

Subject:

FW: Proposed Exchequer-Employer Investment Mechanism for Higher Education and Further Education and Training

From: Tom Reilly [mailto:Reilly.Tom@itsligo.ie]

Sent: 12 April 2017 12:21

To: ConsultationNTF <ConsultationNTF@education.gov.ie>

Subject: Proposed Exchequer-Employer Investment Mechanism for Higher Education and Further Education and Training

Dear Madam / Sir

IT Sligo welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Consultation process and we do so as perhaps the most Employer Engaged Higher Education Institute in Ireland. IT Sligo provides over 2,000 online students with programmes tailored made to meet the needs of employers in areas as diverse as precision engineering, quality, pharma and biopharma. In addition, we have pioneered the new Apprenticeship model, delivering the Insurance Practitioners Apprenticeship in partnership with the Insurance Institute.

IT Sligo has been dynamic and agile in identifying and responding to employer needs and in so doing has forged strong partnerships with employers. Given Ireland's low participation rates in lifelong learning, the State needs to incentivise Higher Education to respond to these lifelong learning needs. Accordingly, whilst any increase in funding in this area is to be welcomed, changes are required to make the use of the NTF more responsive and dynamic.

In respect to the first question, given that the NTF already exists, an increase in the Levy is an appropriate way to enhance employer contributions to Higher Education, provided that the additional income is spent on higher education. The increase in the Levy as proposed is for both FE and HE – the Expert Group report on future funding applied to Higher Education only. Accordingly, for this change to be presented as responding to the Expert Group the additional funding for Higher Education needs to be quantified.

There is an element of ambiguity in the consultation document in that it is unclear whether the increased contribution is to more sustainably fund current HE provision or whether it is to fund additional provision. On one hand the consultation document sets out that the proposal is predicated on improving the student / staff ratio yet on the other hand it refers to the increased funding providing 31,000 apprenticeships, 50,000 upskilling and reskilling places in HE etc. It follows that the mechanism by which the NTF is allocated would be different depending on the answer to this question. If the additional funding is to be used for a combination of these purposes, there would need to be two mechanisms for allocating funding.

The opportunity exists to change the way in which any funding for additional HE could be used to enhance employer-education engagement, flexible forms of learning and education and training to meet future skill needs. Employers in the UK pay a levy for apprenticeships, however employers are given the option of using their levy contribution themselves to directly purchase training and education to the required and specified standard. Such an approach, again within a clearly defined framework of quality assured, accredited provision, could work well. Employers will know their skills needs and HE providers would be incentivised to respond to these needs. An agile, responsive and actively engaged Institution such as IT Sligo would welcome the opportunities that such an approach would lead to.

Whilst welcoming the overall proposal as it represents increasing funding to Higher Education, IT Sligo is keen to stress the importance of balance in the overall debate on future funding. Even with the introduction of this proposal, the State will remain the biggest funded of HE by a significant margin. Any increased contribution is welcomed but it must not allow employers to dictate the State's HE policy. Providing skilled employees to

participate in the economy is an important part of the role of HE but it is not the only purpose; this must not be forgotten.

To conclude, as arguably the most engaged HEI in the State, IT Sligo is keen to contribute to the process of developing the policy detail which will be required to implement these proposals. We understand employer-education engagement, meeting skills needs and flexible learning because we do it every day; our record of achievement speaks for itself. This experience could be valuable to achieve the desired outcomes from implementing the proposed changes and we look forward to the opportunity to contribute to that.

Yours sincerely

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