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INOUE Submission to the National Skills Strategy 2015 - 2025

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IRISH NATIONAL ORGANISATION OF THE UNEMPLOYED

The National Skills Strategy uses the three themes identified by the OECD framework for Skills Strategy Development and raises questions under each of these themes: developing relevant skills; activating skills; effective use of skills. Under each theme the aims / objectives are listed followed by questions. This submission was completed on-line via https://www.nationalskillsstrategy.com/?gf_token=8e12f049f9a74df680d15a9b2c8342f2

Theme 1: Developing Relevant Skills, p62-67

- Encouraging and enabling people to learn throughout life
- Fostering mobility to fill skills gaps
- Promoting cross border skills policies
- Increasing engagement between enterprise and the education and training system including schools, further education and training providers and higher education institutions

In response to the questions raised in Consultation document

Relevant Skills:

- What do you consider to be the relevant skills for development in the period to 2025?
 - Good interpersonal and communication skills.
 - Good guidance and counselling skills that facilitate people to identify the most appropriate pathway to decent work for them.
 - Access to key, practical relevant information directly relatable to learners, learning opportunities and their desired learning outcomes. Such information identifying and addressing both potential barriers and concerns with practical solution based information and supports.
 - Specific skills that facilitate people to secure and maintain employment.
 - Such skills development should be in response to existing and emerging employment opportunities which must be viewed from a wider perspective than enterprise need, it must also include the skills required to develop good public services, and meet the skills requirements of the community and voluntary sector. For example, healthcare; education and training; youth and community work; planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation; enterprise development including green and social enterprises; tourism; security; STEM including environmentally sustainable technologies.
 - Development of multi-disciplinary skills practices and qualifications which are transferrable within specific employment fields and which provide core foundation skills for secondary or associated employment fields.
- Do we have the right mix of initiatives to deliver the future needs of enterprise, the economy and society?
 - At one level it could be argued yes, and certainly greater efforts have been made to develop policy in a more coherent manner. However, there are gaps in the development and implementation of these initiatives, and in particular how they respond to the needs and aspirations of people who are unemployed or otherwise distant from the labour market. This gap is also reflected in the lack of acknowledgement of the potential role of long-

standing initiatives targeted at these groups e.g. Community Employment Programme or the groups who provide targeted supports and services on the ground.

- How can employers and education and training providers work more effectively to identify and address skills needs and ensure the “work readiness” of learners?
 - They must engage with each other and develop well informed local, regional and national plans. They must engage with the learners and create good mechanisms that support learners to develop their skills and identify the most appropriate application of these skills in the labour market: a market that includes employers from the private-for-profit; public; community and voluntary sectors.
 - Education and Training providers must develop, implement, engage in and support the role of their own specific organisational lifelong learning practices in the development of education and training services for users.

Measurement & targets:

- What indicators should be used to measure progress in the new Skills Strategy (e.g. NFQ levels, Employer surveys, other)?
 - NFQ; employer surveys including employers from all sectors of the labour market; learner surveys and in particular independent surveys of learners directed into courses by other agencies e.g. Jobseekers directed by the Intreo Office; progression outcomes including labour market outcomes and their sustainability.

Life Long Learning:

- How can we motivate more people to participate in life-long learning?
 - People need to feel that such learning is valued for its own sake, that the personal, familial outcomes from such engagement are acknowledged by society.
 - People also need to see that their employment prospects will be enhanced: be it entering or re-entering the labour market after a period of unemployment; or an improvement in their employment conditions including access to a more sustainable and better income.
 - There are many people scared of the academic/assessment element of life-long learning to such a degree as they do not participate. However, those same people, particularly those in low skilled low paid work are interested in doing further training but not the assessment piece. Work needs to be done to recognise a person's skills and competencies through the training itself rather than their ability to write an essay on the subject.
 - Make better use of workplace learning as a way to upskill/reskill.
 - People need the ongoing development of flexibility in the design, development and delivery of lifelong learning options through a variety of sources geared towards their ability to access training and education.

- People need a form of guarantee that outcomes and qualifications achieved are not only formally recognised, but are academically sustained and retain longer term relevance where education/training courses have been altered, changed or removed.
- What are the attitudinal and structural barriers to learning that need to be overcome?
 - Employers and in particular those at the 'lower' end of the labour market need to be persuaded of the value of LLL, and to appreciate how they as a collective would benefit from employees with enhanced skills.
 - Employees, unemployed people and other jobseekers, need to realise the value over their life time of improving their skills, and they need to see that this enhanced value will materialise.
 - Practical measures that facilitate people to engage in LLL need to be further developed, including the complete roll-out of excellent broadband that would facilitate learners to engage in on-line/e-learning, particularly important for people with mobility, transport or caring barriers to overcome.
 - Enhanced income supports should also be developed to support in particular unemployed learners and people working in low paid / precarious employment. Such supports should be viewed as an investment that the State would see a return on as more people move into more sustainable employment.
 - For the unemployed, engagement in LLL should form part of an official curriculum acknowledging that individual's proactive engagement in LLL meets GSW and DSP based progression plans.
- What actions can be taken by employers to support and encourage increased participation in lifelong learning?
 - Facilitate a national campaign of workplace publicity and promotion of LLL as an option, and attached benefits for employees.
 - Facilitate employees through income supports; time off to learn; improved conditions of employment of those who up-skill.
 - Incentives for employers based on take-up and completion of LLL by key categories of 'low-paid' or newly employed persons from the live register.
 - Establish a national LLL charter for employers recognising the benefits of LLL and seeking the support of Employers Organisations, the Trade Union Movement, Chambers Ireland and key Social Corporate Responsibilities supporters in developing the charter.
- What actions can be taken by education & training providers to support and encourage increased participation in lifelong learning?
 - Provide accessible and well-targeted programmes of learning that participants know will improve their employment prospects.
 - Take the time to ensure that the course is the right one for the participant.
 - Ensure that the course has the right supports in place to facilitate the learners' retention in and progression from the course / programme.
 - Work on developing appropriate and robust Recognition of Prior Learning mechanisms to aid participation.

- Develop individual transferrable LLL plans for persons throughout their entire life, with the ability to suspend and reactive the plan based on their life experiences.
- What actions can be taken by the State to support and encourage increased participation in lifelong learning?
 - Enhanced income supports should also be developed to support in particular unemployed learners and people working in low paid / precarious employment. Such supports should be viewed as an investment that the State would see a return on as more people move into more sustainable employment.
 - Complete the roll-out of accessible and excellent broadband services.
 - Develop Recognition of Prior Learning mechanisms at national levels.
- How can we give recognition to prior learning including skills acquired in work, home or community settings?
 - Implement the April 2011 report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs on 'Developing Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) - The Role of RPL In the Context of the National Skills Strategy Upskilling Objectives' including:
 - ↳ DES providing an entitlement for all adults/ individuals to an assessment of core skills with a view to making their prior learning visible, providing, where relevant, credit/exemptions from core skills training and promoting their participation in further education/training and facilitating mobility and employability across sectors.
 - ↳ DSP could refer individuals for assessment, or consider integrating RPL assessment tools into its referrals work with the unemployed.
 - ↳ DES leading the development of an integrated RPL service.
- What barriers need to be addressed in order to stimulate investment in training by Irish enterprises?
 - Attitudinal: SMEs seem to see only the cost of facilitating LLL rather than the benefits of well skilled workforce.
 - Provision of more work based learning would lessen the cost, in terms of employee time/absenteeism while also showing the benefits of training, in real time, to Irish enterprises.
- What barriers need to be addressed to encourage disabled people to engage with education and training?
 - Accessible provision; accessible transport; costs of participation supports; challenging of discrimination in the labour market so that people with disabilities see real employment outcomes from such engagement.

Real world experiences for learners:

- How can the range of work place experiences be expanded, particularly in SMEs, to increase opportunities for learners to gain practical experience as part of their education and training programme?
 - Engaging with employers in the design and delivery of training: this should include informing employers of what is already available and identifying what courses and course participants could enhance their business or organisation.

- As part of this engagement build a good mechanism to identify and support work experience opportunities that will enhance both the learner and the organisation's skills levels and awareness.
- From the learners' perspective it is really important that they see the work experience enhancing their course learning and see it as an opportunity to support their job seeking.
- If suitable work experience cannot be found then alternative or additional course modules should be used: unrelated and poor work experience can undermine course learning and learners' confidence.

Skills infrastructure:

- Is the structure and architecture for the education and training system fit for purpose?
 - Too much of the structure is based in the formal education system that operates on an academic timetable that is irrelevant for many adult learners and in particular those out of work seeking to re-skill or up-skill and secure employment.
 - Alternative provision is less structured, funding over a longer time period is less certain: this can have the advantage that this part of the structure can be more flexible and adaptable. However, this also means it is less visible and often does not have the status of the formal providers.
- Is there a need for greater collaboration, particularly in the post-secondary sector to support learners to access learning opportunities and to meet the skills needs of employers?
 - Yes, and this collaboration must be between education and training providers, employers from all sectors, and the learners so that an integrated and responsive system emerges.
- How can we encourage the provision of a range of programme offerings by education and training providers that are relevant to learners and enterprise needs?
 - Enhance the funding for this type of activity and secure it over the longer term. Skills development only accounts for 4.2% of the €8.2bn DES Vote.
 - Build on the learning from programmes like Springboard; Momentum; BTEI; LTI.
- What can institutions do to ensure their policies and practices are inclusive and open to people with disabilities and other underrepresented groups?
 - Further develop and then fully implement their equality, human rights and social inclusion policies. Under the IHREC Act, a positive duty on public bodies was introduced and so it will be incumbent on all public service providers to design their policies and practices to ensure they are addressing discrimination and pursuing equality in practice.
 - For people with disabilities, it is vital that training and education provision is really accessible; that accessible transport is available; that good quality broadband is available to support on-line and e-learning; that adequate cost of participation supports are provided; and that discrimination in the labour market is addressed so that people with disabilities not only see but experience sustainable employment outcomes.

- For other-represented groups including Travellers and people for other marginalised communities, the issue of discrimination in the labour market must be addressed so that people from these communities experience good outcomes which in turn demonstrates to the wider community that engaging in education and training is a worthwhile activity.
- Education and training providers must have a demonstrated commitment to addressing inequality and social exclusion, and the wherewithal to engage with people whose experience of education and training provision has been less than positive.
- In turn these providers must be supported by the wider system commitment to equality, human rights and social inclusion, so that there are clear pathways from such engagement out into the labour market or into additional education & training that will ultimately lead to a decent job.
- There are divergent views on the issue of over-education and the scale of skills mismatches in the economy. It is clear that enterprise requires skills at all levels of the NFQ. We would welcome views on this issue and the implications that it has for the skills system and in particular the balance of provision between further education and training and higher education.
 - This is a societal issue as there is an overemphasis on academic education and an under appreciation of alternative routes to skills development and employment.
 - An awareness campaign is required that moves this perception and one which must include encouraging employers to look at the actual skills they need and to look beyond well-established landmarks: the Leaving Cert, the Degree.
 - Such an approach should also facilitate the development of a robust Recognition of Prior Learning model, one which would have currency in the labour market.
 - Job seeking skills, practical application of learning must become an integral part of the full education and training system: a role employers could play and enhance their engagement with the learning system.
- How can education and training providers and employers work together more effectively to respond to the results of the Employer Survey to achieve greater satisfaction amongst employers in future with the skills of graduates?
 - Job seeking skills, practical application of learning must become an integral part of the full education and training system: a role employers could play and enhance their engagement with the learning system.

Theme 2: Activating skills, p68-71

- Encouraging people to offer their skills to the labour market
- Retaining skilled people in the labour market
- Engagement between enterprise and the education and training system to design appropriate upskilling and reskilling opportunities

In response to the questions raised in Consultation document

- What changes can be made to the approach to training and skills development to improve the employment prospects of people who are long-term unemployed?
 - Pathways to Work as overseen by DSP must build person-centred services that really engage with people who are long-term unemployed and seek to provide the most appropriate provision for each person. That requires taking the time to assess people's existing skills and experience; identifying where there are gaps; identifying where there are appropriate opportunities and what would be the best course to re-skill or up-skill each person to avail of these opportunities.
 - An integrated guidance service must also be delivered, one where Intreo et al draw on the expertise of the LETB guidance service and other adult guidance services to ensure that the most appropriate and sustainable options are being made available to unemployed learners.
 - The re-introduction of cost of participation supports.
- How can the education and training system better engage with unemployed people with low levels of educational attainment?
 - For the unemployed, engagement in LLL and other forms of education should form part of an official curriculum acknowledging that individual's proactive engagement in LLL/education meets GSW and DSP based progression plans.
 - Support and resource good quality alternative and community based learning.
 - Clear progression links to other education and training opportunities so unemployed learners can see a real pathway into a better future, a sustainable job.
 - Provision of good quality information on the options that are available and how relevant and useful they are to the learner.
 - Stop referring people onto courses for the sake of seeing to be 'activating' someone, to fill places: it is a waste of money, discourages other learners, and makes provision of good quality education and training very difficult.
- How can we encourage people with disabilities and other under-represented groups to return to education or to retrain for employment?
 - For people with disabilities, it is vital that training and education provision is really accessible; that accessible transport is available; that good quality broadband is available to support on-line and e-learning; that adequate cost of participation supports are provided; and that discrimination in the labour market is addressed so that people with disabilities not only see but experience sustainable employment outcomes.
 - For other-represented groups including Travellers and people for other marginalised communities, the issue of discrimination in the labour market

must be addressed so that people from these communities experience good outcomes which in turn demonstrates to the wider community that engaging in education and training is a worthwhile activity.

- Education and training providers must have a demonstrated commitment to addressing inequality and social exclusion, and the wherewithal to engage with people whose experience of education and training provision has been less than positive.
- In turn these providers must be supported by the wider system commitment to equality, human rights and social inclusion, so that there are clear pathways from such engagement out into the labour market or into additional education & training that will ultimately lead to a decent job.
- What measures can be taken to improve the progression of young people from education and training – as well as those not in education or training, including early school leavers – to employment?
 - There are two groups of people here: the first are those with decent educational levels but who have yet to secure employment because of the crisis. As the economy picks up what this group needs is access to decent employment and supports to access such employment i.e. enhanced job-seeking skills and how best to apply their existing learning to the working environment. It is important that internships are not overused to address these issues as many young people perceive them as blocking their access to a decent job.
 - The second group are those who leave school early, may come from families and communities where this is the 'norm'. Good quality alternative provision that has demonstrable links to the labour market is critical for this group. Similarly, good quality pre-development work that facilitates this group to understand and assess their options and identify the most appropriate pathway into work for them will be important. And to underpin all of this the provision of cost of participation supports would be advisable.
- What can we do to facilitate and support the return of skilled Irish migrants in the coming years?
 - The creation of decent and sustainable jobs; the addressing of the housing crisis so everyone including immigrants can find affordable accommodation; the provision of good quality public services so people know their health, education and others of themselves and their families will be addressed.
- How can we encourage older people to reskill & retrain and continue to participate in the labour market? What skills will they require?
 - There are two groups here: firstly, there are many older unemployed people who have good skills and experience, who have re-trained themselves through programmes like Springboard, Momentum et al, but who have not found employment because of the barrier of ageism. This barrier must be addressed, otherwise older people not in the labour market will find it difficult to re-enter.
 - Secondly, for those older people in employment, a supportive work environment that encourages and rewards life-long learning is required.
- How best can this reskilling and retraining be facilitated?

To support both groups good quality guidance is required that assesses peoples' existing skills, identifies where there are gaps and provides good quality information on how best to address them.

As part of this development a fully functioning RPL system is required, so that engagement in education and training is seen as acknowledging people's existing skills and experience and seen as an opportunity to further enhance and develop them.

Depending on the first two actions, the provision of targeted education and training provision may be required, this could be sector specific and provided to facilitate the formal recognition of people's existing knowledge.

Other actions would require the targeting of older people with a strong and positive message about the value of life-long learning and the enhanced opportunities it could facilitate people to access.

Theme 3: Effective use of skills, p72-73

- Creating a better match between people's skills and the requirements of their job
- Increasing the demand for high level skills
- Engagement between enterprise and the education and training system on immediate and future skills needs

- What changes could be made to ensure that future skills needs of the economy can be anticipated and communicated most effectively to education and training providers, employers, students and those already in employment?
 - Make better and more effective use of the work of the Expert Working Group on Future Skills Needs.
 - Properly resource skills development and in particular alternative routes to learning.
 - Create consultative spaces that are inclusive of all and create good mechanisms for the exchange of learning and know-how.
 - Incorporate job-seeking skills and application of skills into a wider spectrum of education and training provision, and in particular into the formal education system.
 - Develop and engage with less formalised fluid network structures of employers, students and employees in aligned industry areas and facilitating informal cross-industry networking of networks.
- How can all stakeholders work more effectively to increase awareness of skills requirements and career opportunities among both school leavers and those already in the labour market?
 - Make better and more effective use of the work of the Expert Working Group on Future Skills Needs.
 - Properly resource skills development and in particular alternative routes to learning.
 - Create consultative spaces that are inclusive of all and create good mechanisms for the exchange of learning and know-how.
 - Incorporate job-seeking skills and application of skills into a wider spectrum of education and training provision, and in particular into the formal education system.
 - School Leavers: Develop a coherent, focused, relevant and sustainable social media and internet based presence which both facilitates access to information and feedback from users.
- How can the new network of Regional Skills Fora best contribute to the development of the skills base in each region?
 - It is important that all players in the education and training space, including the learners are involved in these fora. No-one player, stakeholder has all the answers, no-one perspective should dominate, a good working space that is inclusive of all and provides for the skills development of all is required.

Otherwise there is real danger that developments will take place that leave many people on the margins of the labour market behind, while those already benefiting from the system will benefit from the improved integration these fora should provide.

- How can we ensure a better understanding of the skills that are available, for instance in creating a common understanding of language proficiency?
 - The development and promotion of a fully integrated RPL system would help in this regard, and should be acted on.
 - Better communication from the parent Department, DES, on the role of skills development, a sense that it has equal footing with the formal education system; an acknowledgement of what we have; a recognition of what we need; and a clear pathway on how this will be supported, maintained, developed and implemented.
- How can we promote a more effective use of skills at work? In particular, how can managers be supported to identify effective work and organisational practices that make the best use of skills available to them?
 - A nationwide promotional campaign that highlights the business case for good skill development and retention; and as part of this,
 - The identification and promotion of good work practices that would facilitate organisations to engage in skills assessment and development, and its role in creating a positive work environment.
- How can this best be promoted among SMEs?
 - A nationwide promotional campaign that highlights the business case for good skill development and retention; and as part of this,
 - The identification and promotion of good work practices that would facilitate organisations to engage in skills assessment and development, and its role in creating a positive work environment.
 - Work with employer representative organisations in the promotion of the first two bullet points and identify examples of good practice and employers willing to talk and promote the positive benefits of such an approach.
- How can workplace learning be used more effectively to link training provision more closely to employer needs?
 - Workplace learning is not used in all organisations and during the next NSS it would be a good idea to identify where it does take place; how does it take place; who undertakes it; who provides the inputs.
 - It is a mechanism that could be used by a wider range of employers and could be beneficial in addressing employers' fears of supporting access to LLL.
 - Developing sector specific responses could prove to be the most relevant, as employers could see how it would benefit them directly, rather than questioning the applicability of such an approach to their own business if the example of good practice and benefit used is in a complete different category to themselves e.g. large enterprise, high skill sector.
- What additional measures are required to support entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurship skills in Ireland?

- Incorporate such learning into the formal and alternative education systems.
- In particular, develop a RPL module that would facilitate existing entrepreneurs to acquire formal recognition of their knowledge.
- A nationwide promotional campaign that highlights the business case for good skill development and retention.
- How can SMEs be better supported and encouraged to engage with training?

Developing sector specific responses could prove to be the most relevant, as employers could see how it would benefit them directly, rather than questioning the applicability of such an approach to their own business if the example of good practice and benefit used is in a complete different category to themselves e.g. large enterprise, high skill sector.