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Date: 5th December 2022

Re: Excellent education for all: Interim Report of the Independent Review

Dear Dr Bloomer and Panel members,

The Northern Ireland Skills Council (NISC) met on the 21 October 2022 and discussed the recently published Interim Report of the Independent Review. On behalf of the NISC, I would like to formally welcome the Interim Report, assure you of our support and our ongoing willingness to engage with the Review Panel as your work develops further.

The NISC's primary role is to provide strategic advice to Government as the Skills Strategy – '*Skills for a 10x Economy*¹' – is implemented. The NISC brings together representation from business, education institutions, policy makers, trade and student unions and the community and voluntary sector to ensure our advice is drawn from a broad range of stakeholder perspectives.

The Council has noted the broad coherence with many of the key themes set out in '*Skills for a 10x Economy*', particularly the recognition that a whole-of-system approach is required as we adapt to the increasing importance of lifelong learning in a period of rapid technological development and demographic change.

The Council also strongly supports the Panel's emerging views on curriculum and assessment and would welcome further engagement on the issue of parity of esteem between academic and vocational pathways. The Council agrees that this is essential to improving the supply of work-ready skills entering the Northern Ireland labour market and maximising economic opportunity for individuals across the population.

¹ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/skills-10x-economy-skills-strategy-northern-ireland>

The Council also agrees that the focus of the final report on “*securing sufficient funding for education; ensuring it is efficiently used; and ensuring that decision makers have a better understanding of the impact of funding*” is fundamental to development of a fit-for-purpose skills system. The evidence of financial cuts applied to Northern Ireland’s education and skills system since 2010 is of considerable concern. As set out in the Skills Strategy and the OECD Report², we need sustainable, multi-year budgets which recognise the strategic importance of education and skills to the development of our social and economic prosperity.

As noted, the Skills Council includes a broad range of stakeholders and it recognises that the change required in education and skills cannot be delivered by government alone, but that we all have a substantive role in both advocacy for change and actively supporting government in delivering transformation. In this regard, we are keen to continue to support the Review and look forward to further engagement as your work develops.

Yours sincerely

**Jackie Henry MBE
Chair of the Northern Ireland Skills Council**

² https://www.oecd.org/skills/centre-for-skills/OECD_Skills_Strategy_Northern_Ireland_Report_Summary.pdf