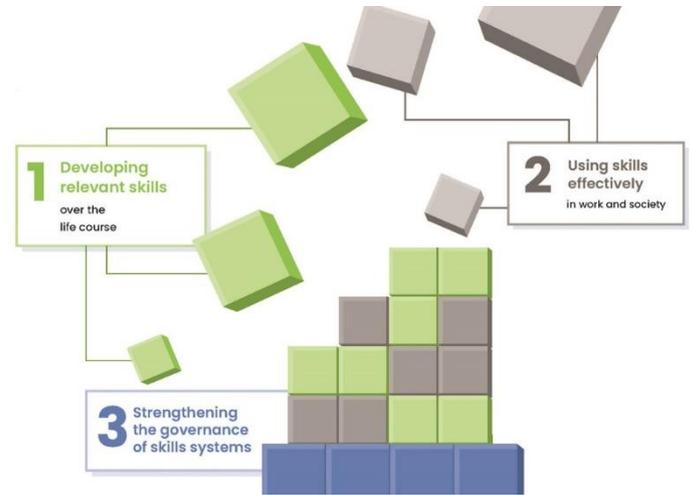




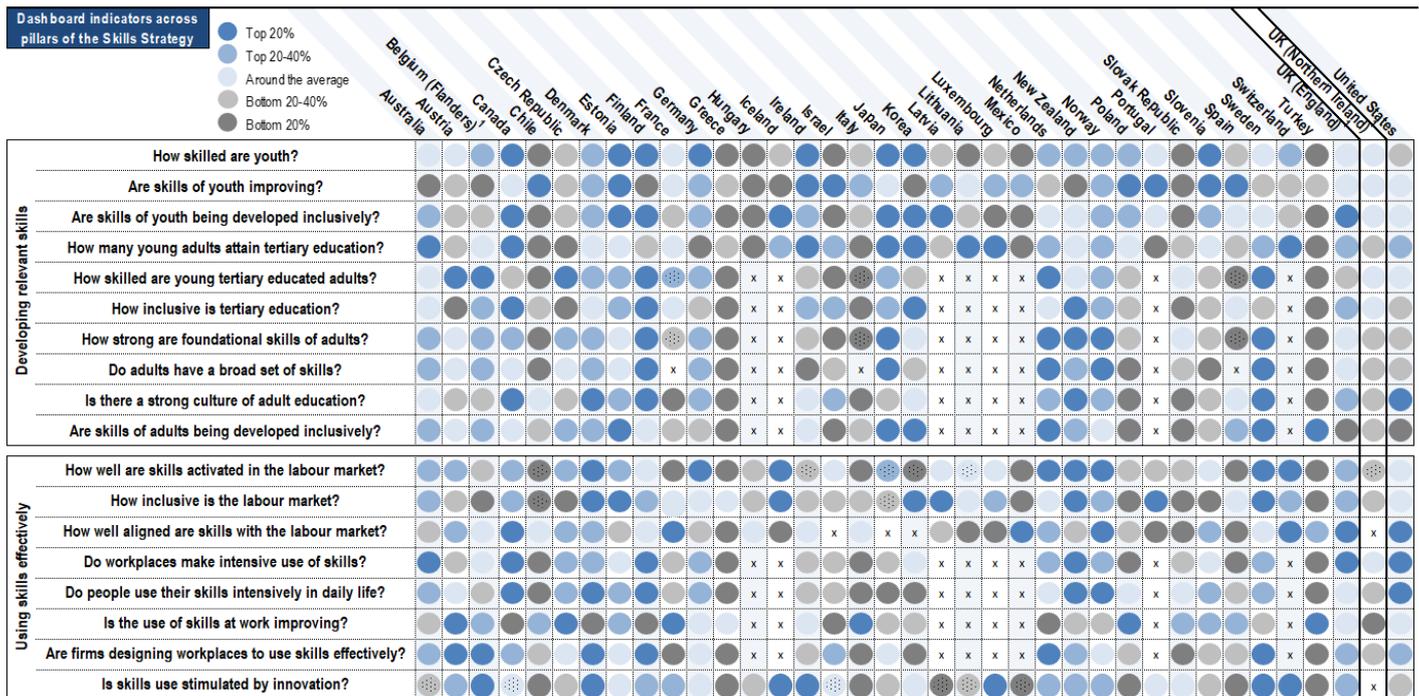
### 2019 OECD Skills Strategy: Northern Ireland

Since its launch in 2012, the OECD Skills Strategy has provided countries with a strategic and comprehensive approach to assessing their skills challenges and opportunities. The 2019 OECD Skills Strategy incorporates lessons learned from applying the OECD Skills Strategy framework in eleven countries, including new evidence about the implications of so-called megatrends, such as globalisation, digitalisation, population ageing or migration. It also accounts for new evidence about skills policies that work under the proper governance arrangements, including effective co-ordination and accountability mechanisms, efficient funding from different sources and information systems. This document describes the key findings for Northern Ireland.

### The 2019 OECD Skills Strategy



### OECD Skills Strategy Dashboard: summary indicators of skills performance



Notes: Indicators are selected, aggregated and normalised in a way to ensure that a higher value and being among the “Top 20%” reflects better performance. Colours in the dashboard represent the quintile position of the country in the ranking, with dark grey indicating performance at the bottom, and dark blue indicating performance at the top of the ranking. The “x” indicates insufficient or no available data for the underlying indicators, and dotted circles indicate missing data for at least one underlying indicator. Only OECD sources have been used (see OECD (2019) for overview).

1. For Belgium (Flanders), United Kingdom (England and Northern Ireland), a combination of regional (PISA and PIAAC) and national data have been used.

Note on Israel: The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and are under the responsibility of relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

### Northern Ireland’s skills performance

The Skills Strategy Dashboard provides a snapshot of Northern Ireland’s comparative skills performance. Northern Ireland is a relatively strong overall performer in developing skills of youth and young adults, with the performance of 15 year-olds in PISA 2015 above the OECD average in mathematics, reading and science. Since the

Belfast Agreement over two decades ago, Northern Ireland has made significant progress in strengthening its economic performance and social stability. The labour market has become more inclusive and the unemployment rate has progressively fallen to its record low.

Despite this positive trend, there continue to be areas in which Northern Ireland could improve. The skills outcomes of youth and tertiary educated adults are only average, and the skills of adults are still low in comparison with most OECD countries. According to the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), adult's average scores for numeracy and problem-solving were below many of the OECD countries, and just above the average for literacy skills. Northern Ireland also ranks in the bottom 40% for the strength of its adult learning culture, with the participation rate and reported interest in learning in adulthood well below the OECD average. Strengthening the culture of adult education could contribute to improving the breadth and quality of skills in adults.

Northern Ireland could also improve the activation of skills and the inclusiveness of the labour market. The employment rate has been growing but remains lower than in many OECD countries. Moreover, although the gender employment gap is comparatively narrow, the employment difference between high and low educated is among the highest in the OECD countries.

Finally, more can be done to improve the intensity with which skills are used in the workplace. Northern Ireland has only around average performance in the use of reading,

numeracy and ICT skills at work, and skills use has been increasing less rapidly in Northern Ireland than in most OECD countries. The intensity of skills use in the workplace could be improved by encouraging the adoption of high-performance workplace practices, but a comparatively small share of firms are currently adopting these practices in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland has taken important steps to help address many of these challenges. *Success through Skills* offers an overarching vision to promote the development of skills up to 2020 towards four strategic goals. Northern Ireland has also recognised the importance of such challenges going forward. The *Draft Programme for Government* includes reducing the inactivity rate and increasing the rate of innovation among its key outcome indicators. Finally, *Further Education Means Success: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Further Education* was launched in 2016 to provide future direction for further and adult education.

Still, Northern Ireland could benefit from a renewal of its strategic vision for the future to ensure that all of its people have the necessary skills to respond to the challenges and opportunities of a complex and rapidly changing world. A whole-of-government approach is needed to achieve this aim.

### Key recommendations for improving the performance of countries' skills systems

#### Developing relevant skills over the life course: Making skills systems responsive

- Making each stage of learning a foundation for success in the next
- Enabling policies to support learning in adulthood
- Supporting teachers to become lifelong learners
- Financing adult learning
- Harnessing the power of technology as a tool for learning

#### Using skills effectively in work and society: Making the most of everyone's potential

- Make full use of everyone's skills
- Making the most of migrants' skills
- Activating skills to build more inclusive and cohesive societies
- Making intensive use of skills in work
- Aligning skills with the needs of the economy and society
- Aligning skills policies with industrial and innovation policies

#### Strengthening the governance of skills systems: Tackling increased complexity

- Promoting co-ordination, co-operation and collaboration across the whole of government
- Engaging stakeholders throughout the policy cycle
- Building integrated information systems
- Aligning and co-ordinating financing arrangements

#### Further reading

OECD (2019), *OECD Skills Strategy 2019: Skills to shape a better future*, OECD Publishing, Paris, [//doi.org/10.1787/9789264313835-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264313835-en).

OECD (2019), *OECD Skills Outlook 2019: Thriving in a Digital World*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/df80bc12-en>.

OECD (forthcoming), *Strengthening the Governance of Skills Systems*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

#### Contact

Bart Staats, Policy Analyst, OECD Centre for Skills: [bart.staats@oecd.org](mailto:bart.staats@oecd.org)

#### For more information on OECD National Skills Strategy projects, contact

Montserrat Gomendio, Head of the OECD Centre for Skills: [montserrat.gomendio@oecd.org](mailto:montserrat.gomendio@oecd.org)

Andrew Bell, Head, National Skills Strategy projects: [andrew.bell@oecd.org](mailto:andrew.bell@oecd.org)