

Stepping Up and Stepping Forward



Foreword

‘Stepping Up and Stepping Forward: 10 Learning Insights on how well Northern Ireland’s education system is responding to COVID-19 and other challenges’ is a commentary publication which draws on learning from the education and training system’s response to the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused extensive disruption to education and training across the world. According to the [United Nations](#), 1.6 billion learners in 190 different countries were impacted adversely; Northern Ireland’s (NI) learners were caught up in this global disorder.

The Learning Insights acknowledge the exemplary efforts made by NI’s leaders and practitioners and suggests how we can all work more collaboratively to address the ongoing challenges. Since the start of the pandemic, educators have stepped up and stepped forward to meet the challenges. Parents and carers, as first educators, were integral to that success.

‘Stepping Up and Stepping Forward’ is distilled from Education and Training Inspectorate’s (ETI) first-hand observations and evidence from survey work, questionnaires, focus group discussions, visits to organisations, and interactions with leaders and practitioners across all education and training sectors, since March 2020. It provides insights on what ETI has learned during the pandemic and how we all can work more collaboratively and confidently in support of our learners.

High quality education can transform lives and life-chances. ETI plays a unique role in education, in that its work covers the spectrum of the education, training and youth sectors. Inspectors believe that our work promotes improvement through professional and reliable external evaluation of provision in individual organisations, at sector level and at system level. Equally, we view collaborative working, professional dialogue and building consensus as being key contributors to our own and our stakeholders’ improvement agendas. That includes listening more attentively to learners to identify their individual needs, designing curricula to meet those needs and supporting and developing our most valuable learning resource, our teachers¹ and leaders.

Despite the best intentions, mistakes can be made, or important decisions not made quickly enough, by each one of us. However, with understanding and a resolve to work more collaboratively, we can accrue much practical learning from one another and through sharing our experiences.

¹ In this document, the term ‘teacher’ includes teachers in schools and EOTAS settings, tutors/mentors in work-based learning, lecturers in Further Education colleges, staff in early years’ settings and tutors in youth settings.

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All of our professional peers, stakeholders, families and communities play complementary roles in the education of our learners. By sharing our expertise, experiences and learning, we can work more coherently to realise our shared goal of giving every child and young person the life-chances they deserve.

We hope that the worst of the COVID-19 disruptions are behind us. We have all learned that by continuing to upskill ourselves, manage risks for learning and have high expectations around what we can achieve, we are stepping up from COVID-19 and stepping forward for learners.