



**QUEEN'S  
UNIVERSITY  
BELFAST**

## **Covid–19 in Northern Ireland. A new economic vision**

Harper, B. (2020). *Covid–19 in Northern Ireland. A new economic vision*.

### **Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

### **Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:**

[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

### **Publisher rights**

Copyright 2020 Pivotal

This work is made available online in accordance with the publisher's policies. Please refer to any applicable terms of use of the publisher

### **General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Queen's University Belfast Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

### **Take down policy**

The Research Portal is Queen's institutional repository that provides access to Queen's research output. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact [openaccess@qub.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@qub.ac.uk).

Covid-19 in Northern Ireland

# A New Economic Vision



PIVOTAL

PUBLIC POLICY  
FORUM NI

# Index

- 03** The impact of Covid-19 on the Northern Ireland economy
- 06** Northern Ireland's economy pre-Covid
- 08** Who's affected most by the Covid-19 economic crisis?
- 10** Opportunities
- 17** Policy considerations

# Overview

Across the world, governments are trying to balance the protection of public health with the need to reopen economies and societies. This paper looks at the challenges and opportunities Northern Ireland faces as its economy is gradually rebuilt after lockdown. It aims to encourage dialogue around an important question: how best does Northern Ireland recover from Covid-19?



This paper looks at the opportunities this crisis presents in the long-term. It examines the overall effects of C-19, how these effects are not spread equally across the population, and the challenges already faced by the economy before Covid-19 (C-19) emerged – and it concludes that the vision for recovery should be ambitious and bold.

Any plans to turn back the clock, to simply restore what went before, would be insufficient. The Executive's economic recovery strategy needs to take full account of Northern Ireland's long-term weaknesses and take sustained and effective steps to address them. This is an opportunity for real change – for a transformation in skills, reinvigorated infrastructure, and moving towards sustainability.

Brexit is not the focus of this paper, but it is recognised that ongoing negotiations between the Executive, the UK government and the EU have the potential both to create opportunities for and obstacles to growth.

This is the second report in Pivotal's series of briefing papers on Northern Ireland's social and economic recovery from C-19. Each of these papers aims to inform public debate and assist policy makers. Our previous paper explored global approaches to easing lockdown and put forward policy considerations for Northern Ireland.

# The impact of C-19 on the Northern Ireland economy

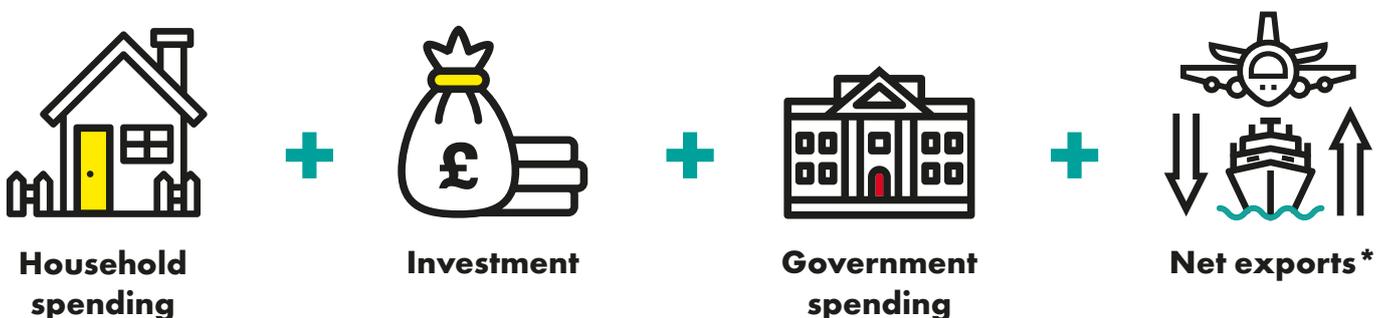
C-19 has had a profound impact on health, social and economic outcomes around the world. The global economy is projected to contract by 3% in 2020 which is significantly more than the global recession in 2008-2009. Ambitious policy development must provide effective measures to contain C-19 and promote economic recovery.

Globally, there have been an estimated 8,351,427\* confirmed cases of C-19 and 449,027 deaths. Estimates indicate that C-19 may push 40-60 million people into extreme poverty, amplifying existing social and economic divides.

There are a range of estimates for the impact of C-19 on the Northern Ireland economy. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth is traditionally used to measure the health of an economy and as an indicator of economic prosperity. There are several approaches to measuring GDP. The figure below provides an explanation of GDP based on total spending.

GDP growth forecasts have been made by a number of leading economists in an attempt to predict GDP changes following the C-19 pandemic. Table 1, Page 4 provides a summary of forecasts of annual decline in GDP.

## GDP =



\* Net exports is the value of UK exports to other countries minus UK imports from other countries

\* Figure retrieved from <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html> on 18.06.20.

**Table 1: GDP Forecasts**

Country	Equivalent annual % decline in GDP	Source	Release Date
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	12.70%	UUEPC	May 2020
	7.50%	Danske Bank / Oxford Economics	April 2020
<b>UK</b>	8.30%	European Economic Forecast	May 2020
	14.00%	Bank of England	May 2020
<b>Ireland</b>	7.90%	European Economic Forecast	May 2020
	8.30%	Central Bank of Ireland	April 2020

The forecasts above highlight a range of annual decline in GDP, some of which are dependent upon a relatively swift recovery at Quarter 3 (i.e. July-September). Estimations of the economic impact of C-19 vary due to the uncertainty associated with the relaxation of lockdown measures, furloughed staff returning to work, potential redundancies, consumer confidence and the fear of a second wave of infection.

Whilst there are variations in the above figures, many forecasters do not expect economic output to recover to 2019 levels until 2022 at the earliest. However, these estimates may be optimistic given the record decline of UK GDP of -25.1% reported between February and April 2020. The monthly decline in GDP in April was nine times the size of the previous highest monthly drop in June 2002 and 20 times bigger than record numbers reported during the 2008 financial recession.

The scale of contraction in the Northern Ireland economy is estimated to be much faster and larger than previous recessions. Leading economists have projected various recovery models including a U, V or W shaped model. Economists are pessimistic about a V shaped recovery and indicate that the nature of the Northern Ireland economy makes it vulnerable to not returning to 'pre-Covid' functioning for some time, if at all. Regardless of which model applies in Northern Ireland, recovery is likely to be a long-term endeavour, probably longer than the rest of the UK and Ireland.

**Table 2: Unemployment Forecasts**

Country	Projected annual unemployment rates	Source	Month Release
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	5.00%	Danske Bank	April 2020
<b>UK</b>	6.70% 9.00%	European Economic Forecast Bank of England	May 2020 May 2020
<b>Ireland</b>	7.40% 14.0%	European Economic Forecast Central Bank of Ireland	May 2020 April 2020

Table 2 demonstrates the range of predicted unemployment estimates which may increase further depending on outcomes in large sectors who are currently in furlough. We can expect unemployment to peak at a higher level in-year than the above predictions of annual unemployment rates. The Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UU-EPC) predict peak unemployment to reach 12.0% depending on market recovery in quarter three.

Northern Ireland statistics released on 19.05.20 indicated that the unemployment rate had nearly doubled, rising to 6.1% with an increase in claimant\* count figures from 26,500 to 56,200 for the period up to 09.04.20. The Department for Communities (DfC) reported an 'unprecedented' number of claims for Universal Credit (UC) with a tenfold increase of claims between the period 01.03.20-26.04.20. Further rises in unemployment are expected in sectors at risk of a slow return to pre-Covid functioning; for example, hospitality and retail.

## Government economic responses

The UK Government and Northern Ireland Executive have provided three broad types of support to employers during C-19: tax reliefs, government backed loans, and grants.

Tax reliefs (business rate holidays and VAT deferrals) have provided some immediate help to businesses and loans to provide much needed cash flow. Government loans such as the Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme and 'Bounce Back' have provided financial support to avoid

immediate financial problems. However, such schemes could create long-term challenges for the economy. For example, companies may be less likely to invest in growth in the future while repaying a significant debt. The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, commonly referred to as the 'furlough scheme', has been one of the most utilised the government support packages supporting 8.7 million employees across the UK to claim a cash grant of up to 80% of their salary (capped at £2,500 per month).

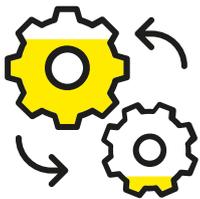
Recent HMRC data indicates that the most affected sectors are hospitality and retail and also those where staff cannot work from home. These sectors have the highest number of employees furloughed, totalling 1,609,800 employments across the UK. Due to future social distancing measures, ongoing lockdown restrictions and changing consumer attitudes, it is unlikely that these sectors will return to work in pre-pandemic numbers due to future social distancing measures, ongoing lockdown restrictions and changing consumer attitudes.

In Northern Ireland, 211,700 employees have accessed the furlough scheme which is due to change in August 2020 when the government will encourage workers to return to work, even on a part-time basis with employers paying salaries. The government have indicated that they would explore training opportunities for furloughed staff but no further details are currently available. The distributional design of the furlough scheme has been criticised as failing to protect those on lower incomes. Furthermore, the system inadequately supports those in the zero-hour or gig-economy and those where tips subsidise their income.

\*The claimant count is an administrative data source derived from Jobs and Benefits Offices systems, which records the number of people claiming unemployment-related benefits.

# The Northern Ireland economy before Covid-19

Northern Ireland’s economy faced some serious challenges before C-19. While the economy is strong in some areas and sectors, it lags far behind in others, as set out in Pivotal’s first report ‘Moving forward – putting Northern Ireland on track for the future’.



Productivity is amongst the lowest in the UK regions, even with strong performance in some sectors.



Northern Ireland has the lowest skill levels of any UK region, with almost one quarter of 25-64 year olds not having any qualifications above GCSE or equivalent.



Around one quarter of the population remains economically inactive, despite recent improvements.



Low-paying Jobs



High-paying Jobs

Northern Ireland has the highest percentage of low-paying jobs of all UK regions.



1 in 4 1 in 5

One fifth of the population, including one quarter of all children, live in poverty.



Northern Ireland is held back by a lack of investment in key infrastructure.



## Summary

Productivity in Northern Ireland is 15.6% below the UK average. Low productivity puts a significant constraint on growth in Northern Ireland, with knock-on effects on levels of investment and innovation. Low productivity feeds through to individuals and families through lower incomes and fewer opportunities for good quality jobs. Northern Ireland has a much larger concentration of employment in lower paid sectors such as agriculture, retail, and health and social care than the UK average. In contrast, employment in the rest of the UK is more concentrated in higher value-added sectors such as professional services, ICT and financial services.

Northern Ireland’s low productivity is linked to low levels of skills and historical difficulties with skill gaps in the employment market. There is a shortage of people with qualifications at NQF levels 3-5 (e.g. NVQs, HNCs and Higher Apprenticeships) in the labour market. This supply issue is created by a combination of issues including; low levels of education leavers obtaining NQF levels 4-5, relatively limited training provision of professional and technical qualifications, and low student training numbers in industry identified areas (e.g. engineering and technology).

In contrast, Northern Ireland has a relatively high proportion of level 6 (university degree) graduates. However, the subject mix of graduates is not always proportionate to labour market demand, with an over-supply in some areas (e.g. teacher training). As a result, graduates’ skills may be under-utilised in the economy and lower skilled workers may be pushed down the employment ladder.

# Who has been most affected by the C-19 economic crisis?

Evidence suggests that the economic impact of C-19 will increase existing economic and social inequalities.

Sectors with large numbers of low-paid roles are more likely to have employees that have been furloughed or to have lost their jobs, which include demographics who faced pre-pandemic inequality. Emerging UK studies indicate that women, young people, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) individuals and people with a disability are at particular risk of adverse social and economic consequences of C-19.

**This section explores three interconnected groups that have been disproportionately affected by the economic consequences of C-19.**

## Young people

The economic consequences of C-19 are likely to have a significant impact on economic and educational inequality; the two key drivers of social mobility. Compared to other groups, young people may have been financially struggling prior to the pandemic due to decreasing real wages, fewer opportunities for progression, and increasing housing costs. Young people's education has also been disrupted by the pandemic which may have significant consequences for their future social and economic opportunities.

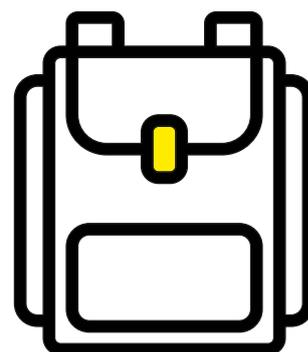
UK data from the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) indicates that young people aged under 25 are nearly 2.5 times more likely to work in a furloughed industry (e.g. retail, hospitality, construction). Some sectors that employed young people (e.g. hospitality) may not return to pre-pandemic functioning for a significant period of time, if at all, which risks the potential of long-term unemployment for these young people.

Within Northern Ireland, young people may have been disproportionately affected by the economic crisis as over

45% of total workers under the age of 25 are estimated to have been furloughed or laid off. Furthermore, the most vulnerable to permanent job loss are furloughed workers.

Young people entering the labour market after finishing school or university are also at risk of unemployment. The crisis has created uncertainty for employers who expect to reduce their opportunities for graduates. UK data indicates that approximately a quarter of employers will be recruiting fewer graduates and internships may reduce by up to a third. The reduction of entry level positions for those aged 16+ combined with a reduction in graduate opportunities will have a significant impact on social mobility.

The rate of young people entering the labour market during a period of job uncertainty and unemployment is likely to reduce opportunities for lower qualified young people who may be competing with FE and HE students. The combination of an influx of education leavers, job losses for the under 25 group and reduced graduate positions is likely to create significant rises in youth unemployment with estimates rising from a current rate of 8% to a potential rate of 26%.



# Northern Ireland has a history of difficulties in developing and maintaining a skilled workforce.

## Workers with lower qualification levels

Northern Ireland has a history of difficulties in developing and maintaining a skilled workforce which affects workforce and career progression. There is a strong association between increased skills and increased earnings. Furthermore, within the context of the current pandemic, those in higher skilled jobs have better capacity to work from home and decrease their risk of furlough and/or redundancy. Therefore, it is not surprising that the occupations with the highest percentage of workers furloughed are amongst the lowest paid and lower skilled in the labour market.

UK and Northern Ireland data indicates that qualification level is a risk factor for furlough and future job instability. In Northern Ireland, almost half of the total number of workers who have been furloughed or laid off have a highest qualification equal to NQF level 2 or below. The probability of a worker with a NQF level 6+ worker being furloughed or laid off is approximately half that of the general employment market.

## Low income households

An analysis of UK data in April 2020 indicated that low earners are seven times as likely as high earners to be employed in a shutdown sector. The IFS found that 35% of employees in the bottom tenth of the earnings distribution work in sectors directly affected by the lockdown, compared to just 5% of those in the top tenth. Prior to the pandemic, approximately 30% of low-income households in the UK

reported being unable to manage for a month if they were to lose their main source of income.

The UU-EPC analysis of the labour market in Northern Ireland found that the occupations with the highest percentages of workers furloughed or laid off were also amongst the lowest paid in the labour market. This data is consistent with a global picture of the economic vulnerabilities of the lowest earners who are at the highest risk of unemployment and/or experiencing reduced income.



# Opportunities

While a huge and painful challenge, the crisis of Covid-19 also creates opportunities for new thinking, new ideas and new ambition. Across the world, individuals, businesses, organisations and governments have responded to the challenge of C-19 by re-thinking, adjusting and innovating.



Consumers have found new ways to access services and goods.



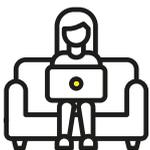
Reductions in commuting, congestion and pollution have greatly benefited the environment.



Some businesses have reacted to lockdown restrictions by broadening their customer base and product ranges.



Travel has fallen hugely due to lockdown restrictions and, in its place, there are increased numbers of people walking and cycling.



Employees have worked from home in previously unimaginable numbers.



Recognition amongst the public that many in the lowest-paid jobs have been those putting their lives at risk to keep others safe.

# Looking ahead

While some of these changes from C-19 were a temporary consequence of lockdown, others could become a lasting legacy as economic and social activity increases again. There is an opportunity for governments to harness these ideas, energy and motivation.



The ‘disruption’ for many individuals, families and governments has provided an opportunity to do things differently. The impact of C-19 has given hints of how life could be different and better – for example, a full recognition of the urgent challenges of climate change, reduced congestion, an increased valuing of public space, and a greater recognition of the contribution of those in low paid jobs.

The Executive should grasp this opportunity to develop a positive and ambitious vision for Northern Ireland’s economic future. This vision should address not just the immediate impact of lockdown on businesses but also the longer term weaknesses of the Northern Ireland economy. Whilst the Executive has acted to minimise the negative impacts on individuals and firms, a more wide-ranging and long-term approach is needed to put Northern Ireland’s economy on track for the future.

# Policy considerations

In this section we consider ways in which the Northern Ireland Executive can demonstrate ambition and vision in its plan for the economic recovery from C-19. Our intention here is to suggest ideas that open-up discussion and debate, rather than offering a blueprint.

The Executive's economic recovery strategy from Covid-19 needs to respond to the immediate impact of the downturn on businesses and individuals but, more importantly, also address the economy's underlying weaknesses.

## 1. An ambitious economic vision for Northern Ireland

The Executive has acted quickly and robustly to address the immediate health and economic crises resulting from C-19. The package of economic measures was welcome and necessary to support businesses through the immediate impact of lockdown and beyond. The Executive now needs to move beyond this short-term support to respond as clearly and decisively to Northern Ireland's long-term economic problems.

The Executive should develop an ambitious long-term vision for the transformation of the Northern Ireland economy including a plan for radically improving skills, investing in infrastructure, addressing the challenges of climate change and prioritising inclusive growth that benefits everyone.

### Skills

This vision should commit to a transformation of skills. Northern Ireland's workforce has on average a lower level of educational attainment and skills compared with other UK regions. This leads to skills shortages which reduce the growth potential of local firms, deter investors from locating here and limit productivity growth and competitiveness. For individuals and families, low skill levels also mean Northern Ireland has the highest percentage of low-paying jobs of all UK regions.

### Infrastructure

The vision should commit to a programme of investment in the infrastructure that underpins economic growth. Northern Ireland is held back by long-term under-investment in key infrastructure. Congestion and pollution demonstrate a need to reduce our reliance on cars through investment in public transport, along with walking and cycling routes. Water and sewerage infrastructure is near, or at, capacity in many places, limiting new development and raising environmental risks. While Belfast is now a super-connected city, digital infrastructure outside the city lags far behind.

### Climate change

The vision should commit to Northern Ireland being a world leader in tackling climate change. While there has been some progress towards reducing carbon emissions, much more is needed to match reductions in the rest of the UK. The Executive needs to put green jobs and investment at the centre of its economic vision.

### Inclusive growth

This vision should commit to inclusive growth that benefits everyone in Northern Ireland. It should focus on good quality jobs that offer fair pay, security and progression prospects; underpinned by improved skills that enable people to access these opportunities.

Such an ambitious vision will require the Executive to work differently from in the past. Success will rely on all departments contributing, not just the Department for the Economy. Pivotal's previous report concluded that the Executive has struggled to work effectively across departmental boundaries in the past and to implement long-term strategies. Success with such an ambitious

# The C-19 crisis provides Northern Ireland with an opportunity for a renewed commitment to address our climate emergency.

economic vision will rely on the Executive owning and pursuing this vision collectively and persistently.

The Department for the Economy's recent report 'Rebuilding a Stronger Economy' is a welcome first step. Its three aims of increasing higher paid jobs, a higher skilled and agile workforce, and a more regionally balanced economy are all fundamental building blocks for long-term economic success. The key going forward will be turning this strategy into the delivery of improved economic outcomes.

In the rest of this paper, we set out further areas where the Executive as a whole needs to act to deliver a long-term economic vision.

## Policy considerations

**The Executive should develop an ambitious long-term vision for the Northern Ireland economy, including a plan for transforming skills, investing in infrastructure and addressing the challenges of climate change.**

**The Executive's economic vision should commit to inclusive growth that creates opportunities for all and shares the benefits of growth fairly across society.**

**This long-term economic vision should include commitments from all departments about how they will contribute to achieving this collective vision.**

## 2. Developing a sustainable future

The C-19 crisis provides Northern Ireland with an opportunity for a renewed commitment to address our climate emergency. C-19 is likely to have led to changing attitudes towards outdoor spaces and increased demand for green spaces, cycling and exercise. In the absence of a vaccine, social distancing measures are likely to be in place for some time which has radically changed how we work, travel, and use towns and cities. These changes provide opportunities to develop a more resilient economy through climate-friendly policies that make best use of city centres, public transport and tourism.

### *Developing a better connected Northern Ireland*

The pandemic has led to a substantial rise in demand for high quality broadband and future UK projections indicate that online sales, leisure use and education are significant growth sectors. Broadband is essential for economic development as a facilitator to employment, entrepreneurship, education and business. However, rural areas in Northern Ireland have inconsistent and at times poor broadband coverage. Reliable access to high streaming broadband across Northern Ireland is likely to increase the capacity for some sectors to work from home, increase business opportunities and reduce unnecessary business travel.

The implementation of the broadband enhancement scheme, Project Stratum, should be accelerated to provide access to essential broadband across Northern Ireland. Delivery of Project Stratum must also take into account increased demands for broadband usage and the project may need to be expanded wider to ensure consistent connectivity

# The economic response to C-19 should address the long-term issues with productivity and skills in Northern Ireland.

across Northern Ireland. Furthermore, the contract award should include skills development opportunities for those furloughed and young people aged 14-19.

## *Reducing carbon emissions*

Only a small amount of progress has been made in Northern Ireland towards the 80% reduction target for carbon emissions set as part of the UK Climate Change Act 2008. Northern Ireland urgently needs its own climate change strategy and targets to reduce carbon emissions. This strategy should harness the ideas and energy that are driving environmental policies across the world; for example further investment in renewable energy, linking agricultural support to reduction in emissions, tree planting and changed transport habits.

## *Re-imagining town and city centres*

The Executive has an opportunity to work with the business community and councils to consider different solutions to increase activity in sectors badly affected by the lockdown. Towns and cities may benefit from a strategy to pedestrianise some streets in cities and towns to facilitate social distancing measures in the hospitality industry. Furthermore, flexible opening hours may support social distancing, reduce queues and better facilitate the consumer experience.

## **Policy consideration**

**The Executive should agree an ambitious strategy for tackling climate change to make Northern Ireland a world leader in environmental policy including; further broadband provision, challenging targets for reducing carbon emissions and re-imagining towns and cities.**

## **3. Skills development plan as a catalyst for productivity**

The economic response to C-19 provides the Executive with an opportunity to address long-term issues with productivity and skills in Northern Ireland. The Executive should consider a strategic plan to invest in education, skills and training for a future-ready workforce. This strategic approach must also include a reactive plan to address unemployment of young people and workers in industries at high-risk of redundancy as a result of the C-19.

Young people have been disproportionately affected by the economic consequences of C-19. Sectors that historically employed high numbers of young people are unlikely to immediately return to pre-pandemic employment levels. Education and training are essential to provide new opportunities for young people and those in furloughed industries.

Previous research in Northern Ireland demonstrates that 12% of working-aged unemployed adults had qualifications equal to NQF level 4 compared to 39% of people in employment. The skills deficit was a significant issue prior to the pandemic with three quarters of businesses in Northern Ireland describing a lack of confidence in their ability to fill highly skilled positions. There is a risk that unless opportunities to re-train and upskill are made available during rising unemployment that this skill deficit will further increase.

The Executive's initial response of providing online training programmes for individuals affected by C-19 is a welcome first step to prepare for skills re-training. However, the current figure of 2,000 places is insufficient to meet the necessary training requirements for estimated unemployment figures in

# Three months without formal education is likely to have increased educational attainment gaps.

Northern Ireland. Furthermore, the training programme is not linked to a strategic plan to address historical skill deficits.

Comprehensive policies are needed to address our long-term skills shortages and provide re-training for those who may lose their jobs in coming months. Urgent consideration should be given to those who are most likely to be threatened with unemployment (e.g. young people and those in lower skilled roles). This initial reactive response should be one part of a wider strategic plan to address historical low levels of skills within Northern Ireland. Workers in sectors with a likelihood of redundancy (e.g. hospitality) should be targeted and provided with opportunities to re-train in areas with a skill shortage. A long-term training programme should address historical deficits in sectors such as engineering and technology, maths and computer science, and physical/environmental sciences.

## Policy considerations

**A strategic programme is required to address historical skills shortages across Northern Ireland. This strategy should provide targeted investment and training opportunities in areas with particular skills shortages (e.g. engineering and technology).**

**An urgent strategy is required to provide re-training opportunities to those at risk of redundancy in sectors with high levels of furlough.**

## 4. Educational recovery plan

Children across Northern Ireland have experienced a three-month break in formal education since lockdown began in March 2020. Social distancing measures put in place to return to education in September 2020 may prevent a return to pre-Covid teaching practices for some time due to constraints of physical space, decontamination requirements and staffing issues.

Emerging research indicates that factors such as higher Social Economic Status (SES), parental education level, parental job occupation and digital literacy are indicative of a more favourable home-school outcome. School closures may increase the educational attainment gap for low income families and children with Special Education Needs (SEN). Children in lower income families are at larger risk for attainment gaps than children in higher SES households and could experience permanent 'educational scarring'. This 'scarring' may be particularly relevant to children in the early years and school leavers, wiping-out gains made to narrow the achievement gap in the previous decade.

Underperformance by GCSE students and sixth-formers from disadvantaged backgrounds may increase the likelihood of poor economic success and decrease opportunities to attend highly selective universities. The lack of opportunities post-education for 'Generation Covid' is concerning as this group of young people face record levels of unemployment, reduced graduate recruitment, global recession and decreased opportunities for social mobility.

Children in England will be supported by the £1 billion 'Covid Catch-up Plan' to address the impact of lost teaching time on primary and secondary students. However, this plan

# Northern Ireland requires a national teaching support service to 'level-up' the educational loss that some children will have experienced during lockdown.

does not currently apply to the devolved nations. Northern Ireland cannot socially or economically afford to ignore the emerging educational crisis for children and young people. The Department of Education (DoE) was already under significant pressure to meet the needs of children with additional needs. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the economic gains obtained solely from eliminating extreme underperformance in high-income countries by 2030 would be sufficient to pay for the primary and secondary education of all students.

The recent short-term plan proposed by DoE to provide summer schools and virtual classrooms for children in Primary 5-7 and priority access to youth services for keyworkers is welcome. However, these measures are not compulsory and will not be applied throughout Northern Ireland.

It is unclear how the DoE's proposed 'Engage' programme to provide educational support and nurture-based interventions will be resourced and implemented throughout Northern Ireland. A national teaching support service to 'level-up' the educational loss that some children will have experienced during lockdown is required in Northern Ireland. This teaching service should be one part of a wider educational recovery programme with online resources, after-school support and targeted careers advice for children in Key Stage 3 and above.

Creative models of educational support could be considered as part of a wider educational recovery strategy. Emerging models of the use of graduate tutors in the UK may be applicable within Northern Ireland. Similar schemes have historically demonstrated a convincing argument of using

university students to enhance academic outcomes for children in addition to providing longer-term social and economic benefits.

## Policy considerations

**The Executive should develop a resourced educational recovery plan to 'level-up' the educational loss that some children will have experienced during lockdown. This plan should apply across Northern Ireland and provide a teaching support service, comprehensive online resources, after-school support and targeted careers advice for children in Key Stage 3 and above.**

**Further details are required on the 'Engage' programme outlined by the Department of Education. This programme must have capacity to provide tuition to all children who have experienced learning loss to level-up the lockdown learning gap.**

# Policy considerations

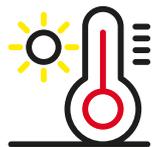


## An ambitious economic vision for Northern Ireland

The Executive should develop an ambitious long-term vision for the Northern Ireland economy, including a plan for transforming skills, investing in infrastructure and addressing the challenges of climate change.

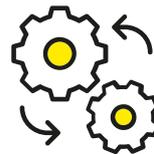
The Executive’s economic vision should commit to inclusive growth that creates opportunities for all and shares the benefits of growth fairly across society.

This long-term economic vision should include commitments from all departments about how they will contribute to achieving this collective vision.



## Developing a sustainable future

The Executive should agree an ambitious strategy for tackling climate change to make Northern Ireland a world leader in environmental policy including; further broadband provision, challenging targets for reducing carbon emissions and re-imagining towns and cities.



## Skills development plan as a catalyst for productivity

A strategic programme is required to address historical skills shortages across Northern Ireland. This strategy should provide targeted investment and training opportunities in areas with particular skills shortages (e.g. engineering and technology).

An urgent strategy is required to provide re-training opportunities to those at risk of redundancy in sectors with high levels of furlough.



## Educational recovery plan

The Executive should develop a resourced educational recovery plan to ‘level-up’ the educational loss that some children will have experienced during lockdown. This plan should apply across Northern Ireland and provide a teaching support service, comprehensive online resources, after-school support and targeted careers advice for children in Key Stage 3 and above.

Further details are required on the ‘Engage’ programme outlined by the Department of Education. This programme must have capacity to provide tuition to all children who have experienced learning loss to level-up the lockdown learning gap.

24<sup>th</sup> June 2020

[www.pivotalppf.org](http://www.pivotalppf.org)



@PivotalPPF

PIVOTAL

PUBLIC POLICY  
FORUM NI