

Response by Department of Education and Skills (DES) to the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Regional Assembly

DES has previously provided some input to the RSES drafters relating to education and the linkages between skills availability and economic growth. Copy at annex for convenience.

The following additional observations/comments are now provided.

School level

General Information

In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, the Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas and uses a Geographical Information System, using data from a range of sources, to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. With this information, the Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level. Major new residential developments in a school planning area have the potential to alter demand for school provision in that area. In that regard, as part of the nationwide demographic exercises, the Department engages with each of the local authorities to obtain the up-to-date data on significant new residential development in each area. This is necessary to ensure that schools infrastructure planning is keeping pace with demographic changes as there is a constantly evolving picture with planned new residential development, including additional residential developments arising from the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF).

In addition, the Department is among the prescribed bodies with whom local authorities are obliged to liaise in respect of statutory planning processes. The Department engages with local authorities in relation to the preparation of county development plans, local area plans and strategic development zones so as to ensure an adequate supply of appropriately zoned land for educational use to meet future demand for primary and post-primary school development. The preparation of these Statutory Plans present valuable opportunities for the Department and the local authorities to ensure that there is sufficient educational infrastructure to meet the needs of the community. In this context, the demographic projections provided by the local authorities in their draft statutory plans are analysed by the Department to extrapolate the likely requirement for school places that will be generated. This is in addition to the utilisation of multiple other data sources through the Department's Geographical Information System. Based on these projections, the Department specifies to the local authorities the number and type of school sites that it requires to be suitably zoned. Local authorities are also referred to the Department's technical guidance in order to assist them with the identification of sites suitable for the provision of school accommodation.

In order to reflect the importance of aligning education infrastructure with community needs, it is suggested that the following amendment is made to the text:

On page 267, RPO179:

Change *“Encourage multi-agency approaches to delivering the health, social care, education and community services needed by growing, diverse or isolated communities.”*

To

“Working collaboratively across agencies, to deliver the health, social care, education and community services needed by growing, diverse or isolated communities. For example, in education, no substantial residential development should proceed without an assessment of existing schools capacity or the provision of new school facilities in tandem with the development.”

Higher Education and Further Education and Training

The Department welcomes the various references to the development of skills, talent and innovation in the region, including the identification of *“Growing our third level infrastructures, access to skills and to research, development and innovation”* as a high level Regional Policy Objective. It is positive that the links between education and skills development opportunities, and economic development in the region, are also highlighted at various points through the strategy. The case study on the Connacht University Alliance highlights the benefits of a future TU in the region in attracting and retaining investment. It is welcome that “Talent” is specifically identified under “Policies to Focus On” in the RSES.

The Department wishes to suggest a small drafting amendment:

On page 264, RPO 168: “technical university status” should be changed to “technological university status”

Annex 1: September 2018 submission

Material for inclusion in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Regional Assembly

Education is central to, and indeed enables the Government's overall objectives under Project Ireland 2040 - a strong, future-proofed economy, balanced across the regions and a fair society without barriers to opportunity. Education is the engine behind strong regional development and is of course crucial to ensuring we deliver on the future skill needs of our economy.

National Development Plan

The ambition set out in Project Ireland 2040 is underpinned by investment being made under the National Development Plan. Under this Plan, €11.9 billion is due to be invested in the education sector for the period 2018 to 2027. The NDP provides for a 70% increase in the school building budget, an almost trebling of investment in higher education and the first dedicated capital budget for the further education and training sector.

The increased funding in the NDP for the school building programme will be targeted at delivering on the twin objectives of catering for the continued increase in demographics and a greater focus on refurbishment and upgrade of existing school stock.

NDP funding for the HE sector in the North Western Region includes:

- Capital investments to support the bid for the Technical University status for the **Connacht Ulster Alliance (CUA)**, consisting of GMIT, Institute of Technology Sligo, and Letterkenny Institute of Technology. This involves significant new buildings being provided in GMIT and Letterkenny Institute of Technology as part of the Higher Education PPP programme. These new buildings will support STEM in GMIT and Education space and Library related provisions in Letterkenny IT.
- Capital investment in the form of a new STEM building is being supported for Athlone Institute of Technology. This building will enable the institute to meet the demands from local high tech industry with additional student spaces.
- Capital investment of €2m has also been recently announced to support an upgrade of the roof and other building fabric at the Castlebar Campus of GMIT.

Other investments in the HE sector will be made as part of a refurbishment and upgrade programme and co-funding arrangements for significant strategic projects.

The NDP investment in the FET sector will be prioritised to address issues with the condition of the existing capital stock, to roll out critical new apprenticeship syllabi and courses and to consolidate the provision of further education and training in modern fit-for-purpose facilities that enable the delivery of high quality integrated programmes.

Skills, Talent and Innovation capacity

The availability of well-educated, skilled talent is a fundamental driver of national competitiveness at both national and regional level. The development of talent and skills occurs at all ages and through a variety of interventions, and all parts of the education and training system play a part in the development of human capital.

For this reason, the development of Skills, Talent and Innovation capacity has been identified as a key strategic pillar for the National Planning Framework that underpins this Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

The OECD in its 2015 Innovation Strategy notes that “Skills have become the global currency of the 21st century” and that, in order to compete in a global knowledge economy, modern countries need to develop their innovation systems at both national and regional levels. Access to new technologies, knowledge and skills is crucial if countries are to develop their value-added segments and knowledge-intensive products and services.

The availability of skills and talent is key to economic and social development. Specifically, that role which the further and higher education systems can play in catalysing and supporting economic and social development in local communities, in regions and nationally is recognised. By providing initial education, skills training and lifelong learning the skills base is created to attract and sustain employment and, in turn, improve their attractiveness as places to live.

Ireland has a strong base on which to grow. The attainment profile of those exiting the formal education and training system has been steadily improving. Attainment at further and higher education is above the OECD and EU averages, with the proportion of Science, Maths and Technology graduates being the second highest in the EU.

Increasing productivity will also be required in order to ensure that growth is sustainable in the long run. While we have made significant progress in building a research and innovation infrastructure, greater alignment is required between research endeavour in HEIs and industry as well as effective investment in R&D and extensive collaboration in research between universities and industry.

In addition, in order to future proof our competitiveness, we must develop a skills base that will move Ireland to the forefront of digital and innovative activity. The adequacy and availability of digital skills and high-level ICT skills necessary to fully exploit digital technologies and sustain innovation, will require support for human capital development from education institutions.

Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and Higher Education Institutions need to be connected with companies and communities to deliver a rich range of initial and continuing education and training programmes to increase skills supply and labour market participation. Programmes with strong workplace components such as apprenticeships and traineeships have been critical in activating and growing regional skills supply.

Supporting Growth at both National and Regional levels – the education sector as a key driver

The availability of skills and quality higher and further education and training infrastructure in a region is key to sustaining and growing employment opportunities, and therefore to population growth. Targeted investment in Higher Education Institutions and Education and Training Boards, both current and capital, can be an important driver to achieve the objectives of the National Planning Framework.

Regional growth relies on harnessing the separate but complementary roles of urban and rural components in a region. Taking a regional overview can allow a more holistic assessment of the needs and strengths of a region and can ensure that development proceeds on a complementary rather than a competitive basis.

Cities and urban centres play a crucial role in the development of thriving regions in modern knowledge-based economies. In the past, when growth relied on manufacturing, government policy could promote regional development by locating factories in particular regional locations. However, the modern nature of employment and the importance of skilled services to growth requires a different approach.

Higher education institutions play a key role in our major urban centres. However, the focus of further and higher education institutions is broader than their immediate localities. While they are a key part of the urban infrastructure, they also have a role that extends beyond the immediate urban centre in which they are situated as they also act as key drivers for the economic development of the surrounding region.

In this, not only do they serve a broader geographic area than its immediate surroundings, but they are critical drivers of long-term, sustainable regional development and competitiveness.

In line with the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, higher education infrastructure in Ireland is planned on a regional basis. Higher Education Institutions have come together in regional clusters in order to collaborate to maximise their impact. This clustering allows higher educational infrastructure to be shared, rather than duplicated, across regions, thus allowing institutions to reach a critical mass and act as drivers of growth and development for their regions.

ETBs deliver programmes at levels 1-6 on the National Framework of Qualifications, with labour-market focused programmes delivering key intermediate skills to support regional

development and a range of part time adult and community education and training programmes providing a key pathway to participation in society, in the labour market and in further education and training. These programmes are planned and funded in an integrated way under the oversight of SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority.

This work is complemented and enhanced by the recently-established Regional Skills Fora, which provide a key interface between employers and those developing skills for the labour force. Since May 2016, nine Regional Skills Fora have been established, creating a mechanism for employers and the further and higher education and training system to work together in responding to the skills needs of their regions. The Fora have been established to align with wider Government policy and initiatives on regional economic development, including the Regional Action Plans for Jobs. The innovative structure of the fora sees the work plan within each region being driven by key stakeholders in the region including employers, enterprises and education and training providers thereby ensuring that the responses developed are tailored to the unique identified skills needs. Early indications from their work are positive about the potential of the Fora to have a major impact at regional level in bringing together the key stakeholders to develop swift responses to emerging needs and also to build better data around the needs of enterprise and employers in the region.

The development of multi-campus Technological Universities, as provided for in the Technological Universities Act, will allow them to become key drivers of growth and innovation in the regions in which they are located. Their multi-campus format emphasises their regional role that transcends any one particular urban centre, but instead involves working across a region to lead on the provision of skills and talent in the region. The Technological University proposed in the North Western Region is the **Connacht Ulster Alliance (CUA)**, consisting of Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology Sligo, and Letterkenny Institute of Technology.

The role of HEIs and ETBs in regional skills development

The availability of knowledge and skills in a given region is becoming increasingly important. By nurturing the unique assets and circumstances of each region in developing knowledge-based industries, delivery on regional development goals can be improved. HEIs and ETBs are a key source of knowledge and innovation and play a central role in this process.

HEIs engage with a range of other stakeholders in their regions, and work with them in terms of the provision of lifelong learning and the development of knowledge-intensive jobs which will enable graduates to find employment and remain in their regions after completing their formal education and training. This has implications for these institutions in terms of their teaching, research and service to the regions.

HEIs can fulfil this role through

- Knowledge creation through research and technology transfer;
- Knowledge transfer through education

- Engagement with their stakeholders to create the conditions in which innovation is supported and encouraged.

HEIs have improved their work on removing barriers to the application of their research output and in promoting innovation. Policy responses based on enhancing the capacity for technology transfer and interaction between HEIs and private industry have now broadened to include public services, social and organisational innovation.

Partnerships between HEIs and regional actors can allow the regions to develop by taking advantage of the HEIs' contribution to its human capital. However, the HEIs can also benefit through regional development in the form of increased enrolments, payment for research and other services such as consultancy or training. A well developed, thriving region also contributes to an environment which is more attractive to high quality staff and students, which in turn is of benefit to the higher education sector in that region.

Widening access to higher education is a national goal, as it contributes to human capital development. For a region, educating a broader range of individuals from the region and outside, ensures that there is a skilled pool of labour for potential employers and assists in ensuring that they can meet industry's new skills requirements. Employees can continue to learn through HEI-provided continuous professional development and lifelong learning programmes, which are key to ensuring that skills are kept up to date and adapt to emerging needs as identified in the region.

ETBs shape their further education and training provision to closely serve the skills needs of their regions. They also play a key role in supporting people into employment, growing labour market participation and providing opportunities to acquire skills in their own communities. ETBs also provide pathways for people to progress to higher education.

Both ETBs and HEIs work with employers through the national apprenticeship programme. The expansion of apprenticeship is a key national objective and is being supported through the growth of employer participation in existing apprenticeship programmes and the development of a wide range of new programmes in sectors that have not participated in apprenticeship before. At regional level, ETBs and HEIs are working with employers to develop programmes at levels 5-10 on the National Framework of Qualifications. Apprenticeship has a strong regional footprint and often enables learners to remain in their home communities and contribute to the regional economy.

Institutions providing further or higher education can also work with local employers to address any imbalance between labour market supply and demand. Regional market intelligence and links with business, communities and public sector bodies can ensure that education providers respond to human capital needs in the region in a coordinated way. Further and higher education institutions can also work with industry to create consortia which provide a critical mass in competing with other regions and sharing of learning through disseminating best practice.

Further and higher education institutions also serve wider social and economic goals and have a good track record of working with their communities. For example, the links between

HEIs and many health-care providers are well established. However, there remains potential for improved cooperation in other services. The contribution of HEIs and ETBs in terms of culture has significant potential. The attraction of creative talent and the growth of creative industries are all part of the role of many HEIs and ETBs. Similarly, many HEIs play a significant role in environmental development through the demonstration of best practice in energy efficiency and carbon neutral technology.

Individuals will make decisions on where to live and work based on the range of job opportunities and the lifestyle choices available to them. For many, their aspirations across work, study, leisure and family can best be met in a regional setting, rather than focussing on one particular location, be it, urban or rural.

Regional structures provide an important bridge between national and local levels and allow for a greater coherence between national policymaking and local action. Further and higher education institutions can play a central role in joining up national policies at regional level, through their partnerships with regional stakeholders.

School Provision

School provision is a key part of social infrastructure to be provided in tandem with housing provision.

The National Planning Framework and this Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy will seek to prioritise the alignment of targeted and planned population and employment growth with educational investment, including the provision of new schools on well-located sites within or close to existing built-up areas that meet the diverse needs of local populations.

The provision of additional school places to cater for demographic pressures will remain a key priority throughout the lifetime of the NDP and will be aligned with this new approach to spatial planning. In this regard, the school building programme will align with NPF objectives in delivering, over time, more compact growth and a rebalancing of growth between the regions.

Nationally, enrolments at post-primary level are projected to continue to grow to 2025. While national enrolments at primary level are currently reaching peak levels, regional and local variations mean that there will be a continued strong need for provision of additional school places in areas of population growth.