



AN BUNN
OIDEACHAIS AGUS SOLDAINA
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Consultation Paper

Department of Education and Skills

Statement of Strategy 2016-2018

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

Name:

Organisation:

Email:

- 1. How well does the Education Service meet the needs of children and students? What improvements can be made for**
- a. within existing resources**
 - or**
 - b. through new provision**

As the representative body of the institutes of technology, IOTI is primarily concerned with supporting the strategic development, proper resourcing and continuous improvement in the quality, relevance and impact of Irish higher education. Within this specific context, and taking a view of the system as a whole, IOTI considers that the education system does a reasonable job in meeting the needs of children and students across the continuum of education and training. However, the system is under considerable stress and strain, due to a prolonged period of financial retrenchment - particularly marked in higher education (see 2 below) - the constantly shifting educational and training requirements of society and the economy, and demographic growth. IOTI considers that there is now a very limited capacity in the education sector (certainly in higher education) to effect significant improvements in the context of the existing, much diminished, resources. At this juncture, there is a need to follow through on a range of initiatives that have already been commenced over the past 5 or so years, but are not yet completed. These range from junior certificate reform, through the institutional reconfiguration of institutes of technology, to the implementation of the national skills strategy and expanding provision through new apprenticeships in FET and HET. All of these strategic initiatives have been fraught with particular difficulties and it is arguable that they should be completed before embarking on other forms of expanded provision, unless, of course, additional resources can be found to support such provision.

- 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)?**

In 2016, the key issues affecting the IoT sector are its future configuration and resourcing and will remain so during the period envisaged for this strategy statement. In this regard, IOTI considers that there is a need for the Department to clarify swiftly the Government's intentions on the related matters of the merger of IoTs and their future designation as Technological Universities. Legislation on these matters was introduced under the last government and whether and how this legislation will

be progressed are matters of the utmost strategic importance for the sector. The protracted nature of the process to date has not been helpful to the institutes both on an individual and collective level and, at this juncture, the need for clarity is critical.

The same is true of the issue of the future funding of higher education. IOTI notes the commitment in the programme for government to publish the Cassells' report on the future funding of higher education and that its recommendation will be reviewed by a cross-party Oireachtas Committee. IOTI would urge that this process should proceed swiftly and that all of the issues raised in the Cassells report should be considered and addressed by the Department and the Government in a direct and honest fashion, as the current funding regime is not fit for purpose in an environment where public investment in higher education has been severely reduced over the past eight years and demographic changes are driving up the numbers of students entering the system.

The institutes are also concerned with the manner in which agencies operating under the aegis of the Department engage with HEIs. Despite extensive discussions on the issue, there remains considerable overlap between several of the agencies (notably QQI and the HEA) on their reporting requirements and an absence of co-ordination between them regarding the operation of their reporting systems particularly in terms of their chronological sequencing, with the result that the different bodies often request extensive reports from institutions at the same time. Given the resourcing crisis faced by institutions, the persistence of such a questionable bureaucratic burden, and its operation in such an unco-ordinated fashion, should be addressed by the Department and the agencies.

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?

IOTI considers that there is a need to provide resources to the Department and to the Sector if, together, we are to commence significant new areas of work. The completion of work that has already been begun – such as through the regional skills fora, the higher education clusters and through the HET and FET reform strategies to ensure that existing and future provision meets the needs of learners, employers and the wider society – presents a significant challenge itself before any new areas are considered.

4. How should success on achieving our strategies be measured.

Through concrete delivery of objectives within defined timeframes. At present, it seems that progress on many of the major educational reform initiatives proceeds in a somewhat stately manner. While, admittedly, this is sometimes a function of the need to secure key stakeholder buy-in, it is not always apparent why certain initiatives take so long to commence or to complete. To give an example, it is now over five years since the publication of the National Higher Education Strategy to 2030 which inter alia recommended the creation of technological universities, major HR reform within higher education institutions, and a new financing model. None of these objectives have been realised in the last five years.

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

The institutes of technology are key participants in the development and provision of the new apprenticeships. Arising from the Apprenticeship Review of 2013, this initiative aims to develop a more flexible, enterprise-led system of apprenticeship, which will be rolled out across a broader range of occupations and industries than heretofore, and across Levels 5-10 of the National Framework of Qualifications. The Apprenticeship review had recommended that new legislation would be required to enable the implementation of these new flexibilities. Unfortunately, this legislation has not yet

emerged, and the new apprenticeship system is being developed under near 50 year old legislation - the Industrial Training Act 1967 - which is not fit for purpose. While the IoTs are endeavouring to make the best they can of this situation, they are rightly fearful that the desired flexibilities will be difficult to achieve under the old legislation, which at the time made provision for a deeply centralised and bureaucratic system of apprenticeship governance. Mindful of the comments made in question 4 above, IOTI would request that Government, the Department and the relevant agencies would move swiftly on the matter of introducing 21st century legislation for a modern apprenticeship system.

The Industrial Training Act is not an isolated example. There is a need across the education system for reform of outdated legislation, practices and procedures. For example, in the IoT sector, employee dismissals are still governed by 1930s legislation, and the academic year by circulars over 30 years old. A similar picture is evident across the education sector. In this context we welcome the commitment to a new architecture in education to really drive excellence and “best in class” potential.

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

Main observations outlined above.

A Programme for a Partnership Government - Chapter 10: Education

1. Prioritising Early Years

(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).

(b) How should progress on Prioritising Early Years be measured?

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

2. Tackling Disadvantage

(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).

(b) How should progress on Tackling Disadvantage be measured?

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

3. Diversity and Choice for Parents

(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).

(b) How should progress on Diversity and Choice for Parents be measured?

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

4. Promoting Excellence and Innovation in Schools

(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).

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

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

5. Promoting Creativity and Entrepreneurial Capacity in Students

(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).

IOTI is supportive of the commitment to modernise the second level curriculum in a range of areas, but particularly in relation to the development of ICT as a Leaving Certificate subject.

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

Creativity and Entrepreneurial Capacity are complex areas and will require in the first instance new and sophisticated methods of assessment to measure student progress. It is arguable that the development of such systems of assessment would benefit from greater collaboration between the Schools/FET and third level systems. The ultimate measure of progress, however, will be the number of entrepreneurs and creative individuals that they system produces, though this too is a complex matter. Successful entrepreneurs often have a track record of failure before success arrives, which will have to be built in to the mechanisms for measuring progress.

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

The development of new curricula at second level.

6. Making Better use of Educational Assets within Communities

(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).

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

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

7. Special Needs Education

(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).

(b) How should progress on Special Needs Education be measured?

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

8. Meeting the Skills Needs of the Future

(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).

IOTI is broadly supportive of the approach, but considers that there will be a need to lessen or, more appositely, modernise some of the existing bureaucratic requirements of the state system of education, to ensure that there is better engagement between business/enterprise and state education in all of the sectors, and across all of the levels, to determine and deliver the skills required by employers [see Section 1 Q 5 above re new legislation for a modern system of apprenticeships]. At present, business and enterprise finds it difficult to understand and collaborate with education and training providers, given some of the quality assurance, regulatory and governance arrangements under which they operate.

IOTI welcomes the Government's proposals to increase the number of flexible courses and opportunities available. However, the system's capacity to deliver on these objectives is being affected by recent Department-led initiatives such as the Cush Report on Flexible Working. It will not be possible to deliver a flexible product to students when the institutions are hampered by rigid inflexible employee contractual arrangements. In this context, the Programme's proposals to give greater autonomy to higher education institutions in the area of staffing needs, recruitment and work practices cannot be implemented soon enough.

The funding crisis facing the Higher Education Sector and the Institutes of Technology in particular is well recognised. Capital funding has been practically non-existent for the last five years and is further complicated by the absence of a borrowing framework for Institutes of Technology. In relation to current spending, the pressures on budgets will result in some higher education institutions being forced to cap the number of students recruited in order to protect the quality of the student experience. This is already evident in STEM disciplines.

We note that elsewhere in the Programme for Partnership Government, the Minister for Housing will examine new measures to boost student accommodation supply as part of the Action Plan on Housing. IOTI supports this initiative but support from government departments in the form of capital investment and in the provision of the required borrowing framework is essential if this initiative is to be successful.

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

When the new apprenticeships, regional skills fora and other initiatives have taken root, it would be legitimate to set targets (no's of programmes, no's of students) for providers for particular skills based programmes. In addition, these targets should also measure the level of state investment in particular programmes. However, significant development work has only just begun in this area and it is too early to set hard and fast metrics, until better and more coordinated working relationships have been developed in the area of skills provision between industry, education providers and state agencies. A more sophisticated employers' survey should also be developed targets particular industries and can capture regional as well as national data on skills' needs and employer satisfaction.

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

The priority actions in meeting the Skills Needs of the Future are to address the funding crisis in higher education and to prioritise the enactment and commencement of the legislation to facilitate the establishment of Technological Universities.

Submissions will be subject to the Freedom of Information Acts (details available at <http://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/FOI/>). Submissions may be published online, in which case particular information exempt under the Freedom of Information Acts, such as personal contact details and commercially-sensitive information, will be omitted. *By completing this consultation and submitting the information, you are indicating your consent to this approach.*