Strategic Review of the NI Curriculum

29 January 2025

Summary

- Logistics underpins the Northern Ireland economy: more than 65,000 people are employed in the sector, nearly 8% of the Northern Ireland workforce
- Shortages in essential roles signal a gap in workforce preparedness, exacerbating future challenges
- The skills shortage represents an opportunity for young people, but the current curriculum does not adequately highlight these career pathways
- Logistics UK recommends:
  - Introducing logistics-specific content or modules in core subjects
  - Strengthening employer-school partnerships to raise awareness of career pathways and provide work experience opportunities
  - Promoting logistics careers through initiatives like Generation Logistics in GB to raise awareness and stimulate interest

About Logistics UK

Logistics UK is one of the country's largest business groups, representing the entire logistics industry and supporting, shaping and standing up for safe and efficient logistics. Our membership of more than 20,000 includes global, national and regional businesses and SMEs spanning road, rail, inland waterways, sea and air as well as the buyers of freight services, such as retailers and manufacturers. As an organisation, we deliver services, representation and thought leadership, helping members and policy makers to seize new opportunities for the sector and the economy.

Logistics skills in Northern Ireland

Logistics underpins the Northern Ireland economy, delivering for its households, businesses and public services, every day, via road, sea and air, strengthening connections, growing market access and encouraging innovation. Logistics is a major sector in its own right. More than 65,000 people are employed in logistics roles – nearly 8% of the Northern Ireland workforce, there are over 6,000 logistics businesses in Northern Ireland, making, selling and moving goods, and the wider transport and storage sector adds £1.5 billion to the Northern Ireland economy[1][2].

Continued skills shortages in key logistics roles, including drivers and vehicle technicians, are a symptom of a system that is not delivering for the future. This situation risks worsening as more electric and alternatively fuelled vehicles are introduced to meet the NI Executive's Climate Change targets, which require different skills to maintain. The logistics sector has a key role to play in driving regional balance under the Sub-Regional Economic Plan launched by the Economy Minister in October 2024. Logistics is also a foundational sector to the growth-driving sectors identified in the Industrial Strategy for Northern Ireland[3], one which at least four of those six growth-driving sectors relies upon. The public sector and other private sector businesses spent 15% of their total input-related spending on logistics services in 2019[4], indicating that logistics is one of the UK's most substantial foundational sectors. As such, it is essential that any modern curriculum reflects the need for skills partnerships to support a thriving sector.

[1] Office for National Statistics, April 2024. Regional gross value added (balanced) by industry: all ITL regions
[2] Labour Force Survey, Office of National Statistics Q3 2022 and Q1 2023
[3] Economy 2030: A consultation on an Industrial Strategy for Northern Ireland, Department for the Economy, 2017
[4] Logistics: Delivering a solution to the UK's productivity puzzle, Oxford Economics, September 2023

Response to consultation

2. What are you views on the strengths of the Northern Ireland Curriculum?

With a specific focus on Key Stages 3 and 4, one of the primary strengths of the Northern Ireland Curriculum through a logistics lens is that it takes a skills-based approach. The curriculum emphasises skills such as problem-solving, communication and teamwork, which are essential in many logistics roles.

The curriculum's flexibility in implementation offers providers the opportunity to integrate logistics-relevant content into existing curriculum subjects, for example Maths (data handling, route optimisation), ICT (inventory management, digital logistics) and Science (transport efficiency, environmental impact).

Finally, an emphasis on transferrable skills, such as digital skills, enterprise and numeracy, helps to prepare students for modern logistics careers, which rely on data analysis, automation and problem solving.

3. What are your views on the weaknesses of the Northern Ireland Curriculum?

Whilst key skills that are essential to the logistics sector are emphasised in the curriculum, the lack of direct logistics content, despite the sector being one of major employment in Northern Ireland, is noted. Furthermore, with Gatsby Benchmarks optional for careers education in NI, structured links between industry and education may not be in place[5], meaning students may not be fully aware of opportunities.

The flexibility in curriculum implementation provides opportunities for cross-curricular integration with logistics concepts, but such flexibility could lead to inconsistent adoption. Logistics UK is not calling for inflexibility; rather support to highlight initiatives like Generation Logistics, a careers awareness campaign currently across GB for those aged 13-24 and educators of those aged 13-18, promoting the depth and breadth of the logistics sector with the support of over 30 companies. The Generation Logistics Education Hub now has over 50 free, curriculum-mapped resources for teachers and careers leads to introduce logistics into core subjects, developed with STEM Learning, MEI, the Geographical Association, and sponsors. Careers Leads will also find the Generation Logistics careers booklet, featuring over 20 case studies across 14 job families, two series of vidcasts with logisticians talking about how curriculum subjects relate to their careers, and a student-facing website, the Generation Logistics Hub, with quizzes and activities for students to find out more about how their knowledge, skills, behaviours and interests map to careers in the logistics sector.

In its first two years, Generation Logistics has raised awareness of the logistics sector by 37% and increased positive perception of careers in logistics by 212%. With a curriculum that prides itself on economic relevance and big ideas, a focus on the sector in any revisions will only enhance this aim.

Furthermore, Generation Logistics, and similar programmes in maritime and engineering, foster strong employer-school relationships, allowing students to gain hands-on exposure to logistics careers. A greater promotion of vocational pathways in logistics, particularly at Key Stage 4, would help the uptake of existing logistics apprenticeships, such as the Higher Level Apprenticeship in Supply Chain and Logistics.

Conclusion

Logistics is a fundamental pillar of Northern Ireland's economy, yet its representation within the curriculum does not currently reflect its significance. While the Northern Ireland Curriculum offers flexibility and a strong focus on key skills, there is a clear opportunity to enhance its alignment with the logistics sector by embedding industry-specific content, strengthening employer-school partnerships, and promoting vocational pathways. By expanding careers education, young people will be better informed and equipped to pursue careers in this critical sector. A curriculum that truly prepares students for the modern workforce must include logistics as a core consideration, fostering a pipeline of skilled professionals who can drive economic growth and innovation. Logistics UK welcomes further engagement on this issue and looks forward to working collaboratively to shape a curriculum that supports both learners and industry alike.

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[5] Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland: Skills for a 10X Economy, Department for the Economy, 2022