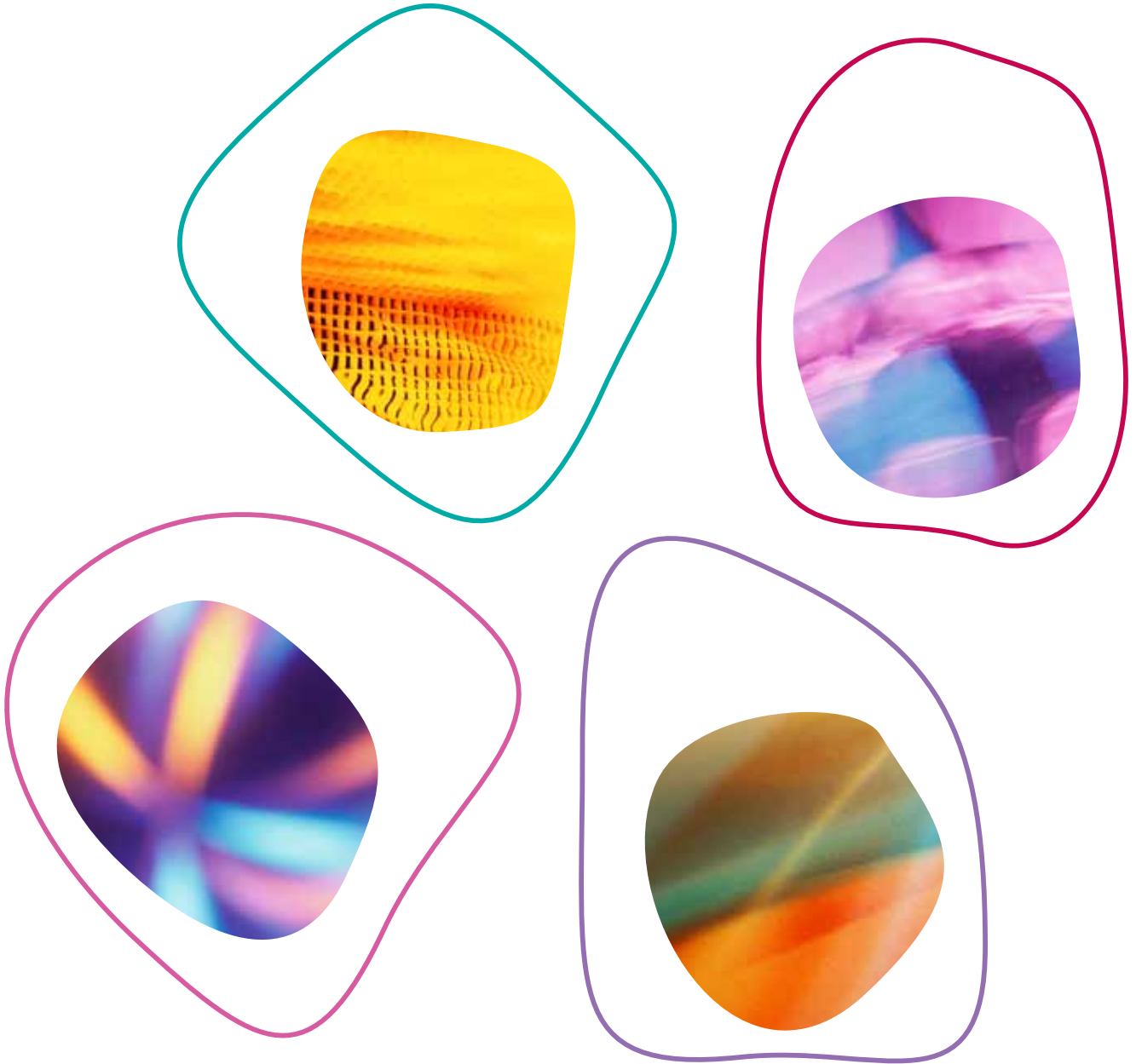


# ANNUAL REPORT 2007-2008



*"Open College Network supports learning and widens opportunity by recognising achievement through credit based courses and qualifications"*



# Chairs Introduction

OCN NI has had another successful year with nearly 22,000 learners registered on OCN accredited courses and qualifications. This was another important milestone in our history, as the growth in our work was predominantly in national qualifications within the National Qualifications Framework and the new Qualifications and Credit Framework and included learners from the age of 14. This clearly shows that OCN NI is an awarding body for *all* learners in Northern Ireland.

The 2007-8 period was a significant transition period for us here at OCN NI and our thanks to Martin Flynn, who acted as Interim Regional Manager from June 2007 until February 2008, and the rest of the team for all their hard work. This period was particularly busy both locally and throughout the network and we are grateful for his effort and commitment in steering us through this busy time.

As part of that transition time, the Board undertook a recruitment process to appoint a new Chief Executive and in February 2008 Brendan Clarke joined the team. Brendan came to us from another awarding body, having held the positions of National Manager for Ireland and Wales and Regional Manager for the East Midlands Region in England with Edexcel. Brendan's breadth of experience is not just confined to the awarding body sector but he has had significant experience within the wider education arena e.g. as a Student Services Manager for one of the biggest FE Colleges in England; a department head in a newly merged college involved in youth work, teacher development and adult literacy and numeracy programmes. Hopefully you will have gathered from this that he has taught in secondary schools, adult & continuing education provision, Further Education and Higher Education sectors. He has also carried out key roles in Regional Trades Councils, District Social Partnerships and acted as a Governor in both an FE College and Integrated Primary school. We were delighted when he agreed to accept the position of Chief Executive and he has enabled us to further build on our great team here at OCN NI - it is good to have Brendan on board!

A special word of thanks must go to all of our membership, our learners and our friends who have contributed so much to the success story of the Open College Network here in Northern Ireland. Your involvement and support providing learning for adults is a vital aspect of ensuring that as many people as possible have the opportunity to access learning.

The next year will continue to provide us with many challenges and it will be an important year as we move towards a fuller, more complete implementation of the QCF and as we seek to increasingly engage with key policy drivers. The Skills Strategy and FE Means Business are important policies for us here in Northern Ireland, and it is our hope that with a fully functioning democratic society, sharing a vision of peace, hope and reconciliation, that learning can be the driver that continues to move us forward as a community.

We are confident that whatever the challenges next year brings, the OCN NI team will be here to help you - our members and learners. And we will be at the forefront of innovative support and learning which celebrates the diversity of learning that OCN NI offers, for we are ***the*** *radically different awarding body*.



Gary Haire  
Chair OCN NI



# A Successful Year

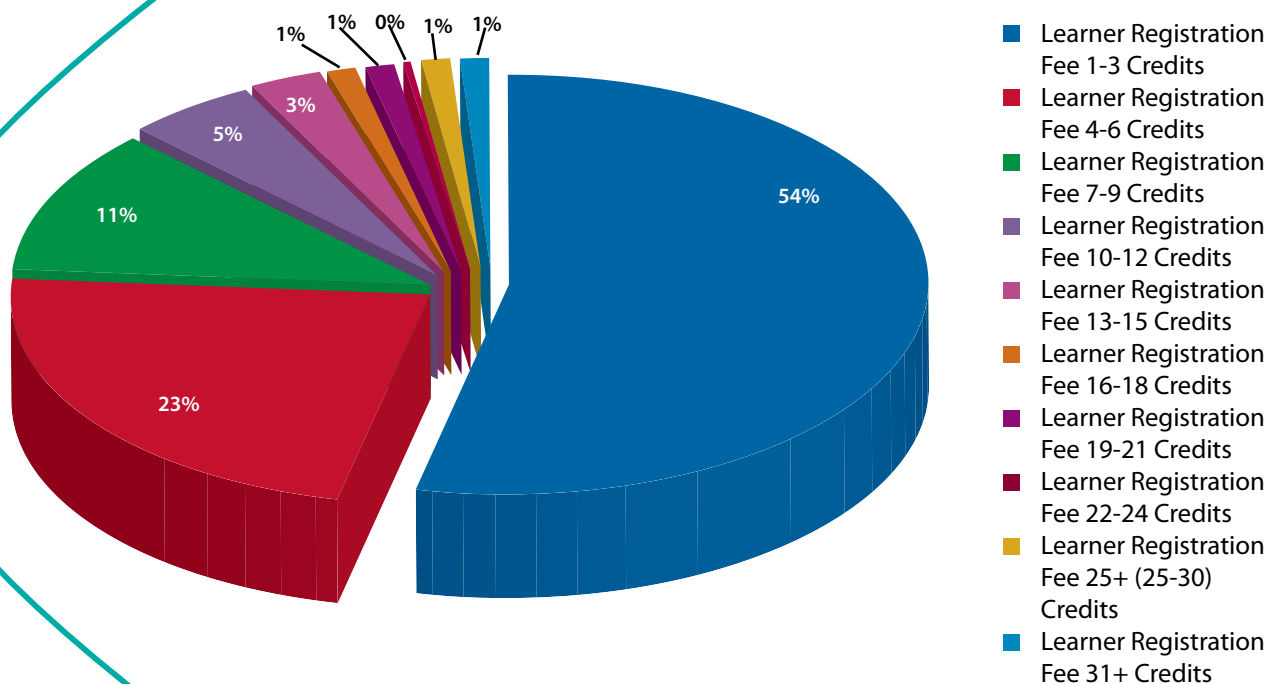
Nearly twenty two thousand learners studied with members of our network in 2007/8. Our members, who play a key part in the learning and development landscape in Northern Ireland, are represented in every sector. Learners who followed OCN NI programmes range from school children to adults and encompass those taking their first step with Essential Skills at Entry Level to those who are studying at Level 4 with our learning providers following a programme of professional development.

Our network continues to grow with over 150 members registering learners in 2007/8. Our learning providers, drawn from every sector of learning and development, are key partners in supporting the transition from a region with limited self governance to a democratic partner with all of

Europe. Often working with those who have had a negative experience of learning, those who have been turned away by others and those who in the past have used weapons rather than a pen, OCN NI member's network plays a vital role in transforming our society.

OCN NI provides, via its license from the National Open College Network, opportunities from Entry Level to Level 4. In addition, OCN NI also provides local accreditation for programmes up to Level 4 that are not currently covered by the NQF/QCF. This means that OCN NI can provide a flexible, structured response to learning demands. Providing opportunities within the NQF and opportunities to recognise and accredit credit based learning that lay outside the QCF means that OCN NI can respond to any learning situation.

## Intended Credit Percentage



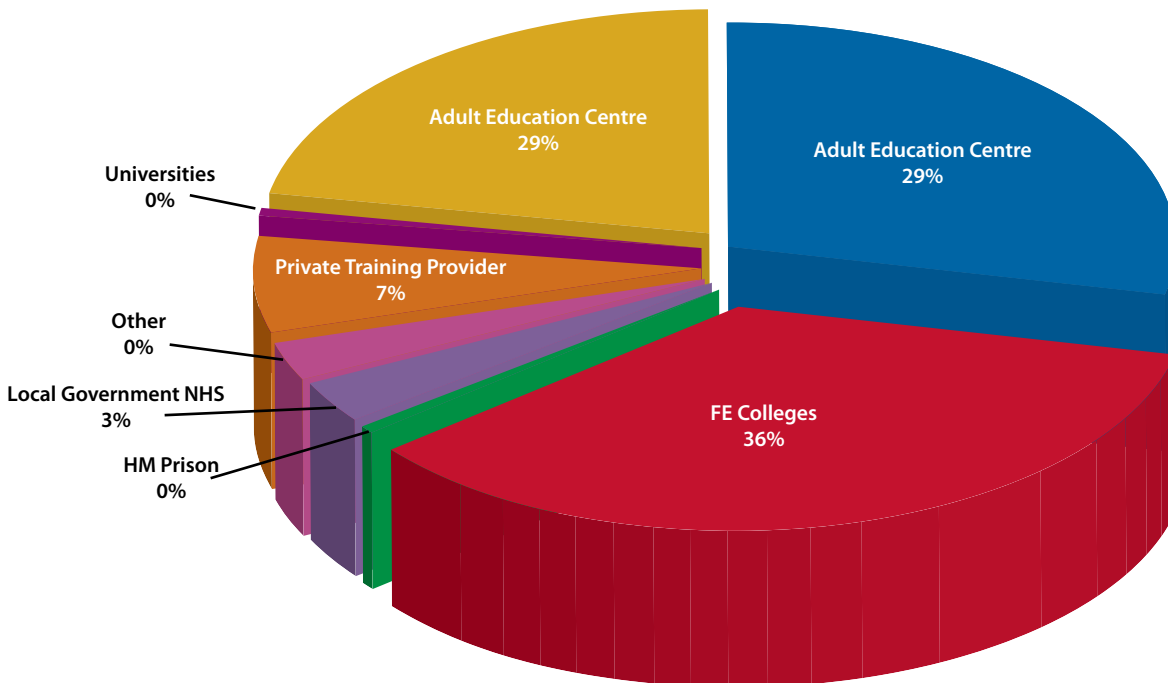
# Moving Forward

The success of any organisation is based on three foundation elements. The people who make the organisation work, the partners it works with and the thinking that goes into making the organisation what the team and its partners need.

Our partners - students and learning providers - have helped our team make 2007/8 one of the most successful on record. The team turned around a deficit of £85,000 in 2006/7 into a profit of nearly £10,000 in 2007/8. This, in an environment of reduced funding, a change in policy on accredited learning and the beginning of the recession, is a massive achievement from the team. It has laid the foundation for a future that OCN NI is aiming at - to be the leading credit based learning and development body in Northern Ireland, promoting social inclusion, wider participation and community transformation.

During 2007/8 OCN NI restructured into a more customer focused body, establishing four distinct teams within the company. The Business and Network Development Team, the Corporate Services Team, the Quality & Programme Management Team and the Leadership Team. These four teams working in harmony to satisfy customer and learner needs are the basis of the effectiveness that makes OCN NI a success. Each member of the team, including our Associate Quality Reviewers, is committed to ensuring that more learners are enabled to study with OCN NI's learning partners and that the quality of that experience is second to none.

## Registrations by Sector Type



# Information & Technology

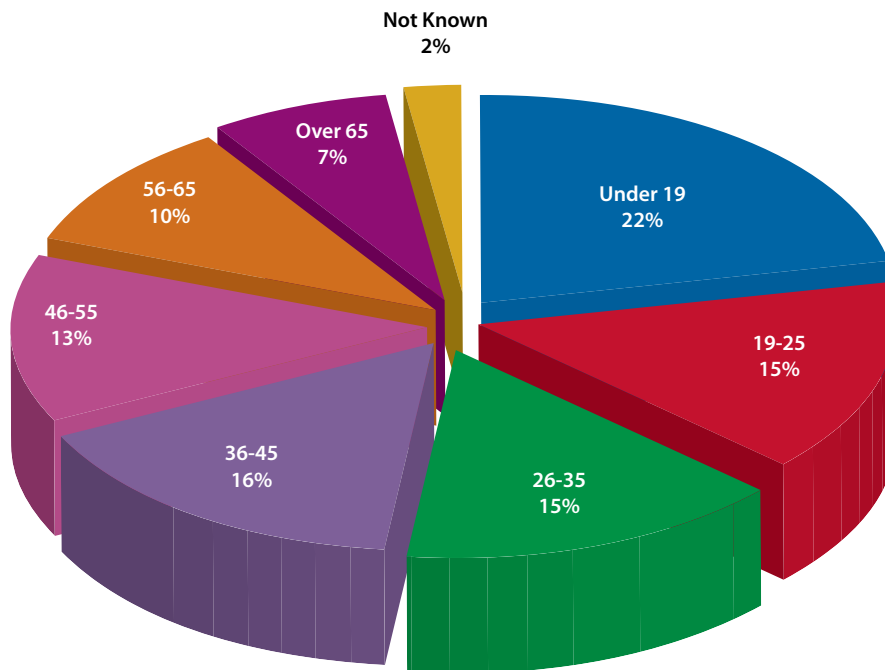
Following the success of the launch of the new look website, OCN NI continues to invest in systems that support effective and customer focused working. Plans were laid to increase the effectiveness of our website, major investment in new facilities means that all work is now scanned into our network. This initiative has major benefits not only for the environment within which the team works; it also provides massive flexibility in information search and accessing documents. It offers the basis for our next development in providing on-line standardisation and moderation.

During this period, OCN NI also made the decision to bring some of its key services in house and also enter into arrangements to ensure the security and maintenance of our ICT system. We invested in a new financial management package which

permits us to manage our salary and reward system in house. In addition we invested in new ICT infrastructure. This provides a more effective back up system and also provides us with an ICT mirror in the unlikely event of an ICT network failure. This work has benefitted from entering into a long term partnership with one of the UK's largest IT solution providers.

The introduction of mobile phones which link to MS Exchange has facilitated the use of Outlook as a diary management system. Mobile phones also provide customers with an opportunity to contact key personnel at any time. The introduction of a Virtual Private Network together with using the mobile phones as a modem means that staff can access the OCN NI Network from anywhere and customers can contact staff wherever they may be.

## Learners Age Profile 07/08



## Building Teams

Investment in quality and business development means that we have more customer facing staff with a range of objectives designed to improve customer service and grow our business. In quality we are building services to support new and existing centres with electronic and on-line support materials designed to reduce quality problems later on. In addition we are developing a range of QA models that seek to support new work with consortia and to provide opportunities to be proactive in standardisation activities. In Programme Management - the R&D arm of OCN NI, we have built a model of development which will support funding proposals. In Business and Network Development we have put in place an account management system together with market share growth initiatives, with existing and new products, which will provide us with opportunities to grow and to resist the inevitable consequences of the credit crunch.

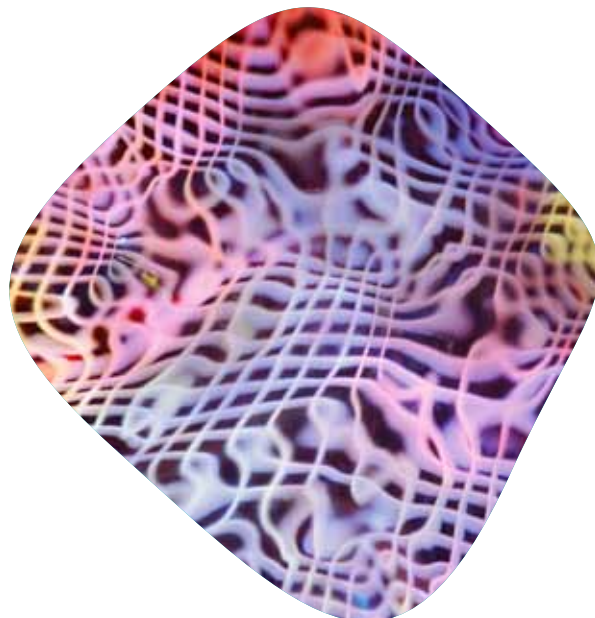
Developing and supporting staff has been a key part of the work of OCN NI over the last year and this will continue. Completing an appraisal process and commencing a new cycle based on the draft plan and linked to work plans that are outcome based and focused on personal objectives. This focus, supported by regular diarised 1-2-1 meetings with all staff supported in turn by team meetings and training and development via inputs, coaching and mentoring, has required a significant investment from everybody.

## Supporting Customers

23,000 learners and 150 learning providers each year require effective support. To provide this support is the major focus of OCN NI. To ensure we do this effectively and to bring our products and services to the widest range of potential learners and providers, the whole staff team are involved in meeting customer needs.

Our Account and Relationship Management process is central to our work. This service means that every learning provider/every customer has a named Business Development Officer to support their work. The relationship manager's role is wide and varied and includes supporting the whole of the customer journey from thinking about joining the network to certificating learners.

Our office based team are a central hub around which all of our work supporting customers operates. This team provides telephone and office based support from Monday to Friday from 8.30am to 5pm. Our service standards continue to be admired throughout the network of OCN offices, with administrative processes being managed in a prompt and accurate manner. The team also hosts the majority of the training events for assessors and verifiers ensuring that these events run smoothly and effectively.



## Demanding Quality

OCN NI again satisfied its NOCN licence requirements first time with no additional requests. This is huge praise for all the team across the organisation who are involved in supporting and ensuring the Quality Assurance process for OCN NI and its learning providers.

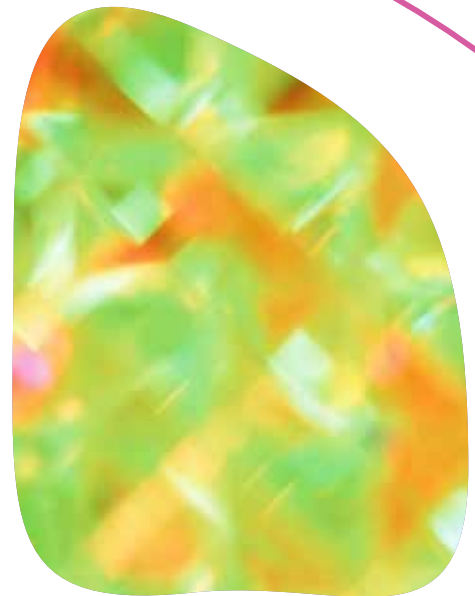
The QA team met their targets of standardisation events for centres and sectors by academic year end 31<sup>st</sup> July 08. Those that have not participated in these activities have been scheduled for follow up activity. This includes participating in a standardisation compliance survey and study to improve compliance and training benefits for members. This will provide opportunities to strategically target quality monitoring of centres.

Quality assurance activity has been steady through the last year. Key developments in regional standardisation and centre recognition have been assisted by our staff in quality and business development. License compliance has been supported by NOCN's quality team and regular contact has assisted us in clarifying regulatory requirements.

## Family Learning

This year saw the conclusion of our Family Learning project. This project over several years has added significantly to the corpus of knowledge and ethos of working in Family Learning through the UK. It has proven with its extensive coverage of centres and learners that Family Learning linked to Essential Skills makes a difference for the adult family member as well as the child.

This work is carrying on with a Family Learning Network that brings together providers and stakeholders to influence and inform Northern Ireland on the real tangible benefits that Family Learning can provide. OCN NI has brought Family Learning to centre stage as a restorative and transforming medium within which to address learning needs. It will form a key part of our work over the coming years as an Essential Skills provider and as an Awarding Organisation.



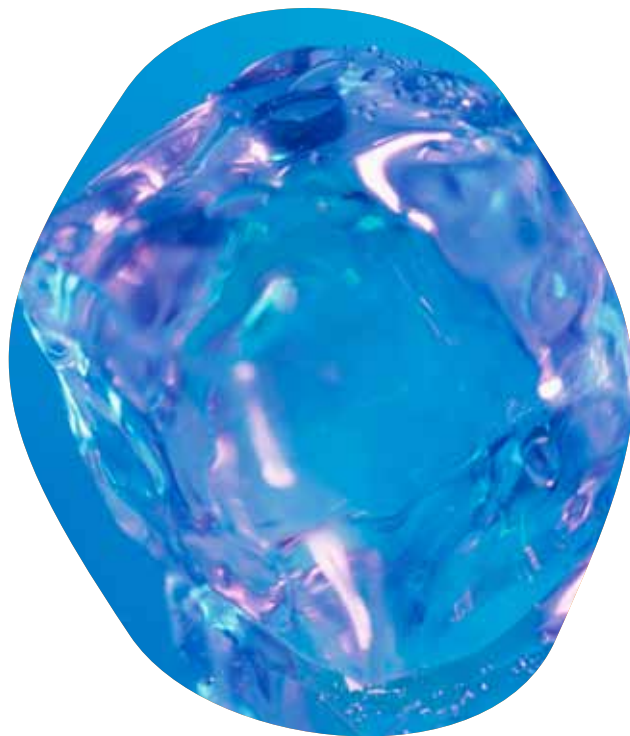
# Looking Ahead

OCN NI is the leading provider of credit based services and qualifications in Northern Ireland. Our work and that of our colleagues in the wider Open College Network has meant that the credit based framework we have been promoting and supporting for over twenty years has now been adopted by the governments of Northern Ireland, Wales and England. The Qualifications and Credit Framework- the QCF is about to fundamentally change the way in which learners access learning and recognition for their learning. This is a future that OCN NI is prepared for.

Part of our work over the next year is to prepare for the full implementation of the QCF by September 2010. Our preparation will include becoming

an Awarding Organisation within the QCF. Strengthening our links with our partner NOCN for national qualifications. OCN NI will strengthen its role in learning and development in Northern Ireland by providing opportunities to recognise all learning wherever it takes place and to ensure that this learning falls within the QCF.

To meet these demands, OCN NI needs to invest in its future - the future of its network and the future for our learners. Our work will continue in using web based technologies to bring learning opportunities to all in Northern Ireland and to build strategic partnerships in key areas of e- assessment, e- learning and e- publishing that will support the learner journey.



# Vision, Mission & Values

## OCN Northern Ireland Vision Statement

To be recognised and respected as the leading credit based learning and development body in Ireland, promoting social inclusion, wider participation and community transformation

*We will achieve this by:*

- Creating and sustaining partnerships that add value to our Network
- Building relationships that help to create "Learning Communities"
- Being innovative, creative and brave
- Championing learners' rights
- Making everyone's potential achievable

## OCN Northern Ireland Mission Statement

To offer the best possible learning programmes and resources, and to put these opportunities in the hands of as many people as possible.

*We will achieve our mission by:*

Providing outstanding qualifications and learning opportunities that meet current and future need, and we will support this learning with brilliant resources and services that add real value to our customers

## OCN Northern Ireland Value Statement

*OCN Northern Ireland:*

- Holds pre-eminent the entitlement of people to gain recognition for their achievements in learning and to fulfil their potential
- Is passionate about respect for and encouragement of diversity in everything we do
- Is inspirational in making a difference to those who experience disadvantage
- Will be imaginative in opening up opportunities for all learners
- Is totally committed to integrity, ethical business practices and corporate responsibility

- Embodies excellence in supporting and resourcing our people
- Is proud to be part of a community of learning that reaches out to all

## OCN Northern Ireland Principles underpinning Lifelong Learning

OCN Northern Ireland is committed to the idea that learning is a lifelong experience and is further committed to supporting that learning journey for all.

This commitment is focused on five key principles:

- *Process:* This principle energises our activity around the *Learning Process*, how, individuals, communities and societies learn, where they learn, why they learn and how we at OCN NI can impact positively upon that learning
- *Transitions:* This principle recognizes that there are *key Learning Transitions* in an individual, community or societal learning journey. These may be organised e.g. school to work, primary to secondary, or they may be personal e.g. parenthood, life change. OCN NI aims to support these transitions for our learners
- *Interventions:* This principle, linked strongly to transition recognises that individuals, communities and society experience a range of *Learning Interventions* in their learning journey. These may be statutory, voluntary, or personal, they may be successful or not. OCN NI goal is to ensure that interventions are learner centred, positive and empowering
- *Development:* This principle organises itself around the concept of *Learning as Development*. Learning for an individual, community or society is part of a development journey that provides opportunities to extend ourselves. OCN NI aim is to make this development meaningful for all.
- *Growth:* This principle focuses on the idea that growth is a natural part of being human. *Learning for Growth* is about what we do with our learning and how we use it to make; our lives, our communities and our society better. OCN NI desire is to contribute to a better society.

## OCN NI Principles and Tools for Change

Building a Better Future is the Northern Ireland programme for Government 2008-2011. In this document, the NI Executive states clearly that,

*'Our over-arching aim is to build a peaceful, fair and prosperous society in Northern Ireland, with respect for the rule of law and where everyone can enjoy a better quality of life now and in years to come.*

*To achieve this we need to pursue an innovative and productive economy and a fair society that promotes social inclusion, sustainable communities and personal health and well-being' (NI Programme for Government p5)*

The Programme for Government lays out four interconnecting Key Priorities, which are based around a main priority of:

*Grow a dynamic innovative Economy*

- Promote tolerance, inclusion, health and well-being
- Invest to build our infrastructure
- Deliver modern high quality and efficient public services
- Protect and enhance our environment and natural resources

These priorities for the eExecutive are further contextualised within the linkages that a modern dynamic society requires, North/South linkages and East/West Linkages and International Relationships.

OCN NI already has key East/West linkages with NOCN, we will develop our North/South linkages in the context of our plan and we will begin the work of extending our international relationships to build on the European Credit Framework and to use our capacity for inclusion on a wider scale by collaborating where possible with development agencies.

Each of the Key Priorities in the programme for government has a range of targets that focus on investment, development, improvement and growth. Whilst all four areas of activity will feature in our work, the three main priorities for OCN NI to focus on will be -

- Growing a dynamic, innovative economy;
- Promoting tolerance, inclusion and health and well being; and
- Delivering modern high quality and efficient public service.

These statements of vision and value, from OCN Northern Ireland and the Executive provide us at OCN NI with an opportunity to focus our work on key areas of Strategic Priority for the next three years. These are:

### Children and Young People

- Develop our contribution to the Youth Work Curriculum
- Grow our involvement in the school sector as part of the entitlement framework
- Extend our involvement with non formal and informal curriculum with children and young people
- Contribute to the anti poverty strategy

### Family Learning

- Promote Family Learning as a key holistic route to supporting both adult and young learners
- Develop OCNNI and our partners capability in supporting Family Learning
- Embed Family Learning as a key feature in the programme for government
- Support the commitment to regeneration, building community capacity and leadership

## Employability

- Respond effectively to the NI Skills Strategy
- Contribute to meeting the Key Goals in the priority area *Growing a Dynamic, Innovative Economy*
- Extend our involvement in Work Based Learning
- Effect the removal of barriers to employment and independent living for the most vulnerable

## Civic Transformation

- Contribute to the modernisation of structure and powers of local/regional/national government
- Impact positively and with measurable value upon the NI Economic and Policy Agenda
- Engage with the aim to achieve measurable reduction in sectarianism, racism and hate crime
- Embrace the imperative to create a shared and better future, based on tolerance and respect for cultural diversity

## Personal and Community Education

- To advance social transformation in line with the NI Executive aims
- Support individuals and communities as they work to overcome poverty, disadvantage and exclusion
- Develop capabilities to remove barriers to employment and to address inequalities in health and educational outcomes

## OCN NI a Learning Organisation

- To become the principle advocate of an accessible and learner centred QCF
- To develop social entrepreneurship in all our people
- To embed learning as individuals, teams and as an organisation in everything we do
- To connect the key services and support that our customers require to do business with us
- To become what we aspire to be



Open College Network Northern Ireland (OCN NI) is licensed by the National Open College Network (NOCN) and supports learning across Northern Ireland. We offer nationally recognised, flexible, credit-based qualifications which conform to the criteria set out by the Regulatory Authorities.

We work with national and local organisations to develop and widen access to education, training and learning. Since 1995 OCN NI has provided a comprehensive accreditation service to learners throughout Northern Ireland and during that time we have registered over 150,000 learners.

We provide:

- Access to NOCN Vocationally Related Qualifications
- Quality assured accredited learning
- Expertise in credit developments
- A comprehensive programme of training to support delivery
- Advice and guidance with support materials
- Support to all organisations engaged in learning and development

Visit our Website:

[www.ocnni.org.uk](http://www.ocnni.org.uk)

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