

**NATIONAL SKILLS COUNCIL**  
**MINUTES OF MEETING OF 30<sup>th</sup> March 2021**



## **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; Prof. Mark Ferguson, SFI; Mr. Martin Shanahan, IDA; Dr. Brendan McCormack, THEA; Mr. Paddy Lavelle, ETBI; Mr. Andrew Brownlee, SOLAS; Mr. Pdraig Walsh, QQI; Mr. Liam Ryan, SAP Labs Ireland; Mr. Martin McVicar, Combilift; Ms. Patricia Roberts, Hotel Proprietor, 1 Pery Square; Mr. Paul Healy, Skillnet Ireland.

**Apologies:**

Prof. Philip Nolan, IUA; Ms. Julie Sinnamon, EI; Dr. Orlaigh Quinn, DETE; Mr. Dalton Tattan, DoE; Mr. John McKeon, DSP; Mr. Alan Wall, HEA; Mr. Peter Mulrine, P Mulrine & Sons.

**In attendance:**

Mr. Andrew Bell, OECD; Ms. Laura Reznikova, OECD; Mr. Alastair Blair, Accenture; Ms. Caroline Douglas, Accenture; Mr. David Hegarty, DETE; Mr. Kevin Daly, DETE; Ms. Vivienne Patterson, HEA; Ms. Joan Mc Naboe, SLMRU; Ms. Nora Condon, SLMRU; Prof. Brian Donnellan, IUA; Mr. Tony Donohoe, EGFSN; Mr. Jonathon McMillan EI; Ms. Breda O'Toole, IDA; Ms. Siobhán Bradley, RSF manager, SW; Mr. John Costello, RSF manager, Midlands; Ms. Evelyn O'Connor, DoE; Mr. Phil O'Flaherty, DFHERIS; Ms. Therese Callery, DFHERIS; Ms. Anne Naughton, DFHERIS; Mr. James Maher, DFHERIS; Ms. Deirdre Duffy, Advisor to Minister Harris; Mr. Luke Devoy, DFHERIS; Ms. Elaine Scanlon, DFHERIS; Ms. Tanya Kenny, DFHERIS; Ms. Orla Lynch, DFHERIS; Ms. Dervila Flynn, DFHERIS; Mr. David Keating, DFHERIS; Ms. Fiona O'Byrne, DFHERIS.

**Secretariat**

Ms. Stephanie O'Brien, DFHERIS; Ms. Emma Kinsella, DFHERIS; Ms. Patricia Flannery, DFHERIS; Ms. Karina Mahnovaca, DFHERIS.

## Agenda Item 1 - Welcome from the Chair and Secretary General's remarks

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. He noted that today's strategic discussion was timely in the context of Covid-19 and the future world of work. He also noted that it is an opportune time for the National Skills Council to ensure that the appropriate structures are in place to face the challenges ahead.

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

### **Remarks by Jim Breslin, Secretary General at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science**

The Secretary General referenced the publication of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science 1<sup>st</sup> Statement of Strategy and its relevance to the work of the NSC.

#### **Some key aspects of the Department's Statement of Strategy:**

- Talent and human development, which highlights the work of the NSC, is one of the Pillars of the Statement of Strategy.
- Of particular importance is the need to address the skills needs in the green and digital arenas.
- A new Apprenticeship Plan which will be published in April sets a target of registering 10,000 new apprentices per year up to 2025.
- There will be improved pathways between the transition from further to higher education and from higher to further education. The system will be more fluid to meet the needs of different learners and to encourage participation in lifelong learning.
- SOLAS has been commissioned to develop a Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy.
- Historic policy decisions will be made shortly with regard to a sustainable funding model for higher education.
- The establishment of Technological Universities are very important in their own right and also to anchor and drive regional development and growth.
- He welcomed Siobhán Bradley, Regional Skills Fora manager for the South West and John Costello, Regional Skills Fora manager for the Midlands.
- He welcomed guest speakers: Andrew Bell, OECD, whose presentation would focus on megatrends around Europe and Alastair Blair, Accenture, whose presentations would focus on findings from a recent report on reaching out and encouraging those not in education or training
- He noted that a collective effort of all members around the National Skills Council table will be required to face the challenges ahead.

## Agenda Item 2 - Strategic Discussion:

### ***Building the Talent Pipeline in the Context of the Impacts of Covid on the Economy***

The strategic discussion focused on the structural changes to the economy as a result of the Covid crisis, the future shape of the world of work and ensuring access to, and engagement with, upskilling and reskilling opportunities by all, and particularly those most impacted. The pandemic has

accelerated change in areas the Council has already touched on (for e.g. digitisation), and there are also unforeseen structural changes (for e.g. hospitality, tourism, remote working).

Presentations by,

- Andrew Bell, Head, OECD Skills Strategy Project, on the International Context in relation to the Challenges and Changes facing our economy.
- Alastair Blair, Country Managing Director Accenture in Ireland, on the findings of the recent Accenture Report [Talent for Tomorrow – Reskilling to Power Ireland's Economy.](#)

The Secretariat suggested the following questions as a guide the open discussion amongst Members, following the presentation:

- In relation to long-term structural changes in the economy, what are the implications for the tertiary education system and lifelong learning? How can the positive changes (online, digital, flexible learning etc.) that have taken place during the crisis be embedded in a sustainable way?
- How can we engage cohorts most at risk in lifelong learning? How can obstacles be removed? What is the role and responsibility of enterprise (and indeed all stakeholders) in encouraging individuals to engage in lifelong learning, to view learning as a continuous journey, and in driving forward workforce development and human capital development?

**Following presentations by Andrew Bell, OECD and Alastair Blair, Accenture, the Chair opened up the floor, the discussion focused on the following points:**

- It was noted that the availability of talent is vital in attracting FDI.
- In light of the advancement of digitalisation, data and Industry 4.0, there is a need to continue to upskill those in employment.
- It was felt that there is a need to address the issue of funding for higher education in particular with a view to improving Ireland's University rankings.
- The role of the Technological Universities was welcomed and the importance of maintaining the differentiation between TUs and the existing universities was noted.
- It was queried as to whether Ireland is prepared for remote working? Is there international research around the correlation of high digital skills and remote working?
- It was noted that OECD findings resonates with SOLAS with regard to difficulties in getting young people to engage in education.
- It was noted that the current unemployment rate is similar to what Ireland faced in 2009, vital to avoid structural unemployment.
- Progressive pathways for learners to facilitate lifelong learning was noted.
- It was noted that lifelong learning has to be more accessible there is a need for more bite size modular courses.
- It was noted that short, micro credentialing provision modules must be stackable and transferable across institutions and sectors. Work is ongoing in developing a framework for micro credentials.
- It was noted that work ongoing to develop a framework for Recognition of Prior Learning.

- It was felt that in order to compete globally there needs to be more focus on research within the workplace.
- It was noted that AI is having a significant impact on both high level skills in middle level jobs and on traditional professions such as accountancy and law.
- It was suggested that SMEs need to be encouraged to move away from out dated business practices to be ready for new ways of working and living.
- It was noted that SMEs are looking for cross sector employability skills, quick interventions and leadership and management courses.
- It was suggested that there is a need to change the mind-set of employers with regard to Lifelong learning. Employers fear that staff will resign once they have been trained/upskilled.
- It was suggested that the tertiary system must view employers as well as students as their clients.
- It was noted that the Apprenticeship model focuses on problem solving, increased awareness around apprenticeship programmes is required.

### Agenda Item 3 – Update on the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs Work plan 2021

Tony Donohoe, Chair of the EGFSN, gave a brief overview of the work of the Group and referenced 2 reports that will be completed in 2021.

- Skills to Enable the Low Carbon Economy – expected to be ready for approval by the National Skills Council in Q3.
- AI Skills - expected to be ready for approval by the National Skills Council in Q4.

The EGFSN will also commence research focussed on assessing the potential additional skills demands to fully exploit opportunities in subsectors such as, FinTech, applied alternative assets, sustainable Finance, AI and Blockchain. The scope will be agreed in 2021 and the study will be finalised in 2022.

### Agenda Item 4 – AOB / Closing Remarks

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

He noted that today's discussion underlines how important the partnership approach is, and how it will only grow in importance in the future. He requested members to reflect on how the Council can further embed this approach and how we should work together in the future. He asked members to keep in touch with Stephanie O'Brien, Emma Kinsella and their colleagues in the NSC Secretariat.

### Action Item:

The Secretariat to follow up with Andrew Bell, OECD with regard to international research around the correlation of high digital skills and remote working.