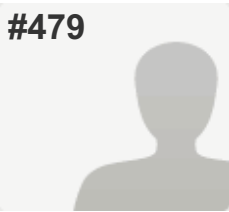


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PAGE 1: Please complete this consultation paper in respect of your area of interest and/or expertise

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

Generally, it is viewed by ITT in line with the IOTI opinion that the Education Service performs well in relation to meeting the needs of children and students across the continuum of education and training. Within the IoTI structure system the Institute of Technology Tralee provides inclusive access to educational opportunities, across a range of disciplines to large numbers of learners from all areas of society and we are firmly committed to this vital part of our mission. One of the main challenges for the education system in Ireland is funding. The higher education system is under considerable stress and strain, due to a prolonged period of financial retrenchment. Funding needs to be considered for the HEI sector from a number of different perspectives as follows:

1. Annual operational budgets – the recurrent grant has been cut by 46% from €21,065,000 to €11,301,000 between 2008 to 2015; while some of these cuts were ameliorated by pay cuts and increases in the student contribution, the IoT sector is under funded;
2. The absence of a borrowing framework for the IoT sector which limits the opportunities for capital development;
3. No monies allocated in recent years through the DOES for capital development projects and the ceasing of PPPs in this area;
4. The IoTI (in contrast to the university sector) receives no funding under their annual grant from the HEA to support the research function, placing a further challenge on the IoTI sector to deliver its remit in the RDI space.

Other areas which need to be followed through by the Department relate to the Technological Universities project, the implementation of the national skills strategy and expanding provision through new apprenticeships in FET and HET.

To continue to reach greater numbers of learners the HEI sector must also continue to develop accessible programme structures (e.g. modular and credit based) and flexible modes of delivery (utilising online and blended approaches). A very important step that could be taken, to facilitate accessible structures and flexible delivery, is to modify the definition of what a student is, such that the differentiation between full-time and part-time students is effectively removed. This would allow students and institutions to receive equivalent grants and funding irrespective of whether they completed their programme in full-time mode, part-time mode or a combination of the two. This would remove barriers to access and would allow individuals to initiate or continue their studies in conjunction with other aspects of their lives such as pursuing a career or caring for family.

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

Respondent skipped this question

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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 key challenges facing the IoTI sector are its future configuration and resourcing.

In this regard, ITT considers that there is a need for the Department to clarify the Government's intentions on the related matters of the merger of IoTs and their future designation as Technological Universities. 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. IT Tralee welcomes the introduction of competitive/performance based funding. IT Tralee has actively engaged with the Strategic Dialogue Process. The dialogue process, facilitated under the Compact Process, with the HEA has provided valuable observations and feedback which will serve the Institute well in future cycles.

The commitment in the programme for government to publish the Cassells report on the future funding of higher education is welcomed and progress on same should be a priority of the DOES.

The IoTI submission as part of this process draws reference to the cumbersome and bureaucratic manner in which agencies operating under the aegis of the Department engage with HEIs. The IT Tralee concurs with the view expressed in the IoTI submission and would request this matter be reviewed as a matter of priority.

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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 HEI landscape is a busy one with many initiatives commenced in more recent times. These include the work of the regional skills fora, the higher education clusters, HEI structural reform in addition to enhancing the roles of the HEIs in the job creation agenda through for e.g. the Action Plan for Jobs. It is recommended that the DOES considers prioritising the actions already underway before introducing new initiatives e.g. appropriate resourcing and clearer articulation of deliverables required under the HEI clusters, progressing the legislation for the technological universities etc.

There is also a need for the Department to focus on increasing access to tertiary and higher education, which can only be achieved through a removal of barriers to access for the non-standard cohort of learners. This cohort includes those involved in continuing professional development (CPD), part-time learners and mature learners. International research indicates that society and the economy will benefit from assisting these individuals and groups to develop their skills and gain qualifications. The 2016 to 2018 strategy should review the various programmes already in place (e.g. Springboard) and should aim to build an over-arching strategy which seeks to remove the barriers to access, progression and ultimate success for this cohort of learner.

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

Success can be measured through the articulation of clear objectives with specified deliverables to be achieved within stated timelines. That said, the benefits of education are multi-faceted and many of the benefits are realised over long periods of time. However, if you accept that education is essentially good for individuals and the broader society then the clearest measure of success is the level of educational attainment across all individuals and groups within society. Our students and graduates will live and work in an increasingly globalised environment where their qualifications and skills must be relevant and recognised across international boundaries. Therefore, it is vital that the Irish education sector at all levels achieves positive ratings in the various international indicators and ranking systems such as PISA and U-Multirank.

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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

The IT Tralee has actively engaged in the apprenticeship agenda. 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 NFQ. This is a welcome development and an exciting initiative. A key enabler in achieving success in this arena is the updating of the relevant legislation (the Industrial Training Act 1967). There is a need to introduce as a matter of priority 21st century legislation for a modern apprenticeship system.

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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

As previously articulated the issue of funding must be addressed as a matter of priority. The higher education sector is significantly underfunded and this situation has persisted for a prolonged period. One effect of this underfunding is that the quality of facilities, ICT, scientific and other equipment and other important infrastructure continue to deteriorate due to lack of funding for maintenance and renewal which undermines the sector's ability to provide excellent education and research. In addition, the funding cuts and other measures introduced as a result of the financial crisis have had impacted on the effectiveness and morale of staff across the sector.

Therefore, it is critical that the ongoing underfunding of higher education is targeted in the broader education strategy. As well as an increase in recurrent funding, it is critical that funding is provided for maintenance and upgrade of facilities and equipment. In this context the Institutes of Technology have been especially disadvantaged because they (unlike the universities and private providers) are prevented from borrowing.

The lack of a capital development programme to address infrastructural deficits needs to be a priority for the national strategy. This ongoing lack of investment is having an adverse impact on teaching, learning and the overall student experience. On the positive side the availability of Elearning and blended learning as flexible methods of delivery present an opportunity in the future of higher education. Consideration should be given to incentivising programme development and delivery in this area.

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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).

Respondent skipped this question

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

Respondent skipped this question

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

Respondent skipped this question

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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).

We support the proposed approach and it is consistent with our mission and priorities as outlined above. In addition to increasing provision it is vital that the barriers to participation are removed. Increased provision will not deliver the desired results if individuals are unable to access the programmes due to financial or personal, family life demands.

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

The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019 outlines opportunities to further enhance the access agenda in higher education. One overarching theme is to “see the development of local partnership initiatives (involving educational, government and other stakeholders) in target communities where levels of participation and attainment are low”. ITT welcomes this commitment as it aligns with the approach which we have adopted via our “Pathfinders” programme to help develop pathways of access to ITT for students from identified communities. Such programmes require resourcing to complement the existing commitment of Access Officers. Engagement with the target cohorts is difficult without direct and sustained interaction from the Institute over a period of time. Resourcing to allow for targeted engagement will no doubt improve outcomes. It will facilitate increased numbers of students from these cohorts to higher education, which will invariably lead to greater opportunity for the participants, work prospects and the resultant economic stability and security will provide the social foundation stone upon which communities will thrive.

Success is difficult to gauge and should not focus merely on: participation (i.e. how many learners are enrolling on programmes) and attainment (i.e. how many are completing programmes). The engagement of potential learners (at second and if possible primary level) and their families in access programmes, the numbers of schools and student cohorts from within those schools should also be captured as part of the performance indicator. The provision of Institute resourced pre-entry programmes to potential entrants and a sustained support programme for identified “Pathfinder” students throughout their study will certainly deliver on tackling disadvantage and consideration should be given by the department to fund such activities.

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

As outlined in the above section, the strategy should aim to increase opportunities/provision and facilitate access/participation. Appropriate resourcing for existing and proposed access programmes would help greatly. The initiation of a national call for targeted access programmes to help tackle disadvantage, leaning heavily on HEI's which are already engaging in collaborative efforts would provide a suitable avenue for development. The projects could be developed and delivered by collaborating Institutes or indeed by the designated regional clusters.

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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).

Respondent skipped this question

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

Respondent skipped this question

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

Respondent skipped this question

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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).

Respondent skipped this question

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

Respondent skipped this question

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

Respondent skipped this question

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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 provision of so-called soft skills is increasingly important in the modern globalised environment. Skills such as interpersonal communication, teamwork and multilingualism as well as creativity and entrepreneurialism are essential in the workplace and wider society. It is important that the new strategy should deliver on the provision of these skills. While many higher education providers have incorporated work based internships/placements into their programmes these are certainly a development to be encouraged.

ITT 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, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation with the Leaving Certificate curriculum. The IoTI sector is ideally positioned to provide up-skilling for Primary, Secondary and FE professional in this area. There is a further opportunity to incorporate a blended learning approach in this up-skilling activity.

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

The goal should be that every higher education graduate will have acquired these skills as a formal part of their programme study. This will require each programme to include module(s) on creativity and entrepreneurial development, these may be by way of work readiness modules or modules developed with the explicit intent to foster entrepreneurial creativity. Further engagement with the HEIs and the second level sector in this arena should be pursued and supported within an appropriate funding model.

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

The development of new curricula at second level.

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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).

The strategy may also wish to address the use of higher education campuses and facilities for community engagement, with a particular emphasis on evening and weekend usage. Summer schools may also provide a suitable option to help unlock the capacity of our HE capital infrastructure

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

Link to the compact performance for funding, thereby capturing the level and type of usage and ensure that public buildings and facilities are accessed by the wider community.

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

Respondent skipped this question

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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).

Respondent skipped this question

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

Respondent skipped this question

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

Respondent skipped this question

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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).

We broadly support the approach in the Programme and welcome the inclusion of technological university designation, apprenticeship and non-standard provision.

The Institute of Technology Tralee, with our collaborative partner, Cork Institute of Technology is seeking to be designated as the Munster Technological University. We have already completed three of the four stages towards designation and will be able to achieve designation in a short timeframe once certain issues have been resolved at a national level.

The mission of the MTU is to Create knowledge and enable the use of knowledge to realise positive effects for society. The MTU will be a different type of university characterised by:

- Entrepreneurial organisational culture;
- Innovative and flexible provision of education, research and other services;
- Responsiveness and regional impact.

The MTU will have 17,000 students, with over 1600 staff and two main locations and six sites across Cork and Kerry.

ITT believe that it is essential that the South-West has a Technological University in order to help provide the economic and social capital necessary for the continued development of the region.

The MTU will:

- Contribute an additional €50m per annum to the regional economy;
- Deliver 13.21% more economic activity than two individual IoTs.
- Make the region more desirable as a destination to study, live and do business in from both a national and international perspective through:
 - Provision of required skills and competencies to a variety of learners (e.g. school leavers, mature students and CPD learners) via varied and flexible modes of delivery;
 - Engaging in leading-edge research and innovation in cooperation with enterprise and social partners in the region;
 - Supporting enterprise development and growth with a particular focus on indigenous start-up and SME enterprises;
 - Operating with an over-arching culture of responsiveness which is focused on recognising the requirements of stakeholders and delivering on those requirements;
 - Partnering with community and social groups to facilitate initiatives aimed at delivering benefits and social capital within the region.

In line with the IoT position, with respect to apprenticeship provision it is important that the role and needs of the Institutes of Technology are considered. The Institutes have played a vital role in this provision nationally over many decades. Delivering apprenticeship programmes in a higher education environment is beneficial to all parties concerned and also builds on the success of international best practice in this type of education which will in turn deliver significant benefits to the graduates and employers both regionally and nationally.

The issues relating to provision for non-standard learner cohorts have been detailed elsewhere in this submission.

Q33: 8(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 appropriate to set targets (number of programmes, number 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 which targets particular industries and can capture regional as well as national data on skills' needs and employer satisfaction. This should be completed in conjunction with the Regional Skills Fora.

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

To follow through on the initiatives that have been commenced in more recent times, namely the implementation of the relevant part of the National Higher Education Strategy, the FET strategy, the National Skills Strategy and the new apprenticeships model appropriately funding the IoT sector in terms of operational and capital budgets is a pre-requisite to achieve the skills needs of the future.

In order to facilitate the creation of technological universities it is vital that the Department of Education and Skills act in a timely manner to address three key issues, namely legislation, IR and funding to support the reform process.

It will not be possible to create Technological Universities without enabling legislation. It is essential that the legislation is enacted in the coming months in order to bring necessary clarity to all involved.

Separate from the legislation (but related) is the issue of industrial action by the Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI). Many of their issues raised by the TUI require negotiation and agreement at a national level.

Through the merger of IT Tralee and CIT we can create a truly regional university which will be highly responsive to stakeholder needs due to its proximity to those stakeholders. The multi-campus structure of the MTU will bring additional opportunities and benefits over a single-site institution. These include:

- Providing enhanced educational opportunities to greater numbers of learners at or near where they live and/or work;
- Proximity to enterprise and other stakeholders which facilitates cooperation and leads to greater synergies and outcomes;
- Being situated in community they serve results in first-hand experience (and therefore a greater understanding) of the needs of stakeholders.

Finally, it is imperative that the significant programme of reform and transformation being undertaken by ITT and our partners CIT is funded and resourced accordingly. A programme of transformation of this magnitude will require dedicated funding separate from existing Institute operational budgets.
