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Please find the initial ISME response, as explained in a prior email today, to the consultation on the Strategy for Education and Skills 2016 -2018.

Priorities 5, Promoting Creativity and Entrepreneurial Capacity in Students, and 8, Meeting the Skills Needs of the Future, of the *Programme for a Partnership Government* are of most relevance to SMEs in Ireland and we will therefore concentrate our submission on these priorities though some comments will be provided regarding other priorities as they do impact, though not directly.

Many of the suggestions provided are quite general in their terminology which makes it difficult to say if the planned actions could be effective and progress/achievement would be difficult to measure, e.g. guidance counselling at secondary level will be enhanced. What does enhancement in this context mean? Is it increase in the number of guidance counsellors? Is it a set of interventions that are proven to improve career guidance? (The assumption is that it is career guidance that is under discussion here.) Does it mean that pupils will have completed aptitude tests? Until this is more clearly defined it is not really possible to comment. As a result there are probably more questions raised than answers given. The questions, however, are meant to help clarify what the strategy is, but do mean that it is not possible for us to put forward priorities or suggest measurements in many of the cases.

## **5. Promoting Creativity and Entrepreneurial Capacity in Students**

This is of high importance as the development of the future owner managers of Ireland's SMEs and large indigenous companies is critical to the future of the Irish economy and ensuring that there are jobs throughout the country supporting the sustainability of life outside of the main population areas.

- a. Learning is not necessarily achieved by "learning" a subject. It may not be necessary to introduce new subjects to the curriculum but to encourage the learning outcomes required through project work, learning methodologies, assessment methodologies, informal learning, etc. It is difficult to envisage the teaching of entrepreneurial skills by someone who has never been exposed to the private sector, let alone an SME. So for the promotion of entrepreneurial capacity it may be better to run regional inter-school competitions, where entry is a requirement, and pupils can learn a number of skills, such as the requirements for running a business, team work, marketing, sales, etc. This could be supported by regional workshops delivered by suitable facilitators. Evaluating current supports does not create the option of introducing new or possibly current best practice supports. Reviewing support options would be more effective. The aim of working with industry and colleges for transition year programmes needs to be clearer. Is it to identify key skills to help in the transition from school and to develop programmes to help pupils learn those skills? Or is there some other purpose to the review?  
Is the intention to implement the recommendation made in the STEM report? This needs to be clearly stated.

What is the purpose of benchmarking entrepreneurial activity in Irish higher education? Also, is the benchmarking done within Ireland or is it to be done internationally?

This area could be better addressed by identifying the learning outcomes/skills that it is envisaged that the students will have – be they creative, entrepreneurial or ICT and STEM related. Once that has been done, suitable interventions can be suggested and researched and the most effective and efficient can be chosen for implementation, with a suitable project plan for implementation. This would include identifying the key resources required for the introductions of the various interventions, including the capability of the teaching workforce. More creative ways of achieving the learning outcomes/skill development could be developed (than pure curriculum development).

An example of the type of thing that works on a number of levels (albeit at University level) is an intervarsity theatre festival where students act, direct, manage logistics, design and make costumes, do the make up, promote the festival, sell the tickets, etc., etc. Not only do they hone the particular skill they are using in a practical manner but they also learn how to work in a team, work cross functionally, budget, etc.

- b. Progress should be measured ultimately by the number of students who eventually go on to set up their own business and how many they employ in comparison to a baseline which has been established.

In the short term, once the learning outcomes/skills have been identified the successful achievement of these should be measured and the number of students achieving each of the learning outcomes/skills should be measured and monitored over time. Increases in numbers would be expected.

The development and implementation of suitable interventions should also be measured and their success in helping students achieve the learning outcomes/skills.

- c. The priority action would be to identify the relevant learning outcomes and skills that need to be achieved, followed by identifying and resourcing suitable interventions to help students achieve these learning outcomes and skills.

CPD may be a priority depending on how resourcing is structured.

## **8. Meeting the Skills Needs of the Future**

- a. The word “support” is used a number of times in this section of the document. What this means in real terms needs to be defined. How will the Department support the introduction of Technological Universities? What will it do to do this and ensure the aims of this change are achieved. How will the support of flexible course and opportunities manifest itself? And likewise what does the supporting of a mid-degree “sandwich year” mean? How will DES support the “new flexibility in HEIs? Without clarifying these it won’t be possible to measure if they are achieved or not.

There is a need to recognise work place learning and training and the skills it provides. This has not been identified by the Programme for Partnership Government. It can be done through the enablement of a way of formally recognising these skills. In addition increasing funding for developing the skills of those in employment will help serve the recognition of skill development by enterprise. This should be done by significantly increasing the

allocation from the NTF to this area, specifically to Skillnets, and also to other interventions which can help improve the skills of the employed.

Regarding apprenticeships and traineeships, more clarity is required on whether the document means apprenticeship and traineeship places or the number of types of apprenticeships and traineeships that are offered. There needs to be targets for both sets of figures.

Offering financial incentives for the response to skill gaps should be superfluous. This should be one of the key criteria on which all funding is based for third level. Why would a system pay to fill non-existent skill gaps (whether personal skill gaps or skill gaps in a sector)? A response to a skill gap is not

necessarily enough. HEIs tend to respond slowly to industry requirements. The excuse of the need for quality is often used for this. There is definitely a need for quality but the speed at which the quality systems work in most HEIs would put them out of business if they were in the private sector. Programme development can also be very slow and then can often be due to the lack of knowledge or experience of the individual developing the programme. CPD may well be required. All lecturers should be required to participate in CPD. This is in both sector/subject specific topics and teaching and learning skills.

The engagement of industry at all levels from the programme design, to delivery to assessment processes is critical to having up to date skills available. However, this partnership should be mutually beneficial with enterprise gaining skilled potential employees for their time and effort. It is also the responsibility of HEIs to ensure that they have suitably qualified staff who are capable of delivering requirements.

Solas have already undertaken a significant strategic review of the FET sector which has engaged with a wide spread of stakeholders. What value will a review by the Oireachtas Committee on Education add? This needs to be very clear if undertaken.

Assisting lone parents access the workforce, whether through improved education and training supports, or other additional supports is an important measure, as they are an excellent potential source of skilled employees who could be adding value to the economy rather than being reliant on social welfare.

b. Each element should have SMART objectives and be measured on them.

- There will be x number of apprenticeship programmes providing y number of places annually by 20XX.
- There will be x number of traineeship programmes providing y number of places annually by 20XX.
- These figures need to be based on industry demand for each area annually, the number of years each programme takes and the expected number of drop outs or those who don't go into work in the particular industry.
- As the objectives regarding the areas being supported are unclear it is not possible to say how they should be measured or if indeed they should be a priority.
- A system for the recognition of work based learning that easy to implement by enterprises, including SMEs, should be introduced. The measure would be that it is introduced by 2018.
- An increase in funding for Skillnets based on its previous allocations but also based on its performance to date in comparison to how other funds are allocated. A

doubling of its annual allocation would be relatively insignificant in the overall NTF allocation but the returns are likely to be significant based on performance to date.

- Completed research into and the identification of other potential forms of funded interventions to improve work based learning and the skills of the employed.
- The introduction of new forms of interventions to improve the skills of the employed.
- What percentage of employees in HEIs have completed programmes in Teaching and Learning.
- What percentage of employees in HEIs have completed CPD programmes in their specific skill or technical area.
- Establish if there is any value to be had in a review by the Oireachtas Committee on Education.
- If there is, has the review taken place? What are the recommendations? Is there a plan for implementation? Has the implementation plan been executed successfully and on time?
- Are there additional supports for lone parents to assist in their upskilling to make them suitable employees. (The supports need to continue into employment.)
- Engagement with industry. Does every HEI, HEI School and HEI course engage with people from industry? Are there SMEs involved in every form of engagement with each of these? Have the engagements with industry been of benefit to the industry partners? To what extent have they been beneficial? (i.e. was it worth the time and energy invested on their part.)

c. Priorities in this area are:

- Recognition of work place learning is a key priority both in terms of increased funding and formal recognition of skill levels.
- Greater flexibility in the provision of training and education, especially around timing – evenings, weekends, summer and other “holiday” periods for those who are not in the main system.
- Increase in the number of apprenticeship and traineeship programmes with the relevant number of places available.
- Interventions to assist lone parents enter the workforce.

## 1. Prioritising Early Years

- a. It is not clear if some of the actions recommended, for example, raising the school starting age to 5, are based in solid research or if these actions taken in isolation of other factors will have the expected impact. Also, have other approaches been reviewed to see if they may have the desired results? It may be useful to review the Preparing for Life Programme to see if the results achieved there could be extended to other communities across the country.

CPD for all teachers may be beneficial.

Ensuring the school physical environment is conducive to learning may also have impact.

- b. If using the Programme for Partnership suggestions, the measurements should be:

- Has a 2<sup>nd</sup> pre school year been introduced
- Has the school starting age been increased to 5.

- Has the pupil:teacher ratio been reduced.
- Has the new service been introduced and does it require collaboration between parents, teachers and primary service providers.
- Has the number of NEP psychologists been increased.
- Where required was there immediate support offered?

And on an on-going basis the actual numbers year on year should be measured.

- c. The priorities of actions in the Programme for Partnership would be:
- Reduction of pupil:teacher ratio

It is unclear if the remainder of the actions are supported by recognised research or not. Without such support it would be difficult to recommend their prioritisation.

## **2. Tackling Disadvantage**

- a. Requiring the school leaving age to be 17 may not be the best route for all. It may be better to require people to be in school or an alternative education/training route until that age. The academic approach taken in second level schools in Ireland does not suit everyone. It may be more beneficial to devise alternative routes to further education, higher education and employment, which rather than disenfranchising a significant cohort of students could engage them more productively. They may also prevent early “school” leaving.

It is positive to see the plans for expansion of supports outside DEIS schools and the broadening of supports provided, making relevant education programmes available at flexible times and the introduction of the Defence Forces pilot employment scheme.

- b. If using the Programme for Partnership suggestions, the measurements should be:
- Have they been implemented?
  - If so, what at the actual numbers year on year?.
- c. The priorities would be the introduction of relevant education at flexible times, followed by the expansion of supports provided and where provided.

## **4. Promoting Excellence and Innovation in Schools**

- a. Best practice sharing amongst the teaching community is vital to the promotion of excellence and innovation in schools. Some of the initiatives listed in this section, while good in themselves have potential knock on effects which may not be so positive.

The Schools Excellence Fund while encouraging innovation and excellence depends on the capabilities of the staff and parents of a particular school and not be as positive for those schools with less engaged or capable staff and parents. Additional supports may be required for this to work, such as the sharing of best practice.

By implementing the Digital strategy those who are not ICT literate may be disadvantaged. Additional supports to ensure the basic level of ICT literacy required may be necessary.

Relevant CPD and preparation courses need to be developed that are both timely and practical.

What is the aim of enterprise engagement? What is in it for enterprise? What will the criteria be for the selection of the experts?

b. The measurements would be:

- Is best practice sharing systemised?
- Do all schools participate?
- Do schools introduce new practices?
- Does the Schools Excellence Fund bring about the introduction of positive interventions?
- If so, how many and where?
- What is the take up of the new elearning courses?
- Is this take up across the board or only in certain schools/by a certain profile of student
- Does the performance of teachers and principals improve based on CPD and preparation courses?

c. The priority in this area would be the systemisation of best practice sharing.

If you have any questions or points of clarification please let me know.

Regards

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