

Critical Review: The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN)

1 INTRODUCTION

The Public Service reform Plan, published in November 2011, outlined the programme of public service reforms and improvements which are designed to deliver the commitments made in the Programme for Government. The report lists the 48 rationalisation measures to be implemented by end 2012 and the 46 bodies to be critically reviewed as agreed by Government last November (S180/20/10/1236A)

In the context of critical reviews, the Department of Education and Skills proposed that the EGFSN should be absorbed into the Department.

2 OVERVIEW OF ROLE OF THE EXPERT GROUP ON FUTURE SKILLS NEEDS (EGFSN)

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) advises the Irish Government on current and future skills needs of the economy and on other labour market issues that impact on Ireland's enterprise and employment growth. It has a central role in ensuring that labour market needs for skilled workers are anticipated and met.

Established in 1997, the EGFSN reported to the then Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (now Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation) and the Minister for Education and Skills.

Forfás, Ireland's policy advisory board for enterprise, trade, science, technology and innovation in conjunction with FÁS, provides the EGFSN with research and secretariat support

The FÁS Skills and Labour Market Research Unit provide the Group with data, analysis and research and manages the National Skills Database. Forfás provides the Group with research and secretariat support. The Group's work programme is managed by the Head of Secretariat based in Forfás. The EGFSN's budget comes from the National Training Fund.

As part of the re-structuring of Departments at Government level, the Skills Division of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation moved to the Department of Education and Skills, with responsibility for the EGFSN also moving in tandem to the DES.

3 RECENT HISTORY OF THE EGFSN

The current mandate was drafted in 2010 (copy in appendix attached). The following are the current arrangements, updated to account for the structural changes.

Chairperson and chairing meetings of the EGFSN

The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment appointed the current Chairperson of the EGFSN. . The current Chairperson is Ms Una Halligan and she was appointed in 2009. Working in close cooperation with the Secretariat of the EGFSN, the Chairperson will ensure the efficient delivery of annual work programmes. S/he will chair meetings of EGFSN and direct its deliberations. In the absence of the Chairperson, the Head of the Secretariat will chair meetings of the EGFSN.

The Minister for Education and Skills is now responsible for appointment of the members and Chairperson of the EGFSN following consultation with the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation.

Sub Groups

The EGFSN may delegate functions to sub-groups. Such sub-groups may include persons who are not members of the EGFSN itself but who possess particular expertise that is of direct relevance to work at hand.

Skills and Labour Market Research Unit

The FAS Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SMLRU) contribute to the delivery of the above mandate. Through its data gathering, analysis and research activities it supports the work of the EGFSN. While the SMLRU will be located in FÁS, its work in this context will, as required, inform the delivery of components of the agreed annual work programme of the EGFSN. This will require the SLMRU to work in close collaboration with the Head of Secretariat to the EGFSN.

He/she will assist the SLMRU in developing its annual work plan for the EGFSN and manage the aspects of the SLMRU work programme that relate to the EGFSN to ensure that projects are completed in line with content specifications and time scales decided upon by the EGFSN. The SLMRU will operate the National Skills Database on behalf of the EGFSN. The SMLRU will be funded through the National Training Fund. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment will review the funding and mandate of the SLMRU annually in the context of its ongoing support of the EGFSN.

Appointment of members

The Minister appoints members of the EGFSN. Membership includes representation from the following broad categories:

- ❑ Business
- ❑ Workers
- ❑ Enterprise development
- ❑ Education and vocational training
- ❑ General public interest

Head of the Secretariat of the EGFSN

S/he is an officer of Forfás. S/he is responsible for the management of all work undertaken or commissioned by EGFSN, including that undertaken or commissioned at its behest by the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit of FAS (SMLRU).

The Head of the Secretariat has responsibility for the efficient and timely delivery of all tasks that fall to the Secretariat of the EGFSN to deliver or to oversee. This includes responsibility for ensuring that the Secretariat itself is properly resourced and managed, that annual work programmes are proposed, agreed and delivered on time and that the outcomes of work undertaken are publicly promulgated and implemented, as appropriate, by those with responsibility for so doing.

Effective delivery of the tasks assigned to the EGFSN

The Head of the Secretariat, working in close cooperation with the Chairperson, has responsibility for ensuring that management and operational systems are deployed in a way that will ensure the most effective delivery of the different aspects of the mandate of the EGFSN.

The Chairperson and the Head of the Secretariat will review the adequacy of these systems annually. If considered necessary by the Chairperson, proposals for change or adaptation will be put to the EGFSN for consideration and decision.

Reporting arrangements

An annual report, in conformity with information headings to be proposed by the EGFSN and agreed by the two Departments is provided to the responsible Ministers not later than end-March following the year to which it refers.

In addition, the Chairperson will arrange to meet periodically, but not less than once yearly, with both Ministers. The purpose of such meetings is to brief the Ministers on the work of the EGFSN by reference to its annual report – which will be available to both Ministers in advance and, in particular;

- ❑ to advise them on the policy, resources and operational implications for their respective Departments of agreed recommendations advanced by the EGFSN
- ❑ to exchange views on issues requiring priority attention in light of contemporary labour market circumstances
- ❑ To review the extent to which recommendations made are being implemented
- ❑ To discuss other relevant issues of interest that have been notified in advance by either side.

The Chairperson of the EGFSN may be accompanied at such meetings by whatever delegation s/he considers necessary.

Below is a list of the current members of the EGFSN.

Una Halligan	Chairperson
Inez Bailey	Director, National Adult Literacy Agency
Peter Baldwin	Assistant Secretary, Department of Education and Skills
George Bennett	Departmental Manager, Clean Tech, IDA Ireland
Liz Carroll	Training and Development Manager, ISME
Ned Costello	Chief Executive, Irish Universities Association
Margaret Cox	Managing Director, I.C.E. Group

Tony Donohoe	Head of Education, Social and Innovation Policy, IBEC
Dr. Bryan Fields	Director, Curriculum Development / Programme Innovation, FÁS
Anne Forde	Principal Officer, Department of Education and Skills
Garry Keegan	Director, Acumen
Enda McDonnell	Sectoral and Enterprise Development Policy, Enterprise Ireland
John Martin	Director for Employment, Labour & Social Affairs, OECD
Frank Mulvihill	Former President of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors
Dr Brendan Murphy	President, Cork Institute of Technology
Dermot Nolan	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Alan Nuzum	CEO, Skillnets
Muiris O'Connor	Higher Education Authority
Peter Rigney	Industrial Officer, ICTU
Martin D. Shanahan	Chief Executive, Forfás
Jacinta Stewart	Chief Executive, City of Dublin VEC

4 CURRENT POSITION

The Minister for Education and Skills has recently made the following new appointments to the membership of the EGFSN.

Mr Phil Doherty
Mr Joe Hogan
Ms Sonia Flynn
Ms Joanne Gardiner

5 ANNUAL REPORTS

National Skills Bulletin 2012 (July 2012)

The National Skills Bulletin 2012 **is the eighth annual report** by the EGFSN on skills and occupational trends in Ireland. Produced annually by the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit in FÁS, the National Skills Bulletin provides an overview of employment trends and demand for skills in Ireland. The Bulletin draws on data on employment, vacancies, job announcements and immigration and other qualitative information held in the National Skills Database, to identify imbalances in the Irish labour market at occupational level.

Monitoring Ireland's Skill Supply: Trends in Education and Training Output 2012 (July 2012)

Undertaken annually by the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit of FÁS on behalf of the EGFSN, this report which is **the seventh annual report** examines the numbers of students entering and leaving the education/training system in Ireland and reports on:

- The demographic profile of the school age population
- Junior and leaving cert trends

- Further education and training awards
- Higher education trends
- Where graduates go
- Adult lifelong learning participants

Vacancy Overview (Feb 2012)

The Vacancy Overview 2011 is the **second in a series of annual reports** prepared by the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) in FÁS on behalf of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs. It provides an overview of the demand for labour in Ireland as measured by trends in advertised job vacancies, thereby contributing to the EGFSN's on-going monitoring of the labour market..

The Expert Group on Future Skills Statement of Activity 2012 (April 2012)

The annual Statement of Activity provides details of the Group's output and activity in the previous year, forthcoming work in 2012, and information on the Group's research and analysis resources.

Key Sectoral Reports (since 2006)

- Key skills for Enterprise to Trade Internationally (June 2012)
- Addressing High-Level ICT Skills Recruitment Needs: Research Findings (January 2012)
- Guidance for Higher Education Providers on Current and Future Skills Needs of Enterprise (Feb 2012)
- Developing Recognition of Prior Learning: The Role of RPL In the Context of the National Skills Strategy Upskilling Objectives (April 2011)
- Future Skills Needs of Enterprise within the Green Economy in Ireland (November 2010)
- Future Skills Requirements of the Biopharma-Pharmachem Sector (November 2010)
- Future Skills Needs of the Wholesale and Retail Sector (May 2010)
- Future Skills Requirements of the Food and Beverage Sector (November 2009)
- Skills in Creativity, Design and Innovation (November 2009)
- A Review of the Employment and Skills Needs of the Construction Industry in Ireland (December 2008)
- Future Requirement for High-Level ICT Skills in the ICT Sector (June 2008)
- Future Skills Needs of the Irish Medical Devices Sector (February 2008)
- The Future Skills and Research Needs of the International Financial Services Industry (December 2007)
- Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy (March 2007)
- International Digital Media Industry, Implications for Ireland (September 2006)

Other Publications

- A Quantitative Tool for Workforce Planning in Healthcare: Example Simulations (June 2009)
- Statement on Raising National Mathematical Achievement (December 2008)
- All-Island Skills Study (October 2008)

- Survey of Selected Multi-National Employers' Perceptions of Certain Graduates from Irish Higher Education (December 2007)

6 FUNDING

EGFSN members do not receive payment and it has no staff.

Forfás staff provide and act as a secretariat for this group and undertake the research and consultation required to inform the Group's deliberations. The costs of the secretariat and of supporting the groups work are paid from the National Training Fund.

In 2012 the budget allocation from the NTF was €420,000. The secretariat of this group will remain with Forfas which is being absorbed into DJEI. The work of this group will be the subject of a funding arrangement between DES and DJEI.

7 REVIEW PROCESS:

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) is not a State Body in the usual sense. It is a group representative of Industry, State Agencies, Education and Training Providers and Government Departments which considers what are the future skills needs of the economy and how education and training providers might meet those needs. It does not have a statutory basis for its existence, its members do not receive payment and it has no staff.

Though the EGFSN is not a body in the usual sense it was decided to review it under the Agency Reform Programme. In this regard it should be noted that Forfás which provides the secretariat was also being reviewed.

The review essentially took the form on interdepartmental consideration by the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation.

The work of the Group is highly valued by both Departments and has a good reputation and credibility among industry as well as education providers. Both Departments consider that the group should be retained. It provides a mechanism for identifying future skill needs which involves all the relevant state agencies (IDA, Enterprise Ireland etc), education providers and industry representatives as well as a process that involves engagement with relevant industries and access to national/international research. Ensuring that course provision appropriately caters for the needs of industry is essential particularly given the economic and unemployment situation. It is accordingly proposed to maintain the Expert Group on Future skills Needs.

The review also addressed the determination of the funding for the EGFSN, particularly in the context of Forfás being subsumed within the Department of Jobs Enterprise and Innovation. In this regard the expertise of the secretariat to the group was acknowledged as core to the quality of its work to date. Accordingly, it is proposed that the annual work programme for the EGFSN will be determined in the context of the estimates programme (NTF Funding) and will be the subject of a letter

of agreement setting out the work programme, the resources to be deployed to implement the programme and a breakdown of the relevant costs. The letter will be issued by DES, who manage the NTF, to DJEI/Forfás.

This procedure will operate for the 2013 programme.

8 CONCLUSIONS

The Group is not a body as such, does not have any offices or payroll costs and operates as an advisory group.

Following further consideration by the two Departments, D/ES and D/JEI, the Department of Education and Skills clarified its position as follows: The Expert Group whose members are appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills in consultation with the Minister for D/JEI will continue to provide advice supported by the secretariat which will be subsumed into D/JEI.

Membership of the Group will remain a matter for the Minister for Education and Skills following consultation with the Minister for Jobs Enterprise and Innovation. However the Secretariat will remain within Forfás (Forfas is being absorbed into D/JEI) and its work will be subject to a regular mandate and funding agreement with DES. Funding will continue to involve an allocation from the National Training Fund (NTF).

Appendix

2010 -2012 MANDATE

Introduction

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) has the task of advising Government on future skills requirements and associated labour market issues that impact on enterprise and employment growth.

Account will also be taken of relevant provisions of Towards 2016 – the Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015 - and of the National Development Plan 2007 to 2013.

Mandate

The EGFSN will operate under the aegis of Forfás. In fulfilling this role the EGFSN will:

1. Advise Government on projected skills needs at national and sectoral levels and make recommendations on how best to address identified needs
2. Advise Government on associated priority education and training requirements and the most cost effective ways of responding to them
3. Advise Government on any skills requirements that cannot be met internally at a given time and that so require to be met through inward migration
4. Advise Government on the content, delivery and outcomes of education and training programmes elsewhere that support excellence and value for money and on adaptations necessary to incorporate such developments here
5. Be advised of education and training programmes that are supported through the National Training Fund. It can convey views or recommendations in this regard to the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment and should respond to any request for advice received from him/her.
6. Endeavour to ensure that recommendations made by it are adequately assessed and acted upon by the responsible authorities. The Secretariat will take the necessary steps to ensure that its members are periodically informed of progress made in responding to such recommendations.