



National Skills Council

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25 September 2023 – 1.15 to 14.30pm

The meeting was chaired by Mr. Bob Savage, Vice President, Regional CIO for EMEA and Cork Site Leader, Dell Technologies, with the key note address delivered by the Minister of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) TD, Simon Harris.

National Skills Council Members present:

Mr Bob Savage, Chair NSC, Vice President Dell Technologies; Mr. William Beausang, DFHERIS; Mr. Paul Healy, Skillnet Ireland; Mr. Pdraig Walsh, QQI; Mr. Liam Ryan, SAP Labs Ireland; Mr. Andrew Brownlee, SOLAS; Mr. Paddy Lavelle, ETBI, Mr. Dalton Tattan, DoE; Prof. Eeva Leinonen, IUA; Mr Michael Lohan, IDA;

Apologies from National Skills Council Members:

Prof. Philip Nolan, SFI; Mr. John McKeon, DSP; Mr. Alan Wall, HEA; Mr. Martin Shanahan, IDA; Mr. Leo Clancy, EI ; Mr. Martin McVicar, Combilift.

OECD Skills Strategies Team

Mr. Andrew Bell, Head of OECD Skills Strategies; Ms. Laura Reznikova, Policy Analyst & Ms Darragh McKee Mathews, Intern, Policy Research and Advice;

Others in attendance:

Mr. David Hegarty, DETE; Dr. Peter Clifford, SFI; Ms. Vivienne Patterson, HEA; Ms. Helen McMahon, EI; Mr. Paul Carroll, DSP;

DFHERIS: Ms Sarah Bardon, Ms Deirdre Waters, Mr Mark McNulty, Ms Alva Hammond;

NSC Secretariat (DFHERIS):

Ms. Emma Kinsella, Ms. Karolina Murphy, Mr. Noel Martin;

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

The Chair welcomed the Minister, Council members & the OECD Team to the final meeting of the Council in its current format.

The following plans for the Council restructure, which will take the form of a new, two-pronged approach, were then announced:

- Advancing a NSC with reconfigured membership, to act as a platform for strategic engagement with Irish industry and enterprise and the main non-governmental stakeholders with a strong interest in skills and workforce development policy to take a high-level and broad perspective to skills challenges, policies and priorities, and;
- Establishing a High Level Skills Implementation Committee (HLIC), intended to deliver the whole-of-government and whole-of-tertiary engagement on national skills policy and delivery recommended by the OECD, composed of Government Departments and Agencies, chaired by DFHERIS, to provide policy and operational expertise as required to the Council, and to support driving implementation of the 2023 OECD Skills Review Recommendations.

The proposed Council reform delivers on the key recommendations set out in the OECD Review of Ireland Skills Strategy published in May 2023 to strengthen the governance of Ireland's national skills system.

The new two-pronged structure is designed to ensure that the governance of the national skills system is equal to the demands it faces – both in terms of:

- The strategic analysis and assessment, advice and direction from enterprise and industry grounded in their understanding of the future 'demand' for skills; and
- The expertise and commitment to delivery of skills supply by government Departments, its agencies and higher and further education and training institutions.

Minutes of meeting of 19th of October, 2022 were approved.

2. Key note address from the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Simon Harris TD

Minister Harris delivered a key note address in which he remarked on:

- The OECD Review of Ireland Skills Strategy that successfully concluded with the publication of the report in May 2023. Governance of the Ireland's national skills system was one of four priority areas, alongside lifelong learning, innovation, and balance in skills, examined as part of the Review.
- The OECD's Review findings which affirmed that Ireland's skills structures, the most prominent of which is the National Skills Council (NSC) are lauded as international good practice. Its role has been vital to date in helping to shape, and reshape, Ireland's skills policy priorities.

- Enormous strides that have been made in recent years in Ireland’s partnership approach, that are owed to a great extent to the pivotal role played by the Council as the main partnership platform on skills.
- The pace of change globally and the scale of the challenges that skills policy now confronts , as documented in detail in the OECD review, now requires the Council to move to a new structure that will align it fully with the advancements in Ireland’s ambitious skills agenda and changes ahead.
- The new NSC structure sets us on a path of continuous improvement that will be at the centre of how we address the skills challenges and opportunities ahead to enhance Ireland’s skills and workforce development performance.

3. PRESENTATION FROM OECD ON RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE OECD REVIEW OF SKILLS

OECD thanked everyone for their engagement and collaboration throughout the project which resulted in the comprehensive report launched in May 2023.

Priority areas on which the OECD Review of Ireland Skills Strategy 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.

Key findings from each of the priority areas were then briefly outlined with the main focus given to Priority Area “ Strengthening the governance across a joined up skills ecosystem” and OECD’s recommendations relating to National Skills Council reform which underpin the proposed reform of the Council.

4. Q & A session

Discussion then ensued with a widespread support demonstrated by all Council members for the Council’s planned reform.

Key takeaways from the discussion to note:

- Clear TOR are needed to position the reformed National Skills Council (NSC) primarily as a platform for strategic engagement with non-governmental stakeholders. There must also be clarity on how to maintain effective coordination and communication between the reformed NSC and the High-Level Skills Implementation Committee (HLIC). It is critical to ensure that industry and public sector bodies are aligned, to achieve optimum results to address industry skills needs. There also needs to be a clear understanding of what the relationship is between this new structure and the National Training Fund Advisory Group (NTFAG).

- Two-pronged approach is welcomed as important to have two separate bodies, one recommending the advice and another group working on implementation. The Skills Council to date, burdened with both tasks, could only partially successfully advance either.
- Important to have a distinct enterprise voice on the Council to allow enterprise to have a stronger influence and play a larger role in shaping Ireland's skills strategy policies. This would allow to better align skills policies with the needs of the labour market leading to more effective workforce development and economic growth.
- It is important to have SMEs represented on the reformed NSC, drawn from diverse sectors and with a diverse membership profile. Representation from companies at various stages of growth and from different regional locations would bring innovation to the NSC and rich workforce development insights.
- It is equally important to have a clear communications strategy to amplify Council's impact, bring public profile to the voice of the Council and facilitate engagement with wider stakeholders across the economy and the skills ecosystem.
- It would be important for the NSC to submit annual advice on skills to government that is challenging to facilitate effective implementation and stronger accountability mechanisms.

5. Closing Remarks

The Chair concluded the meeting with thanking the Minister, Council members & the OECD Team for their participation in the final meeting of the Council in its current guise and expressed his anticipation to seeing the plans for strengthening the Skills Council finalised to see the Council in its new form continuing to make an even greater impact.

The reform of the Council is expected to conclude with the inaugural meeting of the reconstituted Council taking place later this year.