



National Skills Council

Extraordinary meeting of the National Skills Council

19th October 2022 – 2.00 to 4.00pm

The meeting was co-chaired by, Mr. William Beausang, Assistant Secretary, DFHERIS (on behalf of Mr. Bob Savage, Chair NSC, Vice President, Regional CIO for EMEA and Cork Site Leader, Dell Technologies) and Mr. Andrew Bell, Head of OECD Skills Strategies.

National Skills Council Members present:

Mr. William Beausang, DFHERIS; Mr. Paul Healy, Skillnet Ireland; Mr. Padraig Walsh, QQI; Mr. Liam Ryan, SAP Labs Ireland; Mr. Andrew Brownlee, SOLAS; Ms Jasmina Behan, DPER; Mr. Paddy Lavelle, ETBI.

Apologies from National Skills Council Members:

Mr Bob Savage, Dell; Mr. Jim Breslin, DFHERIS; Prof. Philip Nolan, SFI; Mr. Dalton Tattan, DoE; Prof. Dáire Keogh, IUA; Mr. John McKeon, DSP; Ms. Patricia Roberts, No.1 Pery Square Hotel & Spa, Pery Square; Mr. Alan Wall, HEA; Mr. Martin Shanahan, IDA; Mr. Leo Clancy, EI; Dr. Orlaigh Quinn, DETE; Mr. Martin McVicar, Combilift; Mr. Peter Mulrine, P. Mulrine & Sons.

OECD Skills Strategies Team

Mr. Andrew Bell, Head of OECD Skills Strategies; Mr. Bart Staats, Project Leader OECD Skills Strategies; Ms. Laura Reznikova, Policy Analyst, OECD Skills Strategies; Tamar Friedman Wilson, Policy Analyst, OECD Skills Strategies; Heather Carey, Policy Analyst, OECD Skills Strategies.

Regional Skills Fora Chairs present:

Ms. Terri Moloney, RSF Dublin; Mr. John McKenna, RSF Midlands; Mr. Michael Brougham, RSF Mid East.

Regional Skills Fora Managers present

Ms. Natasha Kinsella, RSF Dublin; Ms. Siobhan Keogh, RSF Mid East; Mr. Joe Leddin, RSF, Mid West; Mr. Ray Murphy, RSF North East; Ms. Hilary McPartland, RSF North West; Mr. Edmond Connolly, RSF South East; Dr. Siobhan Bradley, RSF, South West; Ms. Denise Rocks, RSF, West.

Cross Departmental Project Team:

Ms. Sarah Miley, DFHERIS; Ms. Trudy Duffy, DFHERIS; Ms. Nicki O'Connor, DFHERIS; Tanya Kenny, DFHERIS; Ms. Nora Condon, SLMRU; Mr. Alan Power, DETE.

Others in attendance:

Prof. David FitzPatrick, IUA; Dr. Peter Clifford, SFI; Ms. Vivienne Patterson, HEA; Mr. Donal Leahy, EI; Ms. Helen McMahon, EI; Ms. Joan McNaboe, SLMRU; Ms. Breda O' Tool, IDA; Mr. Carl Blake, RSF Co-ordinator; Mr. David Hegarty, DETE.

Secretariat:

Ms. Stephanie O'Brien, DFHERIS; Ms. Emma Kinsella, DFHERIS, Ms. Karolina Murphy, DFHERIS; Mr. Noel Martin, DFHERIS.

1. Welcome from the NSC Chairperson (including approval of minutes)

The Chair welcomed Council members, the OECD Team – including Mr. Andrew Bell, Head of OECD Skills Strategies, members of the Cross Departmental Project Team and the Regional Skills Fora Managers and Chairs. He noted that this Extraordinary Meeting of the National Skills Council (the third and final meeting of three through 2022) marks the beginning of the Recommendations Phase of the Skills Strategy Project, and approaching of the final phase of the project.

Minutes of meeting of 8th of June, 2022 were approved.

2. Opening presentation by Mr. Andrew Bell, Head of OECD Skills Strategies

Mr. Andrew Bell, co-chair, welcomed all participants to the Extraordinary Meeting of the NSC and thanked everyone for their engagement and collaboration to-date which has brought us to an inflection point in the project where we need to formulate strategic recommendations that will enable our skills ecosystem to better serve our economy now and into the future

Mr. Bell continued with a presentation outlining the project and progress made to-date during the recommendations phase of the project.

The main objectives of the OECD Skills Strategy project for Ireland are to:

1. Review how the National Skills Strategy 2025 might need to be adapted to ensure that it is still fit for purpose, and;
2. Identify policy priorities for Ireland, by reviewing the most important challenges and opportunities for Ireland's skills system.

Priority areas on which the OECD Skills Strategy Project concentrated:

1. Securing balance in skills through a responsive and diversified supply of skills
2. Fostering greater participation in lifelong learning in and outside of the workplace
3. Strengthening the governance across a joined up skills ecosystem
4. Leveraging skills to drive innovation and strengthen the performance of firms.

The focus of the 3rd ENSC meeting was on Priority Area 3 “ Strengthening the governance across a joined up skills ecosystem.

Key takeaways from the discussion on potential policy directions for Priority Area “***Strengthening governance to build a joined up skills ecosystem***”-

Opportunity 1: Promoting a whole-of-government and strategic approach to skills policy.

- 1.1 Strengthen strategic co-ordination and co-operation on skills policy across Departments and agencies in Ireland by, for example, establishing a dedicated governmental co-ordination work stream/group under the aegis of the NSC (best practice international example from OECD Norway):
 - Need for an effective oversight of skills system regime to drive the future of skills and contribute to economic and social sustainability, NSC needs to play a stronger role in terms of giving skills policy direction.
 - Need for a stronger forum/space to facilitate better coordination/partnership between all stakeholders and foster stronger engagement to achieve joint goals.
 - Overarching nature of skills creates a significant coordination challenge that needs to be tackled cohesively to realise our shared ambition.
 - Coordination of policy implementation (rather than development) is the main challenge, important to take advantage of opportunities to collaborate and avoid duplications of efforts.
 - Complexities should be removed, focus should be on creating synergies and efficiencies within existing structures/mechanisms.
 - NSC should be tasked with driving the skills agenda/ outputs; assuming leadership in terms of implementation of skills strategy which should be government led in terms of the structure.
 - Suggestion of potential governance structure: Policy (responsibility of DFHERIS?), strategy (responsibility of NSC?), implementation – potential space for a strategic platform responsible for driving efficient collaboration.
- 1.2 Prioritise a smaller number of key objectives in the updated NSS, and consider a more flexible structure (e.g. via specific work programmes over a set period). And:
- 1.3 Improve the accountability mechanisms for following-up on the implementation of the (updated) NSS by considering regular progress reporting and supporting impact evaluation of the introduced measures.
 - More flexibility and adaptability needed in the design of the new strategy to support efficient implementation (focus on key impacts with fewer, high level actions).

- Holistic rather than piecemeal approach (crosscutting initiatives to integrate across the system rather than compartmentalise).
- Accountability with regards to impact evaluation (to include qualitative side of supply of skills as well as quantitative) is critical for effective implementation- NSC could take on an advisory role for government.

Opportunity 2: Supporting effective engagement with stakeholders throughout the skills policy cycle

2.1 Establish clear accountability mechanisms at the NSC regarding meeting outcomes/advice given (e.g. by showcasing how the advice provided is being used). (Best practice international example from OECD: Netherlands):

- Advisory role of NSC needs to be strengthened and enhanced, with clear direction as regards to where the advice goes (Netherlands).
- Despite the rich data available to the NSC it would be better served receiving information derived from this data if providing an advisory role.
- More incentives needed for stakeholders and business in order to strengthen and continue the engagement on permanent basis.
- Drawing in the attention of business sector to NSC is crucial as supply can only be tested by demand.
- Strengthening and improving existing links between NSC, RSF, employers and other skills actors is crucial for NSC to be a valuable and prominent source of advice.

2.2. Pilot establishing industry-focused "curriculum hubs" within ETBs, in close collaboration with RSFs, to enable more systematic stakeholder engagement in co-creation of FET qualifications. (Best practice international example from OECD: Northern Ireland):

- Best practice examples should be emulated and cascaded nationwide rather than new ones developed (Some sectoral networks co created and led out by industry are already successfully established (i.e. tech hub)).
- Co creation of curricula should include all actors (Learner/jobseeker/employee/employer) and should involve all tertiary options not only FET (best practice example LSCG network- Logistics and Supply Chain group- operating at national and sectoral level).
- Communication and raising awareness about existing models and networks is equally important.
- Capacity to develop of new programmes of ETBI needs to fit within ETBs and be supported by the new FET funding model.

Opportunity 3: Strengthening the collection, exchange and use of skills information

3.2 Strengthen the granularity of Ireland's skills data collection by supporting consistent collection of data on employees' skills gaps via the Skills for Growth initiative, and by strengthening the emphasis on skills in the Recruitment Agency Survey (RAS). (Best practice international example from OECD: UK):

- Central platform needed to facilitate efficient and consistent (horizontal and vertical) sharing of skills data between all actors.
- Need for more dynamic, granular, real-time data to respond rapidly to industry's needs and to allow for improved forecasting of emerging skills needs.
- Coordination of data collection is needed so that it is consistent, comparable and avoids duplication of effort.

3. AOB and Closing Remarks:

Mr. Beausang thanked all participants for contributing to a rich discussion on the PPDs relating to governance. These insights would assist the OECD greatly in developing its recommendations.

The next phase of the “Roadshow” would begin on Monday, October 24th, with the National Workshop in the Morrison Hotel.