



**Trinity College Dublin
Students' Union**

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Trinity College Dublin Students' Union - Proposed Exchequer-Employer Investment mechanism for Higher Education and Further Education and Training.

Question 1: Is an increase in the National Training Fund levy as set out in this consultation paper the most appropriate way to meet the recommendations of the Expert Group report regarding enhanced employer funding contributions, or, Are there alternative models such as partnerships with education providers or direct employer contributions, of the scale required to deliver the same result in a more effective manner, given the level of increased levy revenue being indicated?

-Yes, we believe that an increase in this fund is the most appropriate way to meet the recommendations.

There has been a 363% increase in student contribution from 2007 to 2014 (€825 to €3000). As the Paper on the Mechanism notes, students contribute €700 million to higher education. The State has had to reduce its contribution during recessionary times. Now however, it is time to examine the balance of who pays - particularly that of employer contribution.

Students spend, on the whole, between €10,000 to €12,000 a year on college according to a DIT Cost of Living Survey¹. Transport costs go up each year, as do accommodation costs. The average cost of renting in Dublin is €462 a month.

The cost of college for a student is extortionate, and it is rising. We have the second highest fees in the OECD for higher education.

¹ DIT Cost of Living Survey - please note the average renting cost in Dublin - <http://www.dit.ie/campuslife/campuslifeoffice/costoflivingguide201617/>

The word talent is used to describe Ireland's workforce to the world. There is a complete benefit for companies in contributing to higher education, and they need to do so more. There needs to be a balance, and employers are categorically not playing their part at present. Only a tiny proportion of the National Training Fund makes its way into higher education. This needs to be addressed. The report suggests a 0.1% annual increase in the fund for 3 years, giving a suggested €200 million to higher and further education.

We would suggest going further and continuing this for 4 years, so that it stands at 1.1%. This could give us close to €250 million extra. Coupled with increased government investment, this will reduce pressure on students, who already contribute much to higher education. The fund could be amended to support access initiatives also.

It is about time that higher education benefited from employer contributions, and that we use the increase in the fund to support a robust apprenticeship sector in this country. We commend the Programme for Government in committing to just that and providing 50,000 traineeship enrolments and apprenticeship registrations.

Students are Ireland's future workforce, and we deserve that investment.

-Regarding alternative models, we should examine the National Plan for Equity of Access². Employers could strengthen the links between further and higher education, as mentioned in goal 4 of the plan, such as sponsoring access and foundation courses in further education (goal 4.5). They could sponsor local Community Development Committees (goal 5.3) . They could provide mentoring (goal 1.6) for post-entry.

-An employer contribution towards the Student Assistance Fund should be considered.

Question 2: What are the implications for the National Training Fund Act in a changed landscape of employer-education engagement?

-Section 7 of the National Training Fund Act may need to be revised.

-It states:

² National Plan for Equity of Access to Education 2015-2019, http://www.heai.ie/sites/default/files/national_plan_for_equity_of_access_to_higher_education_2015-2019_single_page_version_0.pdf

'7.—(1) Whenever and so often as the Minister considers that it is appropriate that payments be made from the Fund in respect of a scheme referred to in subsection (2), the Minister may make payments from the Fund for that purpose of such amounts as are determined by him or her with the consent of the Minister for Finance.

(2) The scheme referred to in subsection (1) is a scheme the purposes for which it is established are—

(a) to raise the skills of those in employment, or

(b) to provide training to those who wish to acquire skills for the purposes of taking up employment, or

(c) to provide information in relation to existing, or likely future, requirements for skills in the economy.'

-There should be a clear link made that these schemes can be used for further education schemes and higher education schemes. The Act is quite broad and a stipulation that some of this usage must go to higher education is desired.

Question 3: In what ways can increased National Training Fund levy contributions be linked to:

(i) identifiable skills needs,

(ii) the workforce development agenda

And

(iii) the local, regional and national roles of institutions?

i) and ii):

-There is a real danger that the fund may be used in far too specific a way, or just for special courses. This would not solve the wider funding issue which the higher education system faces at present.

We do not exist in the world where one person has the same job for their entire career. Many take on various posts in several fields. We need, therefore, to concentrate on transferable skills.

-Take for instance the Trinity graduate attributes:

To Think Independently:

- I have a deep knowledge of my discipline
- I can do independent research
- I can think creatively
- I appreciate knowledge beyond my chosen field
- I can analyse and synthesise evidence

To Communicate Effectively:

- I am able to present work through all media
- I am expert in the communication tools of my discipline
- I can connect with people
- I can listen, persuade and collaborate
- I have digital skills
- I have language skills

To Develop Continuously:

- I have a passion to continue learning
- I build and maintain career readiness
- I am committed to personal development through reflection
- I am building confidence to take measured risks
- I am capable of adapting to change

To Act Responsibly:

- I act on the basis of knowledge and understanding
- I am self-motivated and able to take responsibility
- I know how to deal with ambiguity
- I am an effective participant in teams
- I have a global perspective
- I am ethically aware.

-These are focus points which we could use when applying the levy.

-We should concentrate on building an adaptable workforce with a varied skillset.

(iii) A much better organised and targeted apprenticeship/traineeship sector can play a part in developing regions.

The Access Plan 2015-2019 aims to 'increase participation by HEIs in the recently formed local Community Development Committees– these offer ready-made points

of liaison through which HEIs (working through their regional clusters) can become more involved with communities experiencing disadvantage.³

An employer contribution towards these (either by providing staff, facilities, or funding towards initiatives) would be much-desired, so that these groups can make real progress.

Question 4: How can increased National Training Fund levy contributions be used to support further forms of employer-education engagement, flexible forms of education and training delivery, and, the education and training outcomes required to meet forthcoming skills needs?

-A national vocation scheme, as evidenced in Germany, should be closely examined.

-Employers could sponsor online learning modules for upskilling initiatives.

-Employer contributions could go towards sponsoring counsellors at second level, which would point many of our young people towards the correct career for them.

Question 5: Is the manner in which we develop, nurture and deploy talent central to HE and FET and other sectoral strategies?

This question is more appropriate for employers and institutions to answer.

Question 6: Are there skills gaps existing or emerging which require a more coherent response from the HE and FET sectors?

This question is more appropriate for employers and institutions to answer.

Question 7: How can better partnerships be forged between Education and Enterprise?

-We would advocate that a better structure needs to be in place regarding overheads for research in Ireland. Currently, industry needs to contribute more to overheads.

³ National Plan for Equity of Access to Education 2015-2019,
http://www.heai.ie/sites/default/files/national_plan_for_equity_of_access_to_higher_education_2015-2019_single_page_version_0.pdf

-Intervention early in education - say, access initiatives at second-level such as sponsoring counsellors, leadership programmes or local community development committees- would be an excellent initiative for employers to take on, and it could be relatively inexpensive.