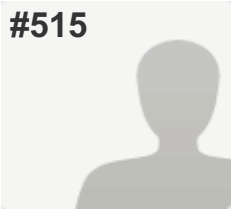


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**PAGE 1: Please complete this consultation paper in respect of your area of interest and/or expertise**

<b>Q1: Name:</b>	Prof. Brian MacCraith
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**Q4: 1(a) What improvements can be made within existing resources**

No submission here.

**Q5: 1(b) What improvements can be made through new provision**

The existing provision at third level is grossly under-resourced and the overall quality of the learning experience for students is under severe threat. There is no avoiding this issue that is exacerbating year on year. Rather than repeat the obvious points of evidence here, I wish to endorse fully the submission of the IUA on this topic and to call for early implementation of the recommendations of the Cassells Report.

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**Q6: 2. Comment on work currently being undertaken by the Department in your area of interest and/or expertise. (What are we doing well, what could we do better)?**

Much excellent work is being undertaken across a broad range of areas:

e.g.

Curriculum reform

Teacher Education

Digital Learning

The overall system (especially student learning experience) would benefit from advances in the following areas:

HE Funding

A strategy for the continuum, especially in terms of a coherent focus on personal development (including skills)

Assessment

STEM education

Education in innovation and entrepreneurship

All of these are covered by comments in later sections of this document

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**Q7: 3. Are there opportunities (e.g. new areas of work) which the Department should consider when developing the 2016 - 2018 strategy which would advance the achievement of our mission, vision and objectives across the continuum of education and skills?**

The role of assessment is key.

Stated another way, the nature and focus of the assessments used in education drive both learning and teaching behaviour.

In this regard, it is important to link the mission, vision and objectives of the DES to assessment and to create a public awareness of same. Arising from the challenges encountered with Junior Cycle reform to date, it is clear that the pivotal role of assessment is not understood by the general public and therefore a significant piece of work is to be done in this context.

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**Q8: 4. How should success on achieving our strategies be measured.**

Success on achieving our strategies can be measured against a clear implementation Roadmap with timed milestones. In addition, where quantitative KPIs can be applied or where calibrated outcomes (e.g. student performance) can be measured unambiguously, these provide clear measures of success.

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**Q9: 5. Comment on any issues relating to the continuum of education and skills, in addition to your particular area of interest and/or expertise**

It is very clear that we could achieve much more from our national education system if we established a coherent master-plan approach and aligned our objectives along all the elements of the education continuum. Many of the problems we are now facing arise from the incoherence in our approach and they become very evident at the transition points, e.g. from primary school to secondary and, especially, from secondary to third level. Surely it should be relatively straightforward to agree on the overall outcomes desired from our education system and to align these objectives at every stage along the education continuum?

In this context, it would be an excellent outcome of this process aimed at developing a Statement of Strategy if we could address this current deficit and take a system-level view of what we want to achieve for all our students at all stages of the continuum of education. We can then ensure that all stages are acting coherently with common objectives.

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**Q10: 6. Any other observations that you would suggest the Department should consider in the formulation of our strategy for education and skills 2016 - 2018**

The Urgent Need for Capital Investment in HE:

At a time when student numbers have increased significantly, Capital and Operational funding of the Higher education (HE) sector has been reduced substantially since 2008 . In attempting to achieve a balanced budget position each year, one key focus area for institutions has been the curtailment of maintenance expenditure. While effective in contributing to the balanced budget position, it has compounded the problem of a lack of capital funding.

If the HE sector is to be able to meet the growing demand for student places and maintain quality, then significant capital investment in the sector is urgently required. In September 2015, in a speech to the Royal Irish Academy, the Chief Executive of the Higher Education Authority recognised the need for urgent investment and confirmed that both HEA and DES reviews showed that the HE sector requires circa €5.8 billion of investment (€580million per year for 10 years) to address substandard conditions and provide for the continued growth in student numbers.

It is clear, therefore, that capital funding for the third level education sector needs to be prioritised as a matter of urgency, through a range of direct capital grant funding and other targeted initiatives such as taxation and other incentives to enable the required investment in the infrastructure of the HE sector to be achieved.

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**Q11: 1(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).**

As a first step, the Minister should revisit the policy options outlined by the Inter-departmental Working Group on Investment in Childcare. The measures put in place over the lifetime of the Partnership Government will be drawn from public investment, and should therefore secure the 'double dividend' of affordability and high quality recommended previously by Start Strong (June 2014). The Minister should also ensure that the recommendations from key reports such as 'Right from the Start: Report of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy' (2013) are revisited and those not implemented are now addressed.

The European Commission Country Report Ireland (2016) clearly maps out the many issues related to affordable, full time and quality childcare. It highlights capacity constraints as particularly of concern. While steps have been taken in the past to address capacity through funding for capital costs, there is no emphasis in the PPG on capacity in terms of qualifications of the workforce. The CoRe Report 2011) commissioned by the European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture set a benchmark that at least 60% of those working in early care and education services should be graduates. The Minister should be seriously concerned about the low level of qualifications in the sector and act to ensure that the growing numbers of graduates with expertise in early care and education are utilised and valued appropriately. Retention of graduates within the sector is of concern with low salaries and short-term 38 week contracts, which necessitate 'signing on' for holiday periods the norm. Without greater investment the workforce will remain unstable and its development curtailed.

The issue of quality is also of concern with the introduction of a second preschool year. The Minister should be concerned that two years of preschool are presented as being about the best lives that children can experience now as three- and four-year-old children, and not just about the preparation of young children further for starting school (see PPG document). The recently initiated Early Years Education-focused Inspections system should be further developed and expanded to secure much more than the current token coverage of the settings providing free pre-school education and care. To engage with the National Frameworks (Aistear and Síolta) and to support quality and reflective practice, settings must have an element of non-contact time and provision for CPD built into the early childhood funding system. The Minister should also consider the system and vision for early childhood holistically, cognisant of the inextricable links between care and education from birth, which were acknowledged in 'Ready to Learn' (DES, 1999). It is a concern that where countries have split systems (birth to three years overseen through health/welfare and three to six years regulated through education) the under 3s are typically vulnerable in terms of funding, systems and curricula (UNESCO, 2010). In Ireland we are fortunate to have Aistear as a curriculum that spans birth to six years and future developments to early childhood systems, structures and processes should reflect an integrated approach.

Parents currently have a choice of provision for their four year old children. We know that schools are a very attractive and convenient choice for many families given their stable professionalised workforce, their location, their resources, their management structures and their quality control safeguards. Any suggestion of the raising of the school starting age to 5 years should not be countenanced by the Minister until corresponding high quality provisions can be put in place in the preschool sector.

The Minister should act as quickly as possible to reduce the pupil-teacher ratio in junior and senior infants in primary schools since this is long recognised as a major constraint in enabling schools to provide the youngest children with the optimum experiences in line with National Frameworks for early childhood education and care (i.e. Síolta and Aistear). The provision of additional teacher CPD in the area of early childhood education and care which builds on current initiatives would greatly enhance the quality of provision for the youngest children in schools. Promoted posts in schools should include one which recognises teacher expertise in Early Childhood Education at postgraduate level.

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**Q12: 1(b) How should progress on Prioritising Early Years be measured?**

Recognition of early childhood care and education as constituting the first level of education as indicated by the development of an appropriate and comparable funding model

Increased professionalisation of the early childhood sector as indicated by the number of appropriately qualified graduates working in the sector

Prioritisation of early childhood within the primary sector as indicated by an improvement in the pupil teacher ratio in early years

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**Q13: 1(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?**

Priority actions:

1. Review and implement the recommendations of existing reports on early years such as 'Right from the start' (2013) to provide affordable and high quality childcare.
  2. Increase and monitor the number of degree holders with appropriate qualifications employed in the sector in line with European Union policies.
  3. Work closely with DCYA to develop mechanisms to improve pay and conditions in the early childhood sector and to retain graduates in the field
  4. Embed a requirement for professional development for early childhood educators into the funding model for early childhood
  5. Reduce the pupil teacher ratio in Junior Infants and provide increased support for children with additional and special needs
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**Q14: 2(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).**

The following issues need firmer addressing in this area:

**Hunger Prevention in Schools - Strategy and Implementation Issues:**

Despite government investment in this area of €42m, real problems remain regarding hunger of students in school. The recent HBSC data highlights this where one in five children go to school or to bed hungry because there is not enough food in the home; one in six children attends school without having breakfast. These figures echo earlier national HBSC (Callaghan et al. 2010) and other local studies from previous years (Downes, Maunsell & Ivers 2006; Downes & Maunsell 2007). On this issue there is a need for a focused national and local strategy, improved coordination for implementation, and less fragmentation between government departments. This issue of hunger prevention in school is more suited to a mainstream national commitment to hot meals in school rather than simply local School Completion Programme cluster decisions about whether to prioritise this issue or making availability subject to an already overburdened school principal applying to the School Meals scheme. A specific and trained person in each school is needed to coordinate the local implementation of hot meals and breakfast clubs, including facilitation of improved dialogue with food suppliers and awareness of children's feedback and individual needs.

**Key Principles regarding the Pupil-Teacher Ratio in DEIS schools that need to be recognised for the 2016-18 strategy:** It is to be recognised that current pupil-teacher ratios in existing DEIS schools need to be maintained and extended with a view to improvement, and with no increase in the 15:1 ratio for schools with so-called legacy posts in recognition of the fundamental principle not to punish any DEIS schools for their gains/successes. The key principle of progressive realisation must also be recognised. Put simply, all DEIS schools are expected to be doing better in five years time in terms of both resources and outcomes than they are doing today. This means no cuts in pupil-teacher ratio in any DEIS school, only extra resources. It is essential to avoid the divisiveness of pitting DEIS schools against each other regarding availability of resources, through a kind of robbing Peter to pay Paul principle between schools. Given the real successes of DEIS schools against the backdrop of the soaring of child poverty during the economic crash, it is to be recognized that DEIS and other schools have served as a major protective factor helping to glue Irish society together against social unrest.

**Alternatives to Suspension and Expulsion through Multidisciplinary Teams in and around Schools:**

The Irish post-primary figure of 5% for suspension, applied to the total population of 332,407 students equates to well over 16,000 students suspended from post-primary schools in 2005/6 (ERC/NEWB 2010), with figures from June 2012 (NEWB) giving 1,051 suspensions in primary schools 2009/10 and 14,162 in postprimary. Many of these students, including those manifesting violent and aggressive behaviour, require mental health/emotional supports through more structured engagements with multidisciplinary teams in and around schools. Some pupils and students displaying consistently high levels of aggression and bullying are reacting to deep trauma in their lives that requires therapeutic supports.

There are only two EU2020 headline targets for education and none for health. One of these headline targets pertains directly to early school leaving reduction across the EU to 10%, with Ireland adopting a target of 8%. Against this backdrop of the major strategic priority of early school leaving prevention and in recognition of all the resources invested by the State in keeping children and young people in school, a policy of such a scale of suspensions and expulsions requires reform. Multidisciplinary teams in and around schools are needed to address the complexity of students' needs who are engaged in behaviour placing them at risk of suspension and expulsion (Downes 2011; Edwards and Downes 2013). A key issue here is not necessarily to prevent withdrawal of a disruptive student from the classroom but to recognise that this does require a strategy to prevent excluding them from the school.

**Need for Emotional Counselling supports in school for early school leaving prevention:**

A key issue for poverty and social inclusion in education is that of emotional supports for students at risk of early school leaving as a protective factor in a system that meets their needs (Joint Oireachtas Committee Report 2010; Downes 2004, 2011a); international research recognises that poverty is an additional risk factor for mental health problems (Dore, 2005; Acheson 1998; Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2009). Mental health and emotional support issues were significantly neglected in DEIS (2005). The lack of adequate emotional counselling services in schools is a systemic gap that needs firm addressing, especially for DEIS schools

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**Q15: 2(b) How should progress on Tackling Disadvantaged be measured?**

*Respondent skipped this question*

**Q16: 2(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?**

Priority Actions

1. Establish multidisciplinary teams in and around schools:
    - A) Need for an Integrated Outreach Strategy to support Marginalised Families
    - B) Emotional counselling supports
    - C) School Based Speech and Language Therapists to Focus on Multipronged Levels of Intervention, including with Parents and Classroom and Support Teachers – rather than simply being with individual children
    - D) Alternatives to Suspension and Expulsion
  2. A national strategy for hunger prevention in schools
  3. Teachers' conflict resolution skills and diversity awareness for early school leaving prevention
  4. Recognise Key Principles regarding the Pupil-Teacher Ratio in DEIS schools for the 2016-18 strategy
  5. A Comprehensive Strategy on the Arts in Education as a Key Resource for DEIS Schools and Other Schools More Generally
  6. Establish common systems of holistic supports for both bullying and early school-leaving
  7. Acceleration of focus on Social and Emotional Learning/Education (including Emotional Literacy) at Both Primary and Postprimary Levels
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**Q17: 3(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).**

No submission on this topic.

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**Q18: 3(b) How should progress on Diversity and Choice for Parents be measured?**

No submission on this topic.

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**Q19: 3(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?**

No submission on this topic.

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**Q20: 4(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).**

There appears to be a disconnect between the title of this section in the PPG and the content that follows thereafter. In particular, the concepts of innovation and enterprise engagement that appear (among many other unrelated topics) in this section would be more appropriate in, and more consistent with, Section 5 (Promoting Creativity & Entrepreneurial Capacity in Students).

Much of this section is associated with school performance and undefined concepts of excellence.

Notwithstanding this, the emphasis on support for principals (incl. teaching principals) and CPD for teachers in general is to be welcomed.

The proposed new Schools Excellence Fund is also to be welcomed although its potential impact and significance is difficult to assess in the absence of any sense of the quantity of investment involved.

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**Q21: 4(b) How should progress on Promoting Excellence and Innovation in Schools be measured?**

Taking account of my comments in 4(a) above regarding Innovation and Enterprise engagement, I will focus only on the concept of 'Promoting Excellence in Schools'. The key initial challenge here is to define the 'excellence' that is intended and to associate some calibrated levels of achievement associated with that. This is likely to be both complex and contentious and would benefit greatly from an overall national strategy for education in Ireland embracing the full education continuum. It is difficult to envisage how one would measure progress in this context without a well-articulated roadmap and clearly-defined milestones of achievement.

**Q22: 4(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?**

The priority action here is the articulation of a 'Roadmap for Excellence in Schools' with well-defined objectives and calibrated levels of achievement for both Primary and Post-primary schools.

This will assist in defining the required supports and CPD for both Principals and Teachers.

In advance of establishing such a 'Roadmap', an Innovation Fund for Schools would be an excellent development. The concept here would not be the teaching of innovation per se (dealt with in the next section), but rather the fostering of an innovative approach to addressing challenges encountered in schools. It would be important to avoid such a fund simply becoming a replacement for real or perceived deficits in schools.

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**Q23: 5(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).**

As in other sections, there would appear to be some conflict between the title of this section of the PPG and the associated content. So, while the title of the section indicates a clear objective concerning entrepreneurial capacity, the section includes diverse topics such as PE, STEM education, computer science, transition supports and guidance counselling!

Leaving this apparent disconnect aside, there are many proposed developments to be welcomed such as the move to implementing a national STEM Education strategy, the focus on skills gaps, and the enhanced guidance counselling. Additional matters that are important and would align clearly with the title of this section include:

- i. Fostering an appreciation of innovation at both primary and secondary level
- ii. Ensuring that all second level students have at least one exposure to experiential learning of entrepreneurship
- iii. Creating a formal structure to facilitate and sustain an active relationship between the enterprise sector and schools

**Q24: 5(b) How should progress on Promoting Creativity and Entrepreneurial Capacity in Students be measured?**

Taking account of my comments in 5(a) above and focusing solely on Creativity and Entrepreneurial Capacity, progress can be measured in terms of:

- i. the development of a policy around innovation and entrepreneurship along the education continuum
- ii. curriculum and content development at both primary and post-primary levels
- iii. the % of students that are exposed to experiential learning of entrepreneurship
- iv. the establishment of an education-enterprise partnership

Taking account of some of the other miscellaneous topics in this section, measures of progress should include:

- i. development and roll-out of a skills module for transition year students
- ii. development and roll-out of an entrepreneurship module for transition year students
- iii. an implementation plan for the recommendations in the STEM report
- iv. development of National Policy for STEM education

**Q25: 5(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?**

Priorities:

1. development and roll-out of an entrepreneurship module for transition year students
2. an implementation plan for the recommendations in the STEM report
3. Creating a formal structure to facilitate and sustain an active relationship between the enterprise sector and schools



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**Q26: 6(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).**

No submission for this section.

**Q27: 6(b) How should progress on Making Better use of Educational Assets within Communities be measured?**

No submission for this section.

**Q28: 6(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?**

No submission for this section.

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**Q29: 7(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).**

All the areas mentioned in PPG warrant attention. Given the clear inequities in the present arrangements, the implementation of the revised allocation model should be prioritised. The EPSN Act and in its relationship with the Disability Act needs to be streamlined and the remaining sections implemented. This will entail devising a system for IEPs that ensure they are performed to a high standard and are reviewed at least annually but that they do not become a legal bureaucratic barrier. The legal component needs to be ring-fenced to a small number of cases where agreements cannot be solved at school level.

Another key issue is the integration of education and health services for children with special educational needs in an equitable framework to ensure equal access regardless of location and the nature of the service provider (State, voluntary, private). Given the numerous failed initiatives in this area, due to structural, legislative, contractual and philosophical difficulties, legislation may be required in this area to ensure compliance.

Arising from the above integration, the primary focus needs to be on early intervention services.

Teacher professional development in relation to specialist positions in the system (support teachers, special school and class) is vital in realising the vision of an inclusive system. There is a strong case for mandatory CPD in this area as part of the Teaching Council Cosán initiative. While this area has received a welcome boost in initial teacher education, other countries have full undergraduate programmes for those in specialist positions. We have traditionally focused on this work at postgraduate level but in a non- mandatory fashion.

**Q30: 7(b) How should progress on Special Needs Education be measured?**

The move to focussing on outcomes for children and young people is welcome. There are a number of areas that this can focus on. Having a marker in relation to special educational needs in the primary and post primary databases will allow progress to be monitored over time. Tracking through the collation of data at school level with standardised tests also has a role to play. For those outside the norm referenced sample of the standardised tests it is important to employ criterion based assessments to track progress. This was a gap in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. Finally, progress should be monitored through a more systematic and standardised use of Individual Education Plans as envisaged in the EPSN Act. This would allow outcomes measures to be broad and relevant to the assessed needs of children in the system.

**Q31: 7(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?**

As outlined above for 7 (a):

1. The implementation of the revised allocation model, given the clear inequities in the present arrangements, should be prioritised.
2. The EPSEN Act and in its relationship with the Disability Act needs to be streamlined and the remaining sections implemented in a feasible manner. This will entail devising a system for IEPs that ensure they are done to a high standard and are reviewed at least annually but that they do not become a legal bureaucratic barrier. The legal component needs to be ringfenced to a small number of cases where agreements cannot be solved at school level.
3. Another key issue is the integration of education and health services for children with special educational needs in an equitable framework to ensure equal access regardless of location and the nature of the service provider (State, voluntary, private). Given the numerous failed initiatives in this area, due to structural, legislative, contractual and philosophical difficulties, legislation may be required in this area to ensure compliance.
4. Arising from the above integration, the primary focus needs to be on early intervention services.
5. Teacher professional development in relation to specialist positions in the system (support teachers, special school and class) is vital in realising the vision of an inclusive system. There is a strong case for mandatory CPD in this area as part of the Teaching Council Cosán initiative. While this area has received a welcome boost in initial teacher education, other countries have full undergraduate programmes for those in specialist positions. We have traditionally focused on this work at postgraduate level but in a non- mandatory fashion.

Summary of Priority actions

1. Implement the revised allocation model.
  2. Streamline the relationship between the EPSEN Act and the Disability Act and implement fully.
  3. Develop framework for the integration of education and health services for children with special educational needs.
  4. Renew focus on early intervention services.
  5. Increase provision of professional development of teachers in specialised roles relating to special educational needs and move towards mandatory rather than voluntary CPD in this area.
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**Q32: 8(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).**

As with other sections, there are many disparate areas under this heading of Skills Needs.

The essential issue is the requirement for a clear articulation of:

- i. the generic, transferable skills that we aim to foster at the different levels of the education continuum, and
- ii. the specific, technical/disciplinary skills that are required for different sectors of employment.

Both elements are important but the latter may change more quickly arising from the rapidity of technological changes in our knowledge-based society/economy.

A biennial industry-education skills forum with a small number of internationally-significant keynote speakers would provide an excellent mechanism for keeping our national focus on specific skills (and related curricula) up to date.

Aside from this, many of the areas highlighted are strongly welcome, e.g.:

1. creating incentives for 3rd level system to respond to skills gaps
  2. partnering with industry to delivery elements of curricula
  3. a funding plan for the HE sector
  4. providing universities with more operational flexibilities (subject to accountability agreements) and 'earned autonomy'
- these are critical for success on the global stage.
-

**Q33: 8(b) How should progress on Meeting the Skills Needs of the Future be measured?**

Overall progress on addressing skills needs requires a roadmap of skills priorities with milestones set for implementation of key issues.

Similarly, for the other action items listed above, an implementation plan with clear timelines provides the best method of tracking progress.

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**Q34: 8(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?**

**PRIORITY ACTIONS**

1. Creating an ongoing partnership with industry to identify and support delivery of skills needs (as outlined above)
  2. Establishing a funding plan for the HE sector
-