

NATIONAL SKILLS COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING OF 24th November 2020



National Skills Council

Chair: Mr. Bob Savage, Vice President, Regional CIO for EMEA and Cork Site Leader, Dell Technologies.

Council Members present:

Mr. Jim Breslin, DFHERIS; Mr. William Beausang, DFHERIS; Ms. Patricia Coleman, DPER; John McKeon, DSP; Prof. Mark Ferguson, SFI; Dr. Brendan McCormack, THEA; Mr. Paddy Lavelle, ETBI; Mr. Andrew Brownlee, SOLAS; Dr. Alan Wall, HEA; Mr. Liam Ryan, SAP Labs Ireland; Mr. Martin McVicar, Combilift; Mr. Peter Mulrine, P Mulrine & Sons; Ms. Patricia Roberts, Hotel Proprietor; Mr. Paul Healy, Skillnet Ireland.

Apologies:

Prof. Philip Nolan, Irish Universities Association; Julie Sinnamon, EI; Orlaigh Quinn, DETE; Mr. Dalton Tattan, DoE.

Secretariat

Ms. Emma Kinsella, DFHERIS; Ms. Patricia Flannery, DFHERIS Ms. Eve McKay, DFHERIS: Karina Mahnovaca, DFHERIS.

In attendance:

Minister Simon Harris, DFHERIS; Minister Niall Collins, MoS for Skills and Further Education; Ms. Stephanie O'Brien, DFHERIS; Mr. David Hegarty, DETE; Mr. Kevin Daly, DETE; Ms. Vivienne Patterson, HEA; Ms. Barbara Kelly, QQI; Ms. Helen Mc Mahon, EI; Ms. Joan Mc Naboe, SLMRU; Ms. Nora Condon, SLMRU; Ms. Evelyn O'Connor, DoE; Ms. Geraldine Hurley, DSP; Prof. Brian Donnellan, IUA; Mr. Tony Donohoe, EGFSN; Mr. Ray Bowe, IDA; Mr. Phil O'Flaherty, DFHERIS; Dean Mooney, DFHERIS; Ms. Joanne Lonergan, Advisor to Minister Harris. Mr. Alan Gray, Indecon; Mr. William Batt, Indecon; Mr. Ronnie O'Toole, Indecon; Ms. Keissi Prendusli, Indecon; Mr. Brian O'Connell, Indecon; Mr. Greg Swinard, Indecon.

Agenda Item 1 - Welcome from the Chair and Ministerial remarks

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting.

The minutes of the previous meeting and the NSC Statement of Priorities Autumn 2020 were approved.

The Chair introduced Ministers Harris and Collins

Minister Harris acknowledged the work of the Council members in driving forward the skills agenda. He is looking forward to meeting members in person during 2021. He noted that the NSC provides a unique opportunity to develop deeper collaboration between enterprise and the further and higher education system. He requested Council members to consider ways to revitalise the work of the Council in the context of a rapidly changing environment and asked that issues such as gender balance, diversity of views, public sector v enterprise representation be considered. He welcomed Indecon's report in connection with developing a funding model for the sustainability of further and higher education. In the context of the National Recovery Plan and the National Economic Plan he anticipates that the government will make a firm decision on a new funding model for the sector in 2021. The Minister acknowledged the work of the further and higher education sector in dealing with the many challenges as a result of Covid-19.

Minister Collins said he was delighted to be in attendance, he acknowledged the significant range of experience and insight of all members. He is looking forward to working with the Council.

Agenda Item 2 - Strategic Discussion:

Discussion of Indecon Consultants' Draft Report - *Increasing the Sustainability of Higher Education Provision in Ireland - Adapting Higher Education and Further Education & Training Provision to Meet the Existing and Future Skills Requirements of Ireland's Labour Market.*

a. Presentation by Alan Gray, William Batt, Ronnie O'Toole, Keissi Prendusli, Brian O'Connell, Greg Swinard, Indecon Research Economists

b. Discussion

Indecon presented on draft research recently carried on the sustainability of Higher Education provision in Ireland. The pillar of this tripartite research considered most pertinent for the National Skills Council examines the question of any misalignment between qualifications and skills provided by the Further and Higher Education sector and the skills demand of the labour market, and provides policy recommendations.

As an initial discussion, 3 questions were discussed at the meeting:

- 1. The scale of alignment between the findings and recommendations of the research and the current orientation of national skills policy and its implementation in further and higher education system and the key areas in which greater coherence could be durably achieved.*
- 2. Key actions requiring examination to seek to ensure that national skills priorities particularly those relating to the skills requirements for continuing to build a knowledge-intensive economy*

as reflected in the Indecon research are best met through a balanced and cohesive further and higher education sector.

3. *Analysis and recommendations contained in the Indecon research which highlight key issues for setting the future strategic direction of skills policy by the Council including in relation to its future work / research programme.*

The Chair opened up the floor, the discussion focused on the following points:

The Indecon Report, which will be an integral part of the future funding of further and higher education, was widely welcomed by all participants.

It was noted that a lot of the recommendations within the report are already in train, however it was acknowledged that there is more work to be done. HEA is working closely with Solas to address the further education/higher education balance. Noted that there should be more focus on further education when students are applying through CAO. Also, there is a need to identify the geographical areas with low tertiary admissions and target those areas. Work based learning and RPL needs to be leveraged. In terms of flexible provision short modular courses under Pillar 3 are proving to be very successful. IUA's micro-credentials provision will increase provision of flexible short courses in a responsive and agile way.

In the context of further education Solas cautioned against referring to low/medium/high level skills, it should be noted that the FET sector also provided high level skills in collaboration with industry. It was noted that more flexible modular type provision and enhanced collaboration with industry is required. It is not sustainable that 2/3 of leaving certificate students are entering Higher Education.

3 areas to be addressed:

1. There should be more exposure to further education and training at time of completing CAO form.
2. Need to embed exposure to pathways from further to higher education and apprenticeship programmes through taster courses at secondary level.
3. There is a need for a regional coherent approach in collaboration with the further and higher education sector, industry, National Skills Council, Regional Skills Fora and Skillnet Ireland.

It was noted there is a shift in labour market requirements and more high level skills are now required. It was noted that there is merit in the triple helix model where Government, enterprise and academia work together. Noted that the NTF Advisory Group has provided a much needed voice to employers.

It was noted that ICT skills are now in huge demand across all sectors of the workforce, there is an urgent need to introduce ICT subject in Leaving Certificate.

It was noted that there is a need for enhanced employer engagement in particular in providing work placements. In the context of work based learning and RPL there is a need for employer and academia input, enhanced collaboration from employers is required. Progression from further to higher education needs to be seamless. Noted that there is a need to look at over skilling, in recent times employers are looking for graduates with high level skills, there is a need to work with employers to ascertain the appropriate skills needs of prospective employees.

It was noted that a review of the leaving certificate is ongoing. In particular the review is looking at STEM, languages and work placements. There is a huge focus on retaining students to complete the leaving certificate.

It was noted that that companies are having difficulty in navigating all the various further and higher education course provision.

In the context of Indecon findings, it is important to note that Ireland's open labour market played a significant role in Ireland's economic recovery. It was noted that there is a significant role for the further education sector to upskill and reskill those most at risk as a result of automation. There is huge merit in the new apprenticeship model, however there is a need to examine what is inhibiting more involvement by employers. There is a need to strengthen skills forecasting. DETE will continue to play their part through the EGFSN.

Agenda Item 3 - Council approval of Monitoring Ireland's Skills Supply

Presentation by Nora Condon, SLMRU.

The report outlines the potential supply of skills to the labour market in terms of

- (a) the number of awards by NFQ level and field of learning made across the education and training sector, including selected private providers
- (b) an educational profile of Ireland's population, also in terms of NFQ level and field of learning.

Approved for publication by the Council.

Next steps:

Publish Monitoring Ireland's Skills Supply.

Agenda Item 4 – AOB / Closing Remarks

The Chair thanked members for their attendance and contributions to the discussion.

He noted that Secretariat is currently working on a work plan for 2021 and would be liaising with members in this regard.

Next steps:

In advance of the next NSC meeting in February, the secretariat will liaise with members with regard to finalising the NSC work plan for 2021.

Dates of NSC meetings to be held during 2021 will be circulated to all members.