



National Skills Council

National Skills Council Summer 2108 Statement of Priorities

The National Skills Council, within its remit to advise on the prioritisation of identified skills needs and on how to secure delivery of identified needs, has examined the issue of the National Training Fund and, in the context of the review of the National Training Fund, contributes the following to the review.

The skills of the workforce are of fundamental importance to Ireland's economic future. Given the changes in the world of work, and the speed of development of new technologies and ways of working, the acquisition of new skills will be vital to keep pace with advances in technology. Upskilling and reskilling of the labour force is a crucial tool for responding to this new situation, and it is vital that employees are provided with opportunities to keep developing new skills throughout their working lives. By offering people the opportunity to adapt and develop their skills, we can also ensure that nobody is left behind because of the changes taking place in the economy.

The National Training Fund was established in 2000 with the objective of supporting the training of those in employment and of those seeking employment, as well as providing for the funding of research on future skills requirements of the economy.

The Council recognises that there is already considerable work ongoing in the funding of programmes through the National Training Fund, and acknowledges the success of many of these programmes in achieving their aims. However, the Council also acknowledges the need for employers to have a greater input into how the NTF is spent, and the need for more specific explanation of funding decisions in relation to the fund. The Council also notes the difficulty that smaller employers may have in engaging with the provision funded by the NTF, and the importance of ensuring that courses be flexible and regionally based. There is also an important role for employers here in ensuring that employees can be facilitated to undertake training.

Therefore, the Council underlines the importance of the continued work of the National Training Fund and declares the following to be the key priorities for the fund going forward:

- 1. The NTFs objectives as set out in the 2000 Act allow policy makers flexibility to change the emphasis of the fund in response to the changing needs of the economy. The Council recommends that this flexibility continue.**
- 2. The Council recommends that the balance of resources deployed by the NTF between those in employment and those wishing to take up employment be monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure it fully reflects the current condition of the labour market.**

3. The selection of programmes to be funded by the NTF should consider the need for in-company training, while also ensuring that Ireland taps into its under-used sources of potential in labour supply.
4. The Council recommends that further efforts are made to ensure that employers, including those who are small and regionally based, have adequate engagement with the NTF and its constituent programmes. A formal ongoing structured mechanism for specific NTF inputs will be important to enable employers to have more direct input into the funding of provision through the NTF.
5. In order to fully engage and increase input on skills issues, it is recommended that employers continue to enhance their understanding and capacity to effectively identify their skills needs.
6. The Council recommends that the potential for the development of some means by which employers could be given access to dedicated funds to use for training be examined.
7. The Council recommends that employers continue to support and encourage their employees to engage in lifelong learning and continue to ensure that opportunities to acquire key skills through education and training are provided for employees. Providing for time off work for employees to engage in lifelong learning, as well as other methods of support and encouragement, will enable employers to obtain increased benefit from their contributions to the National Training Fund.
8. Strong evaluation should remain a cornerstone of the NTF and must go beyond measuring just inputs and outputs. The measurement of outcomes, where possible, is a very important part of this monitoring.