information portal is a welcome addition to communicating progress on key infrastructure projects. However experience to date indicates that the website is not being kept up to date and the information going on it could be of more value to the construction industry.

#### Milestones and Outputs

As stated there is an inadequate level of detail of how many of the commitments are going to be funded and benefits measured, for example the priority road schemes. We certainly recognise the two main public transport schemes are the Derry to Coleraine railway line and the Belfast Rapid Transit Scheme.

The PFG and IS certainly lack key performance indicators to measure progress in achieving road infrastructure and public transport objectives. The key milestones in 2012/13 to achieve 60% of large scale planning applications delivered in 6 months is not ambitious enough.

QPANI believe that we should follow the Scottish Government's ambitious agenda to make Scotland a more successful country through a new national performance framework, fully integrated into their Spending Review, which will underpin delivery against the government's agenda. This framework is designed to be clear, logical and easy to understand. It provides a unified vision and quantifiable benchmarks against which future progress can be assessed. In developing the national performance framework the Scottish Government have drawn on the successful outcomes-based model of the Commonwealth of Virginia, USA. They believe it will allow them more clearly and openly to demonstrate their performance as a government and sharpen the focus of all those responsible for public services on the delivery of Scotland's priorities.

In Northern Ireland we should be moving the whole of government to an outcomes-focused approach to performance. This means that Government will be judged on the results that they achieve; results which reflect real and meaningful improvements in public services and quality of life for people in Northern Ireland.

Our approach should be to focus government on the key long term challenges for Northern Ireland that will enable, and encourage, more effective partnership working right across the public sector and with stakeholders. The whole of the public sector should be expected to contribute to one overarching purpose and all performance management systems should therefore be aligned to a single, clear and consistent set of priorities.

#### Monitoring

We would welcome significantly more detail, rather than the one page in the PfG, of how progress towards the Programme for Government Commitments will be measured and monitored.

#### Conclusion

The vision of the Executive should be to ensure that Northern Ireland will remain competitive in the global international marketplace and that the fruits of our economic success will be shared more equally at regional level and throughout society and deliver key sustainable development targets. QPANI recognise that the commitments and priorities outlined in this Programme for Government can achieve this vision. However like so many other Programmes for Government it is our view this programme lacks detail particularly in how progress towards goals and objectives is going to be monitored and measured. We do recognise that the PFG, the Economic Strategy and Investment Strategy do exhibit joined up thinking and there is significant integration between the three documents for which the Executive should be commended. QPANI, like so many others, now want to see delivery, quick decisions being taken, regular and effective monitoring and clear accountability for responsible individuals.

Signed

Matthew Murphy

**Chairman, QPANI**

Signed

Gordon Best

**Regional Director QPANI**

Date 1<sup>st</sup> February 2012

## Quaker Service



### **Draft Programme for Government 2011 -2015**

#### *Quaker Service response*

Quaker Service runs a number of services primarily at Quaker Cottage and at Maghaberry Prison. At Quaker Cottage we offer support to disadvantaged families and children. We also run a programme for teenagers which has recently included a pilot project at Hydebank Wood. At Maghaberry we run the Visitors' Centre providing a range of services in support of prisoners' families and have recently started a volunteer programme which includes support of isolated inmates. Quaker Service has also been a lead player in the Restorative Justice Forum and has had involvement in the development of plans for the Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre at Maze/Long Kesh.

Our comments on the Draft Programme for Government are therefore focussed on issues affecting disadvantaged families and young people and issues in the criminal justice field.

In broad terms we welcome the Programme for Government and the five priorities. We do feel that in some respects the proposals lack detail and may be rather unambitious.

Our specific comments are as follows:-

#### Priority 1

*Key Commitment: Develop Maze/Long Kesh as a regeneration site of regional significance.*

We welcome the target of completing the Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre by 2014/5. We realise that this is a very important and difficult project and feel that the proposed time scale is reasonable given the complexities of the task. We hope that sufficient resources are made available to ensure that the project develops in an appropriate fashion.

## Priority 2

Many of the commitments relate to alleviating poverty and social exclusion which we welcome but we are unsure how they will all work together. We believe that it is critical that the Government has a clear strategy which addresses disadvantage and poverty but are not sure that this comes across in the Programme.

We welcome the commitment relating to fuel poverty although it lacks detail.

There are several references to the Social Investment Fund but little detail as to how it will work nor how it will link with the Social Protection Fund which is also unclear.

We welcome the proposal to complete a Child Poverty Action Plan but await more specific proposals.

We welcome proposals aimed at helping young people into work. We believe that youth unemployment is a very significant issue in Northern Ireland today and, if it is not addressed skilfully, it is likely to lead to higher levels of criminality and anti-social behaviour. It is highly important that the provision of high quality skills and training is central to any employment support schemes and that measures are taken to ensure that they cannot be used to exploit young people.

## Priority 3

We are particularly interested in proposals relating to reducing crime and, in particular the reduction of re-offending. We believe that the use of Restorative Justice practices can play a significant role both in the reduction of re-offending and in ensuring that more vulnerable members of the community feel safer. We are therefore disappointed that there is no reference to Restorative Justice either in the commitment relating to reducing the level of serious crime nor in the commitment relating to tackling crime against older and vulnerable people.

With reference to the commitment to improve community safety by tackling anti-social behaviour, we believe that there should be additional financial support to resource community initiatives set up to deal with asb by providing alternative diversionary activities and programmes.

Priority 4.

*Key Commitment: Reform and Modernise the Prison Service*

We are pleased to see this key commitment but do not feel that the milestones are either detailed or comprehensive enough given the scale of the work to be undertaken.

Priority 5

*Key Commitment: Include Social Clauses in public procurement contracts for supplies, services and construction*

We welcome this key commitment.

David Bass

Chairman

Queen's University Belfast



## The Sharing Education Programme

Queen's University Belfast

### **Response to the Northern Ireland Executive's Draft Programme for Government, 2011-15**

*"Building a better future..."*



## Background

The Queen's University Shared Education Programme (SEP) has been in operation since 2007 when the School of Education began to work with twelve partnerships based on the first cohort of specialist schools in Northern Ireland. The twelve partnerships, involving over 60 schools and 4000 pupils, developed innovative solutions to collaborative practice and were able to demonstrate clear social and educational benefits.

Work with the first cohort of partnerships was completed in June 2010 and the programme has been extended for a further three years with another cohort of partnerships, consisting of over 60 schools and 5000 pupils to date.

SEP comprises three broad strands of activities:

- **Delivering shared education** – increasing the number of pupils experiencing shared learning with partner schools from different community backgrounds. The criteria for funding gives priority to increasing the number of shared classes that sustain pupil to pupil relationships and which assists curriculum delivery. Typical activities undertaken by schools include:
  - Year 14 students completing 'A' level subjects in cross-community classes
  - Year 12 students completing GCSE subjects in cross-community classes
  - Jointly provided and accredited vocational training courses
  - Combined citizenship and personal development and mutual understanding (PDMU) classes
  - Science mentoring classes - primary schools children from mixed backgrounds attending science classes in a post-primary school
  - Collaborative ICT projects through face-to-face contact and web-based learning
  - Joint schools drama production as part of the GCSE curriculum
  - Foreign languages training for mixed primary schools.
  
- **Supporting teacher development to deliver shared education** – delivering shared classes to pupils from different community backgrounds places particular responsibilities on teachers and school planners. Educational and good/community relations experts support the teachers and planners involved in delivering shared education.
  
- **Ensuring organisational learning and inter-community collaboration amongst partner schools** – supporting school staff to manage change through mentoring and joint events to allow for networking, the sharing of practice, and facilitated discussions on problem solving and the development of new practice.

## **Draft Programme for Government commitments**

Given the above, we have very specific interests in the draft Programme of Government (PfG), in particular the following proposed commitments:

### **Building a strong and shared community.**

#### Commitments:

- Finalise the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy to build a united community and improve community relations.
- Significantly progress work on the plan for the Lisanelly Shared Education campus as a key regeneration project.
- Establish a Ministerial advisory group to explore and bring forward recommendations to the Minister of Education to advance shared education.
- Ensure all children have the opportunity to participate in shared education programmes by 2015 and substantially increase the number of schools sharing facilities by 2015.
- We will make the Education and Skills Authority operational in 2013.

### **Queen's University Belfast Response to priorities**

The first thing to note is that we welcome and support these commitments in the draft Programme for Government, particularly in terms of the Executive's priority of 'building a strong and shared community' and the contribution which education reforms can make to achieving this goal.

However, there appears to be a lack of understanding within the Department of Education as to what is meant by 'shared education'. This is an important 'gap' in the draft Programme for Government since the commitments contained therein are predicated on such an understanding. In the recent appearance of senior DE officials before the Assembly Committee, for example, when asked about the interpretation of shared education and its inclusion in the PfG, one senior official commented that it 'emanated from a political process. We (DE) are the recipients of it, not the shapers... We are at the start of a process here, and we have to draw up the terms of reference for it (the Ministerial Advisory Group) and see how ambitious it will be. This issue came out of a political process and we are

surmising the genesis of it. We are in the foothills of this issue, and we will need a political steer on it'<sup>1</sup>.

At the same committee DE officials, when pressed by MLAs on timescales for commitments on the advisory group, claimed they wanted this work 'to move forward pretty quickly' and 'rather than allowing the issue to meander on for some time, there would have to be a fairly tightly focused piece of work to bring back something fairly quickly'.

**Defining shared education:** In light of these comments and in the spirit of being helpful, QUB offers a working definition of shared education as follows:

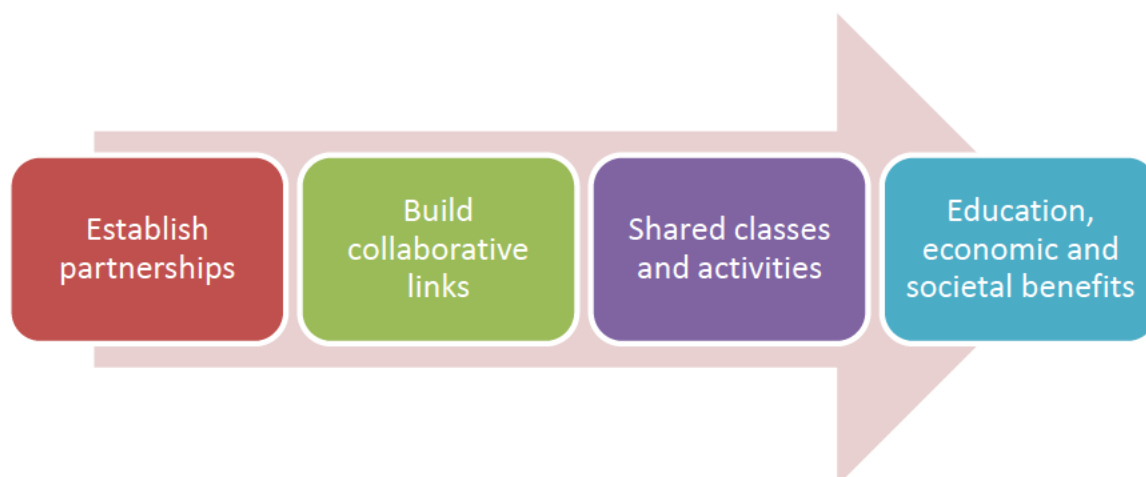
Developments in education policy over the past decade (including the Bain Report, Entitlement Framework, Extended Schools Policy and Area Learning Communities) have been marked by increased support for school collaboration and cooperation. Within this policy context shared education refers to schools from different sectors working together in a sustained process, ranging from two or more schools making shared use of specialist facilities, through to coordinated timetabling and pupils taking classes across a network of schools. Shared education is distinct from integrated education, which involves the removal of sectoral differentiation in favour of unitary common schools. Shared education has the potential to contribute to school improvement and access to opportunity, encourage more effective use of resources, and promote social cohesion through the achievement of a shared and better society.

Research evidence shows clearly that the greatest reconciliation impact is achieved when the level of engagement between pupils, principals and teachers across a network of schools is regular and sustained. Research to date highlights the clear social, educational and economic benefits to be derived from shared practice. Furthermore, there is evidence that the benefits of sharing extend beyond the confines of the school and include parents and the wider communities served by schools (see model of Shared Education: figure 1).

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<sup>1</sup> Official Report (Hansard): 7<sup>th</sup> December 2011. Committee for Education

**Figure 1: Shared Education Model**



**DE's commitment to shared education:** Our concern is that unless the Department of Education embrace a robust and clearly delineated understanding of shared education, such as that offered in the above definition and accompanying model, then the commitments outlined in the draft Programme for Government could be met through a plethora of initiatives, including some potentially superficial responses to shared education such as: mere membership of area learning communities, but with little serious engagement with other schools; a limited element of diversity within a school enrolment; or participation in some of the EMU-style encounters, most of which have been clearly shown to have had limited impact. In other words, the commitment: 'ensure all children have the opportunity to participate in shared education programmes and substantially increase the number of schools sharing facilities' lacks specificity. This commitment is predicated on a definition of 'shared education programmes' and what precisely is meant by 'substantially increase the number of schools sharing facilities' – there is no baseline for either of these measures and, it would appear, no clear understanding of how this baseline ought to be set within DE.

In short, we are uncertain about how the Department of Education will choose to operationalise both these commitments. Shared education could be interpreted very loosely and lack ambition. We are very clear about what shared education programmes entail and would like to see this reflected in commitments by the Department of Education. Shared education programmes encourage schools to work together for the common good. These programmes emphasise sustained, regular contact among people from different communities in promoting understanding and cohesion. Shared education supports school improvement by harnessing the synergies to be achieved through schools and teachers working together. Shared education also offers the opportunity to make more efficient and effective use of the school estate by encouraging the use of shared facilities and resources.

## Next Steps

In order to further the process of mainstreaming the concept of sharing as outlined above we propose the following additions/amendments to the commitments contained in the draft PfG:

### Recommendation 1

Consider the legislative barriers to cross-sectoral sharing and collaboration and take steps to legislatively enable schools to enter formal collaborative partnerships, particularly in light of the continued absence of the Education and Skills and Authority (ESA).

The Terms of Reference for the Area-based planning process, which were released on 15<sup>th</sup> December state: "In delivering an area plan the Boards, working with CCMS and engaging extensively with other school sectors should take account of the guidance issued by the Department and seek to fulfil the following aims/objectives to:-

- identify realistic, innovative and creative solutions to address need, including opportunities for shared schooling on a cross sectoral basis"

It is our experience that whereby schools identify the solution outlined above it is difficult to identify the statutory bodies that are in a position to provide support and assistance. In addition there is confusion how current legislative provision supports the above instruction. We recommend that the current statutory bodies examine ways to support schools in achieving the above aims.

### Recommendation 2

We suggest that the following draft commitment:

*Ensure all children have the opportunity to participate in shared education programmes by 2015 and substantially increase the number of schools sharing facilities by 2015.*

Is amended to the following:

*Ensure all children have the opportunity to participate in **regular, sustained** shared **curricular activities** by 2015 and substantially increase the number of schools sharing facilities by 2015.*

This reflects our concern that the draft commitment as it originally stands could be interpreted in a number of ways, the danger being that in its current form the commitment suggest that "sharing" is additional to rather than the normal model of delivery for education in Northern Ireland.

In order for sharing to be embedded within schools it must be central to schools business, rather than an "add on", hence the focus on shared "curricular" activities.

It would represent a huge wasted opportunity if the current Executive did not grasp the chance to truly transform the education system in Northern Ireland, "sharing" should not be seen as an

additional model for solely addressing community relation issues, nor should the concept be interpreted as the next phase in EMU, but rather an overarching model of educational excellence for all young people regardless of background, ability or location.

### **Recommendation 3**

We recommend that all future plans for education provision should be “share proofed”

1. Education and Skills Authority:

We recommend that any legislation pertaining to the establishment of ESA is cognisant of the need to facilitate and advance the normalisation sharing and collaboration. Examples of this include enabling schools to establish collaborative arrangements such as confederations and more formal entities such as federations.

2. Future funding arrangements for schools:

The current funding formula benefits large schools as it is predicated on pupil numbers. This model also discourages collaboration between institutions. However, we recommend a future funding model that enables sharing and propose that schools are funded on an area basis thus encouraging area based collaborative solutions, minimising duplication and allowing schools more autonomy and room to be innovative in terms of addressing localised context and provision needs.

3. Future Policy

The definition of sharing espoused in this document should be a key priority for future policy formation and as a basis for current policy revision, relevant to education, in particular: CSI and CREDS

**Conclusion:** In conclusion, our primary focus in this response to the draft Programme for Government is on shared education. Whilst we welcome the broad commitments to this in the document, the lack of detail or clear definition of shared education may result in the Department of Education adopting a relatively superficial approach and result in a failure to embrace the essence of shared education leading to a repetition of the EMU type activities of the past. The milestones/outputs on shared education in the draft PfG are much more about process than product.

QUB is willing to engage further on this submission and is grateful for the opportunity to comment in the draft Programme for Government.

## **QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST**

### **Response to Draft Programme for Government and Economic Strategy**

This paper represents a response, by Queen's University Belfast, to the Draft Programme for Government and Economic Strategy, issued for consultation by the Northern Ireland Executive.

The vision for the Northern Ireland economy highlighted in the Draft Programme for Government (PfG) is based on "a sustainable and growing private sector, with a highly skilled and flexible workforce operating in productive and innovative firms that are competitive in global markets."

Queen's University supports this vision and will support the Executive and Assembly in achieving the goals outlined in the Draft Programme. We have long argued that higher education makes a significant and direct contribution to economic growth and job creation through its research and education. Furthermore, as we will illustrate below, Queen's supports specific areas of economic, social and cultural life in Northern Ireland as part of our core mission to harness global excellence for local benefit. The Draft Programme also includes a commitment to tackle the consequences of social disadvantage and inequality. We would endorse that commitment, but emphasise the importance of wealth creation in the economy in order to develop the capacity and resources to tackle these issues.

The higher education sector not only is a significant source of direct and indirect employment in the economy, but also has made, and continues to make, a significant investment in the local economy through capital developments. Queen's University has just come to the end of a significant period of capital investment in which we have built one of the finest university libraries in Europe, refurbished the Students' Union, opened a new International and Postgraduate Student Centre, and relocated our Management School alongside a new Leadership Institute at Riddel Hall on the Stranmillis Road. These capital investments not only enhance the quality of the student experience and the level of expertise we can provide for society, but they also provide much needed jobs in the construction industry. The planned move of the University of Ulster to a new city centre campus in Belfast, and the further development of the Health Sciences campus at Queen's, will represent additional important capital projects over the period covered by the Draft Programme.

The Draft Programme for Government identifies a range of targets, across all areas of government, organised around five central themes. In the main part of this response, we highlight ways in which we currently contribute to the goals within each of these themes, or ways in which we might enhance our contribution in future. We would, however, highlight three general issues on the Draft Programme as a whole:

- While the Draft Programme identifies a range of goals and targets, it is less specific on how these goals will be achieved. While recognising the detail that is included in the Draft Investment Strategy and Economy Strategy, clearly the focus now needs to be on implementation strategies, while recognising that the development of these strategies needs to be based on agreed targets. The universities provide a resource for the Executive and Assembly to work towards the development of implementation strategies,

not least through our informed policy-relevant research, underpinned by an engaged scholarly commitment to social justice, and our capacity to draw on the best international experience to inform deliberations and the development of implementation strategies. We remain committed to providing that support.

- The Draft Programme contains a range of targets, some high level, and some much more specific. Given the focus on the economy in the Programme, and the need for sustainable job and wealth creation, we would argue that central to this should be a specific goal of developing the knowledge economy in Northern Ireland. This is consistent with the need to develop high value jobs, focused on 21<sup>st</sup> century technologies and linked to the strategy for foreign direct investment. A strategy to develop the knowledge economy in Northern Ireland, comprising a more focused diagnosis of actions and targets, is currently being developed by NISP CONNECT through the Knowledge Economy Index (KEI). We would recommend that specific targets towards this goal be addressed once the over-arching strategic goals of the Programme for Government are agreed.
- Higher education is an important sector of the economy in Northern Ireland for a number of reasons: the sector supplies a steady stream of high quality graduates, which encourages inward investment and high value employment; it attracts significant external funds for research into Northern Ireland; the sector is a significant employer, with direct and indirect impact on employment and economic activity; and the universities have invested, and continue to invest, in capital development, thus helping the construction industry: in this latter respect, the capital programme by Queen's over the past decade has seen significant investment in new buildings, with the final phase of building on the Health Sciences campus about to begin, while the University of Ulster plans to start work on its new city centre campus in 2013. Thus, investment in higher education produces significant economic benefit to the wider society and should be seen as core to economic strategy.

As noted above, the Draft Programme for Government is based on five key strategic, interconnected and inter-dependent priorities:

1. Growing a Sustainable Economy and Investing in the Future
2. Creating Opportunities, Tackling Disadvantage and Improving Health and Well-Being
3. Protecting Our People, the Environment and Creating Safer Communities
4. Building a Strong and Shared Community
5. Delivering High Quality and Efficient Public Services.

### **Priority 1: Growing a Sustainable Economy and Investing in the Future**

The main aim of the first priority is to achieve long-term economic growth. This is to be achieved through improving competitiveness and growing the export-driven private sector. The Draft Programme argues that, in the face of a global economic downturn, this will require a rebalancing of the economy away from an over-reliance on the public sector. Queen's University is on record as supporting the devolution of corporation tax, a key factor in rebalancing the economy.

#### *Inward Investment and R&D*

In terms of securing Foreign Direct Investment, growing the number of R&D intensive firms and broadening the range of firms engaged in R&D, changes to corporation tax are clearly critical. Much of the PfG and Economic Strategy are spent exploring the impact of this measure. Regardless of whether powers to set corporation tax within Northern Ireland are granted by Westminster, the provision of skills and the strengthening of R&D and innovation



are critical to rebalancing and growing the economy. Within this context, the role of the universities is vital.

Successful R&D intensive economies tend to have a higher proportion of STEM graduates, who go on to work in higher value-added jobs (see also below). Continued investment in the universities and support to develop graduates from STEM-based subjects, should be encouraged. Policies to support academic-industry engagement, to facilitate the role of employers in optimising curricula and to encourage the transfer of people and knowledge across boundaries, should be adopted. The private sector, and Government, also has a role to play in promoting high value-added careers within the region, and this should be beyond the boundaries of traditional sectors, such as accountancy and law.

R&D and innovation within the region will require sustained investment with short, medium and long-term priorities. It must be recognised that this is a long term direction of travel that will take time and commitment, and adequate resources in order to deliver. It involves business being set at the heart of the Programme, but also should recognise the critical role the universities play in developing the economy through R&D. Without a high quality research base, the objectives set out in the PfG will not be delivered. Several key programmes aimed at facilitating academic-industry collaboration have recently stalled through overly bureaucratic evaluation and audit, such as Proof of Concept and Knowledge Transfer Partnership programmes under assessment since 2010, whilst the rest of the UK has moved on. Severe reductions in funding levels within Higher Education are widely known and some of these, such as cuts to the Higher Education Innovation fund (HEIF), have a direct, adverse impact on the universities' ability to engage in knowledge exchange. Simply put, cuts to HEIF within NI, in contrast to stable budgets in the rest of the UK, will have implications for developing R&D in the region, of which we are not yet fully aware. Sustained investment in helping universities manage/develop their research base and engage with business is vital. This must be target-based but free from onerous bureaucracy and reporting, which drains talent and acts as a deterrent to business and researchers alike.

The drive within NI to increase the number of patents filed and spin-out companies formed, needs careful consideration. It is the quality, rather than quantity, of patents that is important, and similarly with spin-out companies. Recent delays, since 2010, to the Proof of Concept funding programme within NI, have affected the ability of the universities to move research closer to market application. It is critical that the balance between risk aversion and bureaucracy and public accountability is more finely tuned, if a commitment to building a knowledge economy is to hold true. The importance of NISP Connect is also crucial in supporting the universities in forming start-up companies. Whilst access to early stage capital is vital, the need to support, develop and grow entrepreneurs is equally important for young companies. NISP Connect must work closely with the universities to develop a pipeline of entrepreneurs in the region, which has historically suffered from a lack of entrepreneurship and fear of failure.

An openness to new initiatives to support entrepreneurship and business engagement should also be displayed by Government. Recent initiatives within Queen's have included an Enterprise Fellowship scheme to mentor academic staff, resulting in the formation of three new spin-out companies. A similar scheme could be piloted, briefly, across NI to support the development of emerging technology companies. Another scheme introduced within Queen's has been a Knowledge Transfer Secondment initiative, which promotes the inward/outward secondment of researchers to companies. Whilst much of this has been with large multi-national companies outside of NI, a complementary regional initiative could be considered.

The MATRIX initiative has provided a framework, within which NI can identify niche strengths, much of which has been founded on excellent research within the universities, to

focus resources. Ensuring that the PfG and Economic Strategy emphasise distinctiveness is critical – regions cannot hope to compete across a broad base. The MATRIX framework should be revitalised and updated in light of the time-lag that now exists since the framework was completed. The current Competence Centre initiative within the region has some characteristics of an appropriate model – focused sector-based approach, industry led, mixed funding from private and Government sources, and a five year horizon. However, more should be done to develop a clear strategy around these centres, recognising that both universities and industry need to be closely involved in scoping and establishing the centres.

The PfG states “**that all sub-regions are able to grow and prosper**”, hence the University may need to promote its Outreach activities, as we are often criticised for being too focused on the Greater Belfast area. The main industry facing units, including Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, the NI Technology Centre (NITC), Questor and the Polymer Processing Research Centre, have worked with companies in every area of NI to increase their competitiveness in their relevant sectors. In particular, the NITC has worked with a number of regional Councils on helping them deliver their economic strategies, including delivering company development programmes with Armagh City Council, Craigavon Borough Council, Coleraine Borough Council and Belfast City Council. In addition, through the ConnectED programme, we are actively engaged in working with the six Regional Colleges and the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise, to help businesses improve their performance, by providing access to a broad portfolio of knowledge and technology support services.

#### *Agri-food in Northern Ireland: The Growing Importance of Food Safety and Food Security*

The farming community in NI is a large and important one, with over 38,000 workers listed as either self-employed or employed in agriculture. The food and drinks processing sector is the largest contributor to sales, external sales, export sales, employment and value added within the NI manufacturing sector, accounting for 22% of total manufacturing sales. The total gross turnover of the NI food and drinks processing sector increased from £3,397M in 2009 to £3,680M in 2010, an increase of 8.3%. The total number of employees involved in food and drinks processing also increased to almost 20,000, over the same period.

The proportion of sales to markets external to NI is 70% of total processing sector sales. These sales increased by 6% in 2009. Sales from NI to markets outside the UK increased by £16M in the same year. The RoI is the largest export market for the sector, accounting for 17.6% of total sales.

Food has become the true global commodity due to a wide range of factors, such as the reduction in tariffs and other barriers to trade, increasing developments of supply chains from growers to retailers and increasing control of food production by large corporations. It was feared that many of these factors would destroy the NI agri-food economy. Our climate, soil types, cost of energy and the inability to produce on the same scale of economy as the Developing World, were often cited as factors over which we had no control, and which would ultimately dictate a downward spiral in the local agri-food economy. Yet, the NI agri-food economy has flourished in recent times due to a variety of factors. The robustness of our industries, the level of innovation in new, value added products and the quality and safety of what we produce have been the main drivers. These drivers must be encouraged and supported by our Government.

NI, as part of a global supply chain, faces many difficulties and challenges. Many of our raw materials are imported, for example the red and white meat sectors are totally reliant on imported cereals and oils for feeding livestock and a very high proportion of our fruit and vegetables, which are used for value added products, are also imported. Problems with the integrity of these materials, such as contamination with chemicals or microbes, are faced by

our industries on a daily basis. Many food producing regions have seen product innovation as the way forward and competition in this marketplace is fierce.

### *The Need for a Food Security Strategy*

By broad definition, Global Food Security is the challenge of providing the world's growing population with a sustainable, safe and secure supply of good quality food from less land and with fewer inputs. It is predicted that the demand for food will increase by 40% by 2030 and 70% by 2050. Delivery of these needs has been highlighted as one of the major challenges by various UK bodies, the European Commission and international agencies such as the WHO and the UN.

To protect the integrity of our own food supply chain and ensure that our agri-food industries can manage the growing risks and make the most of the undoubted opportunities that are arising we, Northern Ireland, should develop our own food security strategy as part of the Programme for Government. The growing importance of biotechnology, the use of alternative crops and energy sources, the sourcing of raw materials from "higher risk regions", such as China, and growing levels of food fraud are among the topics that need to be better understood, in order to develop means of reducing risks and maximising potential opportunities.

The Institute of Agri-food and Land Use at Queen's University is recognised as a centre conducting research of international importance, but with a strong emphasis towards ensuring the security of the NI agri-food supply chain. This Institute should play a leading role in providing support for this essential policy development in Northern Ireland.

### *STEM*

The STEM Strategy Group, chaired by the Dean of Engineering and Physical Sciences and which includes academic, marketing, recruitment and educational specialists, was set up in 2010 to coordinate and manage all STEM-related activities in the University. In particular, it has been responsible for the creation of the STEM Academy website ([www.qub.qc.uk/STEM](http://www.qub.qc.uk/STEM)), with the primary purpose of providing information on STEM subjects within the University and the careers to which a STEM degree can lead. Currently, we are in the process of developing a new website, based on a 3D gaming environment that will allow pupils to discover STEM through a series of interactive journeys, including quizzes, challenges, tests and projects, as well as informative panels in a number of thematic areas. We will also use the virtual STEM hub to connect to external educational 3D environments, including the Herschel Space Observatory, developed at the University of Cardiff, and Universe Quest at the University of California, Berkeley, an active environment aimed at encouraging girls to take up STEM subjects.

The University has a long history of engagement with school pupils from primary level, such as Primary ConneXions, Medics in Primary Schools, to secondary level, where we facilitate both inward and outward visits. We are also involved in a number of competitions, including the Seagate Young Innovators, the Physics and Chemistry Olympiads, for which the top students in each category take part in the World Science Olympiad finals, and with teachers, primarily through in-house training events in the areas of physics, chemistry, mathematics and biochemistry.

The University also has a major focus on STEM through its widening participation programme, Discovering Queen's, and runs a number of activities including a STEM Summer School.

One of our most successful events in recent years has been the introduction of an Engineering Parents Evening, in which all four engineering disciplines showcase their students and projects. Employment information is at the core of the evening and we have worked closely with our sponsors, FG Wilson in Belfast and Seagate in Londonderry, to ensure that recent graduates speak about their work experiences. In four years, the number attending has grown from 400 in one centre to over 1,400 in two centres. Although we have no hard evidence to hand, there appears to be a correlation between these events and a marked increase in applications to engineering over the past three years.

The University also offers scholarships, valued at £1,000, to any entrant into science and engineering courses who has obtained 3 A grades at A-level. The number of scholarships awarded has increased from 128 in 2007 to 221 in 2011. This large increase in the number of high quality entrants is related to an overall increase in quality, with many science and engineering disciplines increasing their average tariff entry by 30-40 points, the latter equivalent to two grades at A-level. At the same time, we have seen substantial rises in the number of applications to STEM subjects, an increase in student numbers, where our MaSN has allowed this, and significantly better retention rates at the end of Year 1, from 86-89% to 93-97%. The end result is a much improved student, and staff, experience.

The University has also sought an active engagement with employers through initiatives such as the Chief Executives Club, as well as encouraging Schools to set up External Advisory Boards. Through the active engagement and support of the NI business community, we have been able to develop new degree programmes such as Software Engineering and Financial Mathematics, the latter degree having been developed following discussions with companies such as First Derivatives, Citigroup and NYSE Euronext. In addition to input into the curriculum, these companies also offer support through sharing technical skills, the development of joint projects, and personal development training.

### *Creative Industries*

The Ulster Bank Belfast Festival at Queen's represents one very significant contribution that we make to the creative industries and tourism. Thus, for example, the Festival is one of seven "Tier One" events that form the "Our Time Our Place" initiative, and we are working closely with the NI Tourist Board on contributing to the success of this programme. In addition, there are a number of key initiatives, on which the Festival is working, which are planned to contribute to the creative industries more generally, including:

- a skills development initiative for people aged 18-24 working with arts organisations across Belfast, to promote and provide young people with programming and presenting opportunities;
- work with the University's Sonic Arts Research Centre, to develop a series of internationally known residencies to encourage residents to develop digital skills and innovation; and
- an initiative to bring together world-class creatives with the University's science departments to look at innovation and new product development.

### *Sustainable Energy*

Queen's University has a wide portfolio of research and education on sustainability across all three faculties, and has in place a number of initiatives aimed at embedding sustainable

development across the curriculum. Our Institute for a Sustainable World aims to be an internationally recognised centre for interdisciplinary excellence in education and research, which will provide innovative solutions through science, engineering and the social sciences to the challenges posed by the social, economic and environmental transitions required for one-world living. The Institute has identified five major research themes - energy and climate change, water for life, justice and governance, sustainable communities, and sustainable economic, economics and innovation. More generally, we have a number of initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable working, living and development throughout the University.

We welcome and support the identification of this as a key theme in the Draft Programme for Government and highlight the high quality work we are already carrying out to support this area.

### **Priority 2: Creating Opportunities, Tackling Disadvantage and Improving Health and Well-Being**

This priority focuses on the challenge of disadvantage and inequality, and highlights the link between inequality, poor health and shorter life expectancy. The goal in this area of the Draft PfG is to break the cycle of deprivation, educational underachievement, and poor health and wellbeing.

This is an area where an integrated approach across a wide range of areas of activity is particularly important. Queen's University makes an important contribution in a number of relevant areas, including:

- Our Institute for Health Science represents one of our key research areas and forms part of the world-class facility that is fast emerging in partnership with the Health Trusts and in which we are bringing together research and practice strengths in disciplines such as Medicine, Pharmacy, Nursing and Biological Science. Particularly important in this partnership is the co-location of research, evaluation and treatment on our Health Sciences campus.
- In the School of Law we have developed a world-class Centre for Human Rights, and are committed to enhancing our expertise on human rights and equality.
- Over the past four years, we have developed strong research and development on children and childhood, with a particular emphasis on rights-based and evidence-informed approaches to interventions focused on children.
- Our School of Education carried out research into literacy and numeracy, and supports enhanced capacity and quality in our school system.
- Our School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work has lead research into poverty in NI and identified strategies aimed at tackling the consequences of poverty.

There is no doubt that disadvantage and inequality impoverishes our society, weakens social cohesion, and sets huge challenges for many families and children. We agree that tackling disadvantage and inequality should be a key priority for the Draft Programme for Government and would highlight the many ways in which our research and education already supports this goal and will continue to do so.

### **Priority 3: Protecting Our People, the Environment and Creating Safer Communities**

*“This priority focuses on making real improvements to people’s health and wellbeing, both physically and mentally, enhancing community safety, achieving improved safeguarding outcomes for children and adults most at risk of harm and protecting and improving the environment in which we live.”*

The University recognises its responsibility for, and is committed to, environmental improvement and sustainability across the range of its activities. This commitment is reflected in a number of major initiatives including the Carbon Management Plan (CMP), the aim of which is to change fundamentally the way the University works, in order to become an environmentally sustainable low carbon organisation. The CMP addresses Procurement, Green Information Technology, Energy, Waste, Travel and Transport, and Behavioural Change, and the target is to reduce the University’s carbon emissions by 21% by 2020-21, against a base year of 2007-08.

The CMP is supported by an Environmental Management System, certified to ISO 14001; the institutional Travel Plan 2010-15; and the Sustainable Development Design Brief (SDDB). The SDDB applies to all new build and major refurbishment construction schemes, and requires building consultants and contractors to meet environmental performance targets set for each project. The aim is for all new builds and refurbishments to achieve BREEAM “Excellent” or “Very Good” ratings.

#### **Priority 4: Building a Strong and Shared Community**

The main focus of this priority lies in the enhancement of social capital, particularly bridging capital, to build stronger relationships between communities and encourage active citizenship. In addition, this priority highlights the need to reduce the incidences and impact of domestic violence and abuse, and harm directed at children and vulnerable adults. It also recognises the role that sport, culture and the arts can play in promoting positive change and social cohesion.

The higher education institutions have always recognised their social responsibility to their region and the contribution they make to the social and cultural life of Northern Ireland: Queen’s was founded at the cusp of the development of civic universities and has played a key role in the development of Belfast and Northern Ireland since that time, while the University of Ulster has a specific commitment to the region written into its Charter.

In addition to the many research areas already identified which contribute to improved understanding and amelioration of these problems, promoting active citizenship is a core component of our new Education Strategy. We also support the Queen’s University Students’ Union and the volunteering work it is promoting among the student body.

Queen’s supports a wide range of research and development activities across many Schools, which support greater cohesion and active citizenship, including work on conflict resolution, political accommodation and shared education. Our contribution to the arts and cultural life has already been noted above, while our new sports facilities at Upper Malone provide a state-of-the-art facility. We are working closely with all codes in the development of sports academies, to promote an enhanced student experience, sporting excellence and greater community engagement

#### **Priority 5: Delivering High Quality and Efficient Public Services**

The Draft Programme for Government highlights the need for high quality and efficient public services which provide value for money at a time when public funds are under severe pressure. We agree with this priority. Under HEFCE key performance indicators, Queen’s University has always been highly ranked as a well-run and efficient organisation, and we

have renewed our commitment to this goal in our Corporate Plan 2011-2016: our aim is to make best use of resources to provide the highest possible student experience and global excellence in research and education. In a similar vein, we commend the Executive for identifying a broadly similar intent for public services.

Many of our graduates go on to take leading positions in key sectors of society in Northern Ireland, including in the public sector. Through our newly opened Leadership Institute at Riddel Hall, we will seek to enhance the quality of the public sector by providing a key connection between the academy and the public and private sectors.

## **Conclusion**

The Draft Programme for Government places the economy at the heart of the Executive's priorities for the remainder of the CSR period, and highlights the need for pro-active measures in an increasingly challenging economic environment. As this repose to the Draft Programme has emphasised, Queen's University supports this prioritisation. We have identified the need for clear implementation plans to work towards the goals identified in the Programme, and the need for a more focused approach to the pursuit of a knowledge economy. The higher education sector makes an important contribution to the economy, directly and indirectly, and this role should be recognised within the emergent plans for delivery. In addition, across a wide range of activities, the expertise in the universities has an important contribution to make to the development of specific strategic priorities and to implementation goals aimed at their achievement. Northern Ireland faces significant challenges over the next few years, but these can be addressed successfully if we utilise the strengths and expertise that lie within our society, and work together for a shared and better future.

## Quinn P

This is my response to the consultation on the Draft Programme for Government (PfG) 2011-2015.

I am concerned that the Draft PfG lacks an overall vision and is light on key commitments for the natural environment. I believe that the Assembly needs to show the spirit and vision that is needed to make Northern Ireland a leader in sustainability and an example of what local democracy can achieve.

There is an intense focus in the PfG upon growing the economy but this should not be at the expense of the natural environment. Indeed, a healthy environment directly contributes towards a healthy economy - sustainable tourism and creation of the jobs needed to deliver a low carbon economy, are just two examples.

Whilst there are some good things in the Draft PfG, such as a revised Biodiversity Strategy and an Invasive Species Strategy, the document fails to put in place measures to help deliver them. In addition, there a number of significant gaps in the document that must be filled. I ask that the following targets are included in the PfG:

- A Northern Ireland Climate Change Act, with tangible emissions reduction targets for each sector. Currently we are 99% reliant on increasingly expensive imported energy. If we move to a low-carbon economy with a thriving renewable energy sector our energy supply will be secure, and we will have created thousands of new jobs and attracted major investment. Committing to a Climate Change Act would help us deliver this low-carbon economy.
- The creation of an independent environmental protection agency. This would act as a champion for sustainability and environmental protection, and prevent costly indecision and slow action on safeguarding our environment which leaves Northern Ireland taxpayers repeatedly exposed to the risk of enormous fines for breach of EU environmental law.
- A Northern Ireland Marine Act which ensures a framework for healthy seas and protection for a range of marine species.
- A reformed planning system with sustainability at its heart. I want to see a planning system that can help deliver a thriving economy whilst protecting our natural, built and cultural heritage. All development must be truly sustainable and promote long-term societal benefits, and deliver improved health and wellbeing.
- Increased funding for rural development to allow all farmers to be brought into agri-environment schemes. These are one of the main ways of halting biodiversity decline and they also provide a range of other benefits including helping support rural communities by providing financial support to farmers and creating significant socio-economic benefits.

Finally, I want the Assembly to 'Step Up for Nature' by halting biodiversity loss by 2016 through a strengthened Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy and adequate resources to secure the delivery of biodiversity targets. Many of the recommendations above will help achieve this important target.

Yours sincerely P Quinn