



National Skills Council

National Skills Council Spring 2018 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 Lifelong Learning and Workforce Development and considers it a key area of importance for the development of the Irish economy and society.

The new and emerging technologies of the 21st century have developed at an unprecedented pace and have transformed the way we live and work. The digital revolution which is taking place is transforming the economy and society and leading to the emergence of new skills and new jobs, and the pace of that technological change is ever growing.

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 European Union has flagged the importance of Lifelong Learning and has set a target of 15% participation in lifelong learning under the EU2020 strategy. However, statistics show that Ireland, with lower than 7% participation is still some way off this target and currently lags behind the EU average. While Ireland has above average rates for formal learning and engagement in lifelong learning for those who are not in the labour market, rates for those in employment, those over 35, and those without a tertiary education are particularly low.

The Council recognises that there is already considerable work ongoing in the area of lifelong learning and workforce development, and that the National Skills Strategy and the Action Plan for Education have set targets of 10% participation in lifelong learning by 2020 and 15% by 2025. However, the Council believes that given the importance of lifelong learning to the development of the Irish economy and society, it is essential to give it enhanced focus.

Therefore, the Council underlines the importance of lifelong learning and workforce development and declares the following to be the key priorities for the education and training system in this area:

- 1. Improving the skills of those already in employment is critical to maintaining the flexibility and dynamism of the Irish workforce.**
- 2. Lifelong learning and skills development is a shared responsibility. While the State and education and training providers have a role to play, employers and citizens must also take responsibility for ensuring their skills needs are met. Employers must 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.

3. Programmes and initiatives in the Further Education and Training sector and the Higher Education sector, such as eco college, Skills for Work, Apprenticeship and Traineeship, Skillnets and Springboard+ play a crucial role in meeting the future skills needs of the economy. It is important to ensure the continued development of and support for existing programmes, together with the development of new and innovative mechanisms to support lifelong learning and respond to emerging skills needs where required.
4. Soft skills, transversal skills and the mastery of core competencies in numeracy, literacy and digital technologies remain critical for employees in all sectors, and opportunities to develop and enhance these skills are vital. Students and learners at all levels of the education and training system need to be given the opportunity to acquire a strong mix of transversal skills and subject knowledge both during their initial formal education and throughout their lives.
5. A range of delivery tools, formats and models need to be available to ensure employees can access upskilling at the times and locations that best suit their circumstances
6. Accreditation and qualifications provide one mechanism of proving that skills have been acquired. Employers may choose to accept learning experiences that have been acquired but have not been formally certified. Employers and employees should have access to learning opportunities through formal education and training and also through non-formal acquisition of specific skills.
7. With input from industry, education and training programme content for employee development should be reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis to ensure its alignment with industry needs