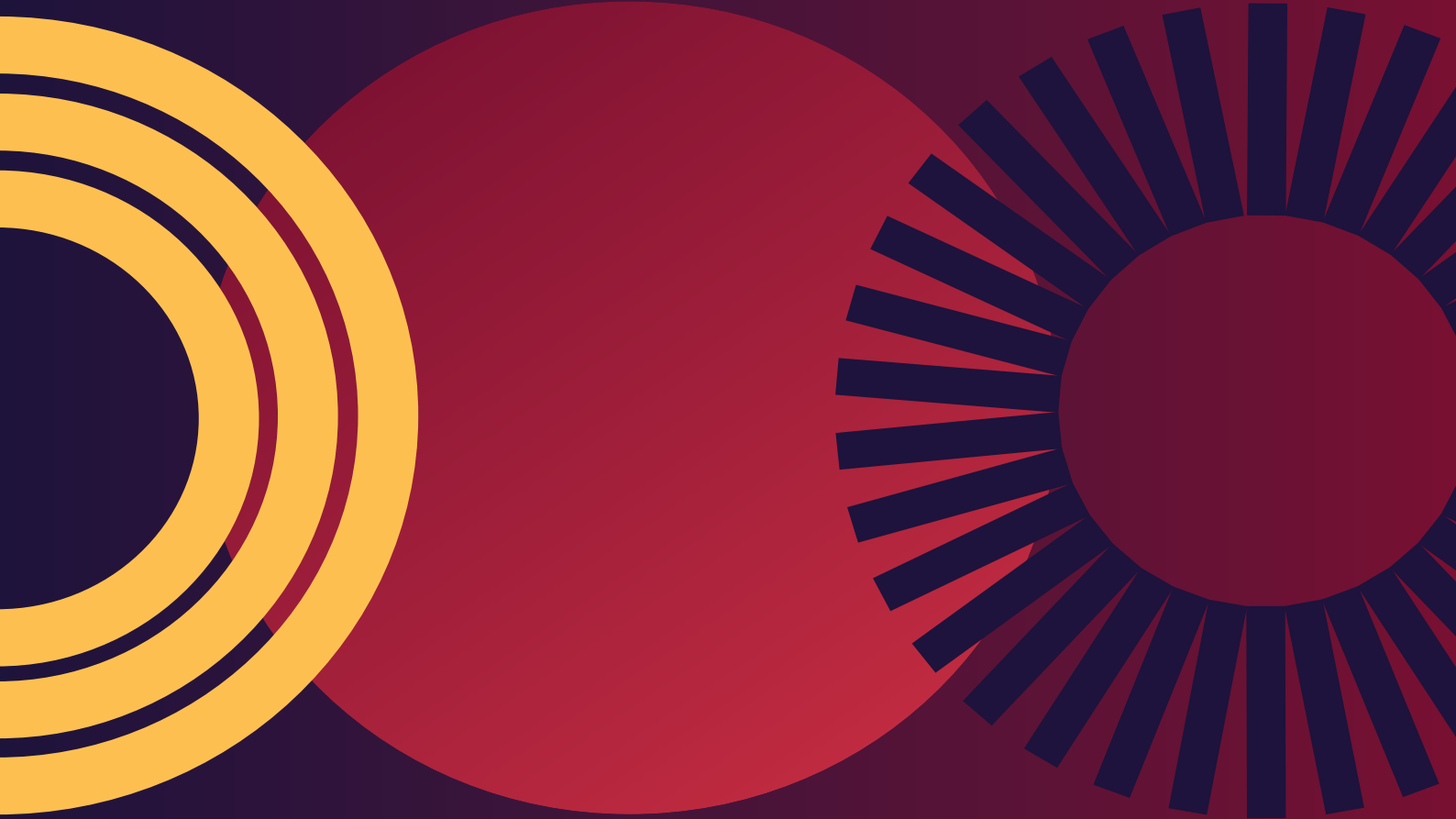




Strategic Plan 2024 - 2027



A trusted path for learners

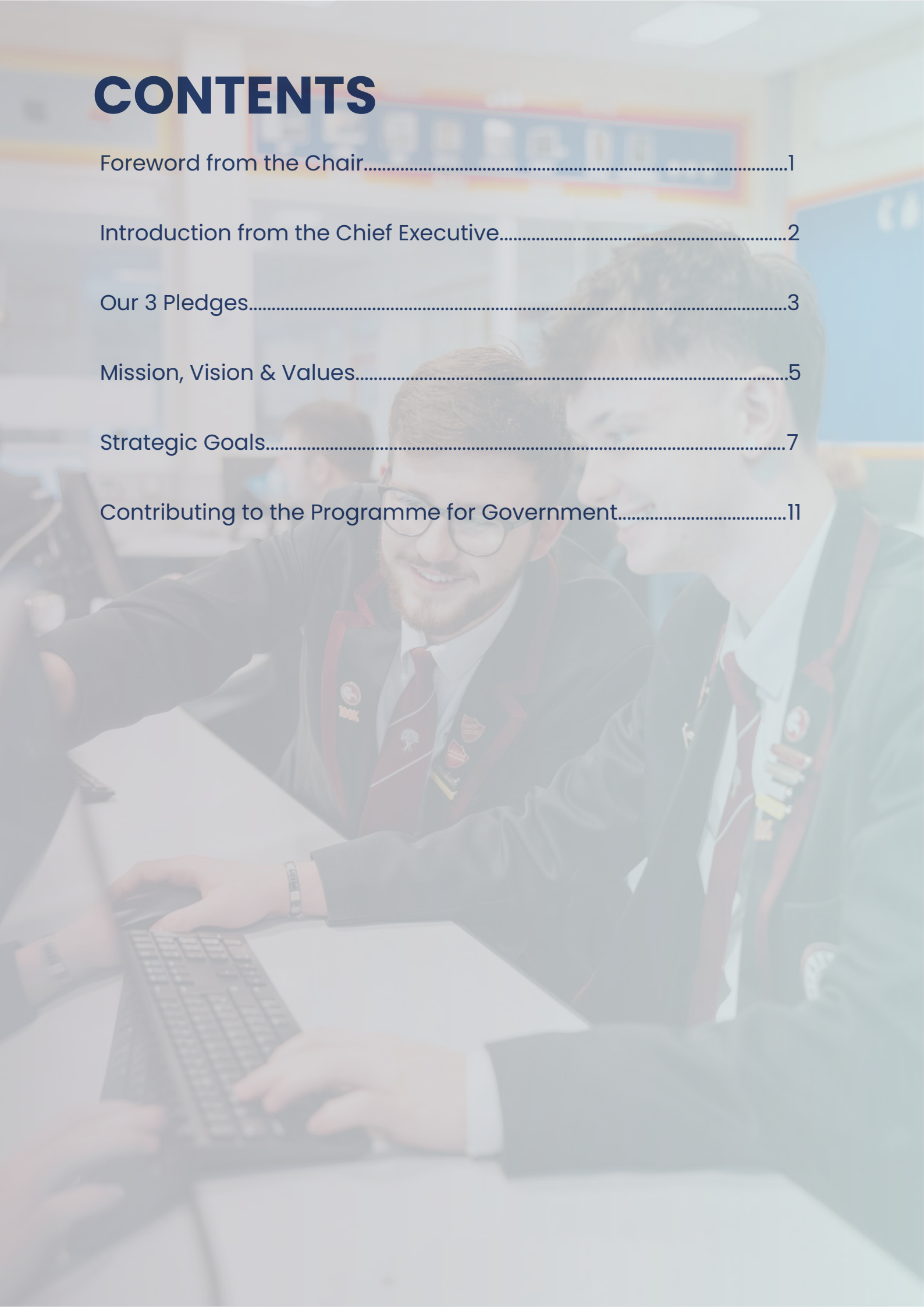
A trusted partner to educators

Shaping futures
since 1995



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Foreword from the Chair

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the Open College Network Northern Ireland (OCN) 3-Year Strategic Plan, a roadmap designed to build on our strong foundations, set new standards of excellence and reaffirm our commitment to learners across Northern Ireland and beyond.

At the heart of this plan lies our mission: *"to develop and award qualifications which engage, enrich and equip learners for life."* Everything we do is shaped by this guiding principle, ensuring that learners remain at the centre of our work.

Our strategy is built around three core priorities that will drive our efforts over the coming years:



To be the awarding organisation of choice

Recognised for quality, flexibility and learner-centred approaches



To promote learning as a tool for transformation

Empowering individuals and communities to realise their full potential



To be innovative, creative and continuously improve

Staying agile, responsive and forward-thinking in a rapidly changing world

The year 2025 marks a significant milestone for OCN, as we proudly celebrate 30 years as Northern Ireland's leading technical and professional qualifications awarding body. Since our launch in 1995, we have continually sought to support learners in their journey of career and personal development. As part of our 30th anniversary celebrations, we have developed three pledges that will underpin the successful delivery of this strategy, ensuring we stay true to our values and mission.

I am extremely proud to be Chair of OCN during this important milestone year in our continued evolution. During my tenure, I have had the privilege to share in the stories of some of our learners and listen to their inspirational accounts – many of whom have overcome great adversity to achieve their goals. As a charity, OCN will continue to ensure that when it comes to learning, *no one gets left behind*.

Paul Donaghy
Chair



Introduction from the Chief Executive

As the leading awarding body for technical and professional qualifications in Northern Ireland, Open College Network NI (OCN) recognises the vital role that skills development plays in driving economic growth and promoting social mobility. For over 30 years, we have worked tirelessly to ensure that our qualifications are relevant, up to date, and most importantly, aligned with the ever-evolving needs of the labour market. This commitment has enabled over 500,000 learners to progress in their education, secure meaningful employment and contribute positively to their communities.

In February 2024, the Economy Minister set out a bold and ambitious vision for the Northern Ireland economy, focusing on four key objectives: creating good jobs, promoting regional balance, raising productivity and reducing carbon emissions. These priorities represent not only a blueprint for economic renewal but a clear call to action for the education and skills sector.

At OCN, we are fully committed to supporting this vision. Our 3-Year Strategic Plan outlines how we will develop and deliver qualifications that equip learners with the right skills to build sustainable careers in a rapidly changing economy.

By working closely with our partners across education, industry and government, we will continue to provide inclusive, flexible and responsive learning pathways that meet the demands of employers and the aspirations of individuals.

We look forward to the opportunities and challenges ahead as we strive to make a lasting, positive impact on Northern Ireland's skills landscape.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martin Flynn". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Martin Flynn
Chief Executive



As we celebrate our 30th anniversary, Open College Network is proud to reaffirm its commitment to education and skills development in Northern Ireland through these three key pledges...Opportunity for All, Collaboration at the Core and Nurturing Innovation.

These pledges reflect our dedication to breaking down barriers to learning, strengthening collaborative partnerships, and creating forward-thinking approaches to vocational and technical education.

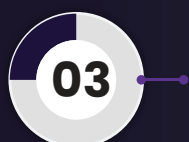
Our vision is for a successful, inclusive society where every learner matters and we are proud to contribute to the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government and the Minister for the Economy's Economic Vision, to help improve the lives of all citizens.



Oppportunity for all



Collaboration at the Core



Nurturing Innovation



Our 3 Pledges

1. Opportunity for All

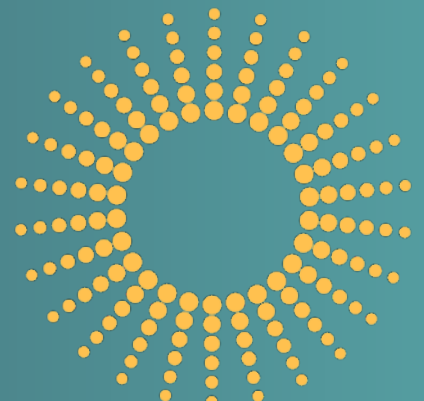
We pledge to continue to break down barriers to conventional learning by offering our recognised education and training providers access to qualifications which are accessible and relevant to people of all backgrounds, ages and abilities. We will promote the value of lifelong learning, enabling more individuals across Northern Ireland the opportunity to gain the skills and qualifications they need to succeed in their chosen fields.

2. Collaboration at the Core

We pledge to strengthen collaborations with policymakers, education and training providers, businesses and community organisations to ensure our qualifications remain relevant, inclusive and meaningful for the next generation of learners. We will recognise and promote the added value of family, community and work-based learning as vital contributors to personal development, social inclusion, and employability. By fostering collaboration, we will drive economic growth and skills development across Northern Ireland.

3. Nurturing Innovation

We pledge to lead the way through innovative vocational and technical qualifications by embracing technology, sustainability and dynamic practices which will nurture and shape a brighter future for learning in Northern Ireland. We will champion the need for a coherent learning and skills ecosystem, where learning becomes the golden thread running through all public policy and funding decisions, ensuring long-term impact and inclusive growth.





MISSION

To develop and award qualifications which engage, enrich and equip learners for life.



VISION

A successful, inclusive society where every learner matters.



VALUES



LEARNER CENTRED

Everyone has the right to learn and develop throughout their lives and have that learning recognised and valued.



RESPECT

Everyone is entitled to be valued equally and treated with dignity and respect. We will apply the highest standards of integrity in everything we do.



EXCELLENCE

Everyone has the right to high-quality services which are accessible, valued and responsive to needs. We will hold ourselves to the highest standards of responsible business.



COLLABORATION

The needs of learners are more effectively met by working closely together with our Centres and other stakeholders to seek collaborative partnerships.

STRATEGIC GOALS

**STRATEGIC GOAL 1:
To be the Awarding Body
of choice**



**STRATEGIC GOAL 2:
To promote learning as a
tool for transformation**



**STRATEGIC GOAL 3:
To be innovative,
creative and
continuously improve**

Strategic Goal 1: To be the Awarding Body of choice

Customer Service

Aim 1.1: To respond effectively to the needs and aspirations of our customers and other stakeholders in line with best practice.

Organisational Excellence

Aim 1.2: To foster a culture of continuous improvement and innovation, ensuring all aspects of the organisation are united in a collective dedication to efficiency, quality, and adaptability.

Marketing and Communications

Aim 1.3: To enhance brand visibility, communicate the value of our qualifications to relevant audiences; and foster stakeholder engagement.



Strategic Goal 2: To promote learning as a tool for transformation

Advocacy

Aim 2.1: To work in partnership to support learner progression and lifelong learning education and effectively contribute to public policy.

Qualifications portfolio

Aim 2.2: To develop new qualifications and update existing ones to align with industry standards, technological advancements, and societal changes.

Engaging and empowering staff

Aim 2.3: To create a workplace environment where every staff member is actively engaged, motivated, and empowered to contribute their best, driving individual and collective success.



Strategic Goal 3: To be innovative, creative and continuously improve

Technological innovation

Aim 3.1: To embed innovative use of technologies in everything we do to enhance and modernise the learning experience.

Financial and physical resources

Aim 3.2: To promote best practice in resource planning, management and reporting and effectively demonstrate value for money.

Governance

Aim 3.3: To establish and promote a governance framework that ensures transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and effectiveness in decision-making, fostering trust and enabling sustainable development.



OCN has been linking learners to brighter futures, employers to talent, communities to lasting impact and has supported government-funded initiatives since 1995.



Contributing to the Programme for Government: Doing What Matters Most

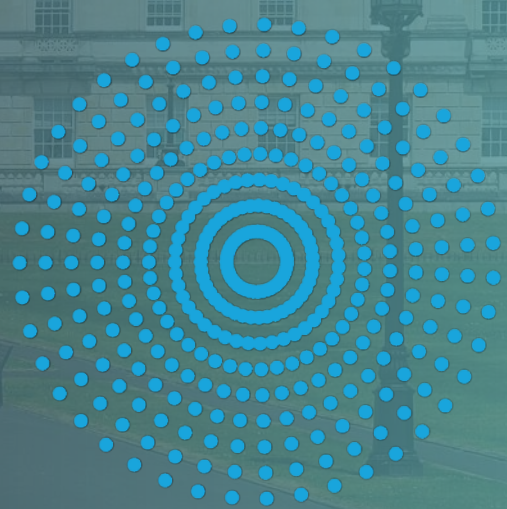
Open College Network Northern Ireland (OCN) is proud to align its 2024–2027 Strategic Plan with the core priorities of the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government, particularly "Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy" and "Shaping a Better Tomorrow." Over the next three years, we are committed to ensuring that our qualifications play a central role in driving economic growth, improving employability and creating a fairer, more inclusive society.

To support the goal of growing a globally competitive and sustainable economy, OCN is focused on developing qualifications that reflect the skills employers and workers need both now and in the future. We are expanding our range of qualifications in key growth areas such as digital technology, green energy, advanced manufacturing and health & social care. Through strong collaboration with industry, government, and education providers, we will ensure our qualifications remain relevant, future-focused and responsive to the evolving labour market. Our commitment to promoting lifelong learning will support people at all stages of their careers, enabling upskilling and reskilling opportunities in line with economic demands. We are also embedding principles of sustainability and innovation across our qualifications to help build a workforce ready to meet the challenges and opportunities of a green economy.



In contributing to the priority of shaping a better tomorrow, OCN is committed to improving access to good jobs through high-quality technical and vocational qualifications. We are enhancing learning pathways that support transition into employment, further education and traineeships/apprenticeships. Our work places particular emphasis on providing opportunities for those who are returning to the labour market, such as parents, carers and individuals who have experienced economic inactivity. By working closely with community and voluntary organisations, we aim to reduce barriers to learning and widen participation, particularly among underrepresented groups. Our qualifications are designed to be accessible, flexible and focused on real-world outcomes, helping individuals to build confidence, gain employment and achieve their personal and professional goals.

Through our work we will develop qualifications that not only supports a competitive economy but also fosters inclusion, opportunity and resilience across Northern Ireland.



STRATEGIC PLAN 2024 – 2027



Where potential
meets possibility

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INVESTORS IN PEOPLE®
We invest in people Gold