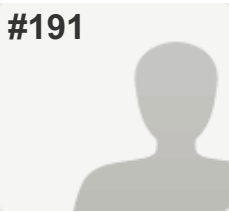


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**PAGE 1: Please complete this consultation paper in respect of your area of interest and/or expertise**

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**Q4: 1(a) What improvements can be made within existing resources**

OECD Rankings and PISA results and other international benchmarks show that Ireland's education system is performing well on key indicators. At third level, the Systems Performance framework assessment also confirms that individual HEIs are performing well and that the system overall is meeting national objectives. The Irish education system has a long tradition of high achievement and the future strategic direction for education set out by the Department is clear, with strategies and mechanisms in place to promote continued improvements in the sector so that we perform to the highest international standards.

The areas for improvement and enhanced utilisation of resources are clearly set out in various government reports, including the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, Innovation 2020 and the Department's current Statement of Strategy 2015-17.

The challenge lies in implementing the ambitious strategies set out for the Education sector with limited resources. Significant changes have been identified and are being implemented through all levels of the Education system.

The Department's Statement of Strategy recognises the challenge of managing reforms in the education and training sector as well as the increasing demographic pressures. At third level, the National Strategy highlights key issues viz.: the importance of developing critical mass in our research capacity to ensure that we attract the best researchers and develop world-class capability in high-value niche areas. It also includes a commitment to fund education in a sustainable and equitable manner so as to guarantee wider participation and fairness of access, and to implement the structural changes identified by the Department to ensure greater effectiveness and efficiencies. In supporting HEIs in carrying out these objectives, there needs to be greater awareness and acknowledgement of the different challenges and priorities of individual HEIs as determined by their different stakeholders and institutional profiles.

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

The planned introduction of new structures, such as the network of Regional Skills For and a new Framework for Apprenticeship Education will help to address skills gaps and better align the education system with labour market requirements. The sharing of knowledge and expertise between industry and education, as well as the competitive funding mechanisms and incentives currently in place, will help to address areas of strategic skills demands and shape new forms of delivery.

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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)?**

The Department has developed a comprehensive range of strategies for the third level sector to improve the capacity and performance of the system, with an emphasis on integration and collaboration.

Of particular importance is the Department's commitment to establish of Technological Universities. The Statement of Strategy commits to enacting the Technological Universities Bill to provide the legal underpinning for the establishment of Technological Universities. This is an urgent matter for the sector.

The funding model needs to recognise the practice-based and industry-led nature of education provision in Technological Universities.

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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 Department's strategy has captured all of the key issues and challenges.

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

The Department has put in place the appropriate structures and mechanisms to measure success, including the Strategic Dialogue and Performance Compact Evaluations of Higher Education Institutions. The System Performance Framework introduced will support improvements in the performance of HE institutions individually and in the performance of the system collectively through better linkages between HEIs, the Regional Skills Fora, ETBs, IBEC, the EGFSN, and co-ordinated academic planning within regional clusters. It will also support the education system in meeting strategic goals related to internationalisation.

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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**

Inequities persist in education at all levels of educational attainment. Further improvements can be made in this area at third level. There is a need for continued provision of additional supports in the area of maths education as well as English language skills. The growing cultural and social diversity of the student population also places additional demands on the education system at third level. The cost of third level education is also a challenge and in many cases an obstacle to participation in third level.

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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 System Performance Framework links funding to performance. It is important to give full recognition to the set of challenges faced by individual institutions in achieving their goals. These challenges are influenced by the socio-economic profile of students and factors such as cultural diversity, resources to support internal reporting mechanisms and benchmarking, as well as funding.

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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).**

The key issues and interventions are identified. Introducing a second preschool year will allow children to start junior school at a later age and bring early education more in line with more flexible pre-school education than formal schooling.

Further investment in Speech and Language Therapy, smaller class sizes and additional NEPS psychologists is welcome and critically important in the early years.

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

Monitoring of:

- The benefits of Speech and Language Therapy services, the impact on provision and reduced waiting lists
  - Progress towards smaller class sizes
  - The impact and effectiveness of National Education Psychology Services in schools
  - The impact of an additional preschool year on children starting junior school
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**Q13: 1(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?**

The key actions are identified.

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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 need to further improve school completion rates in disadvantaged areas is recognised as a priority as is the need for additional supports for students from disadvantaged communities in making the transition to work or further education. The Programme for Government recognises the continuum and interplay between initiatives at second and third level education in tackling disadvantage.

In support, HEIs can play a more active role in supporting second level students in areas of socio-economic disadvantage through, as highlighted, the provision of Summer programmes for children, especially those aged between 10-16 years. The educational benefits of such programmes are proven and can have a profound impact on disadvantaged communities.

There is a need for additional funding to HEIs to provide continued targeted supports for these individuals as they transfer to third level as well as addressing supports to recognize the cultural diversity of the student population in HEIs. These can be more or less acute depending on the location and student profile of the institution.

The introduction of a pilot programme with the involvement of the Defence Forces is innovative.

The Programme for Government, in reviewing DEIS, recognises that a more broad-based package of measures are required to have the desired impact on tackling disadvantage, and a positive development is the support for the provision of relevant programmes for early leavers and second chance learners.

The essential issues are captured although there is no mention of the role of HEIs in tackling disadvantage. Tackling disadvantage continues at third level. Extra supports and interventions are required to assist in remedying the deficits that manifest at third level, particularly in the critical areas of English, Mathematics and ICT. These initiatives can also support retention.

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

Monitoring of:

- School completion rates
- Results of HEA SED survey
- The forthcoming new Graduate Outcomes Survey will facilitate the collection of data on graduate outcomes for students from access target groups
- The number of Summer Schools and levels of participation
- Levels of support provided for same
- Leaving certificate performance in DEIS schools
- Pupil-teacher ratios
- Collaboration between HEIs and second level

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

- Provision of educational supports for students at second level, particularly in DEIS schools, including evening classes and tutorial support
- Support for access initiatives at third level, pre-entry and post-entry

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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).**

The programme captures the key issues, in particular, the Department's commitment to increase the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools, to ensuring transparency and fairness in admissions for pupils, to improving transport provision, reducing pupil-teacher ratios, providing additional speech and language interventions and commencing the Fitness to Teach provisions of the Teaching Council Act.

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

Successful implementation of the stated interventions and commitments.

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

The commitment to increase the number of schools and improve facilities in existing schools.

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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).**

Critical areas are identified, including the need for new subjects, greater engagement with enterprise on future skills needs and there is recognition of the implications for management of being innovative and in driving reforms.

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

Monitoring of:

- School Performance
  - Quality of Teaching
  - Teacher CPD and support
  - External engagement with industry
  - Change management initiatives
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**Q22: 4(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?**

Targeted actions and supports to drive improved performance in the essentials of reading, writing and arithmetic.

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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).**

The commitment to flexibility in introducing new subjects, such as the 2016 introduction of Politics and Society is innovative and promotes diversity and responsiveness.

Some areas identified may not warrant a new subject e.g. new subjects in arts, entrepreneurial education and mental health awareness – these might be incorporated as a part/component of an existing leaving certificate subject rather than a new subject.

Enhancing guidance counselling at secondary level will support students in discovering their own strengths and ambitions and making better choices when it comes to third level.

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

These competencies are not easily measured and the Leaving Certificate is more knowledge rather than competency based. However, these competencies are reflected in active learning and engagement activities by students, as measured by participation in enterprise projects, competitions, Science Fairs, school events and involvement in local community projects.

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

Inclusion of creativity and enterprise in the curriculum at second level. Explicit inclusion in the learning outcomes and assessment methods across disciplines at third level, and involvement of industry and other stakeholders in module delivery and assessment.

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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).**

This approach is forward looking and has potential to strengthen the impact of education providers in their regions. The linking of capitation funding to the availability of after school care options is supportive although contingent on staff being available to support such after school activities. The commitment to increase capital investment in schools is welcome.

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

Monitor the provision of:

- Afterschool care/study, homework clubs, evening classes and other community/sports/educational activities
  - Summer schools
  - Sharing of assets within the community
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**Q28: 6(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?**

Formal recognition and support for Schools utilising educational assets out of hours. Recognition of the additional demands on management and staff to deliver on the objectives.

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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).**

Strategy acknowledges the challenges involved in enacting the Education for Persons with Special Educational (EPSEN) Act 2004.

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

The emphasis should be on reducing waiting lists for children with speech and language difficulties and NEPs.

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

To ensure early and quick access to services, and continuity in services provision.

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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).**

The essential issues are captured, notably the commitment to increase investment (both current and capital spending) in the Higher Education sector, to create Technological Universities and to facilitate greater flexibility and autonomy in the use of resources.

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

A whole of system approach is being adopted and this should lead to greater linkage and better outcomes from the education system in terms of meeting the skills needs of the Future.

Monitoring of progress can be achieved through:

- The System Performance Framework: The Strategic Dialogue and Performance Compact Evaluations of Higher Education Institutions is designed to improve linkages between HEIs, the Regional Skills Fora, ETBs, IBEC, the EGFSN, and co-ordinated academic planning within region clusters.
  - Feedback from the National Employers Survey on higher education outcomes
  - Feedback from the ISSE on programmes of education and training
  - Feedback from the forthcoming Graduate Outcomes Survey which will capture more accurate and comprehensive information on the employment and career progression of graduates
  - The proposed Review of the Further, Adult and Community Education sector
  - Monitoring of competitive funding programmes, including Springboard & ICT Skills Funding
  - Progress towards establishing a national framework for Apprenticeship Education as identified in the Apprenticeship Implementation Plan 2013
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**Q34: 8(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?**

- Legislation to support Technological Universities
  - Support the national network of Regional Skills Fora to promote knowledge sharing and collaboration such that employers and HEIs can work together in building the skills needs of their regions
  - Development of a Framework for Apprentice Education
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