

**Draft Minutes of Meeting No. 85
of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs
7 December 2020 - Webex**

Present:	Tony Donohoe	Chair
	Helen McMahon	EI
	Ray Bowe	IDA
	Vivienne Patterson	HEA
	Joan McNaboe	SOLAS
	Shauna Dunlop	SOLAS
	Laura Bambrick	ICTU
	Stephanie O'Brien	DFHERIS

Secretariat:	Kevin Daly	DETE
	Don O'Connor	DETE
	Niamh Martin	DETE
	Ruth Morrissy	DETE
	Patrick Condon	DETE
	Alan Power	DETE

Invited guests	Séin Ó Muineacháin	LinkedIn
	Kate O'Sullivan	LinkedIn
	Ciaran Conlon	Microsoft
	Niamh Roddy	IDA
	Nessa White	SOLAS

Apologies:	Keelin Fagan	EI
	William Beausang	DFHERIS

1.Minutes of EGFSN Meeting Number 84 and welcome

The minutes of the previous meeting were discussed.

The EI member of the Group requested an amendment to the minutes under the item Spotlight on Skills. The Chair confirmed that the amendment was noted and the minutes would be revised. On this matter, the DFHERIS member added that Spotlight on Skills was part of Skills for Growth.

The Chair introduced Ms Stephanie O'Brien from Skills Planning and Enterprise Engagement (SPEE) unit in the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. Ms O'Brien has replaced Kathleen Gavin who retired during the summer.

The Chair welcomed Mr Patrick Condon who has replaced Ms Katie Griffin in the EGFSN Secretariat.

Stephanie O'Brien described the work of the Skills Planning and Enterprise Engagement Unit in the new Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science- working from the overall high-level skills framework for the country and National Skills Strategy 2025 - including the National skills Council and Regional Skills Fora – and how her unit will be reviewing the Strategy and Framework.

The public consultation for DFHERIS' statement of strategy was open until 18th December, and she was happy to engage with Group members bilaterally about it.

2. Proposal for AI Skills

The EGFSN Secretariat presented a paper proposing EGFSN research into the deployment and management of AI in Ireland.

The Chair noted that it is important that the report looks at the deployment and management of AI rather than the just skills required for AI experts. He said that sometimes companies struggle to see how it can be used in a business context, and also referred to issues of trust around the deployment of AI.

Members commented that it might not be possible to match supply and demand. It was confirmed that most likely there would not be a quantitative element to the analysis.

The Group approved the project.

3. Skills to Compete - SOLAS

Expert Group members Shauna Dunlop and Joan McNaboe described the Skills to Compete programme on behalf of SOLAS.

Skills to Compete is the Further Education and Training activation and skills response for those who have been impacted by the Covid-19 Pandemic. The purpose of *Skills to Compete* is to improve employability skills of participants and to support and advance progression for all relevant learners. There is a Skills to Compete oversight group, which includes representation from DFHERIS, SOLAS and the ETBs.

Plans are progressing to ramp up the initiative in 2021 with a national launch and promotional campaign. The initiative will continue to emphasise good practice and innovation, and will continue to be agile and flexible taking into account the changing environment and the needs of the participants.

The Chair commented that the *Skills to Compete* oversight group has a challenge to assess the areas of need as there is much pent-up demand in the economy and there is always a lag between analysis and reality. However, responding to the needs is time-critical. SOLAS confirmed that the programme

will have to be flexible and agile and it is being offered this way now - but as the Covid pandemic is unprecedented, it is difficult to know what the levels of activation are going to be.

EGFSN Members sought clarification on the eligibility criteria for the programme. The programme is available to cohorts in various ways - usually focussed on the unemployed and those who have become unemployed due to the pandemic. The 8,000 participants so far also include all those on eCollege courses. Information on the programme is available at fetchcourses.ie.

Analysis in the [2020 Skills Bulletin](#) aims to both assess how Ireland's labour market performed in 2019 and how the restrictions imposed as a result of COVID-19 have impacted the outlook across almost one hundred occupations.

EGFSN member Joan McNaboe presented findings from the National Skills Bulletin 2020, which fed into the development of *Skills to Compete*. The report looked at the impact by age, gender, regions, sector and occupations of those considered at risk. The occupations that have been impacted most are jobs that are traditionally associated with women and part-time work. Accommodation and food experienced the most significant fall, followed by administrative and support occupations. There were also a significant number of people in the labour force survey recorded as 'away from work'

It was noted that recent CSO figures indicated that a quarter of people under 25 are in education and sought confirmation that for that cohort, there is no skills issue, only an income one. It was confirmed that not all under 25s are in education but for those that are, the issue will be income protection.

4. Human Capital Initiative

EGFSN member Vivienne Patterson gave an update on the HCI. She described how this new stream of funding is to be managed by HEA. It is a 5 year €300m euro fund that draws down the NTF surplus. It provides for additional capacity, incentivises reform and innovation, and provides for the future-proofing of graduates.

The focus of the update was on pillar 3 of the HCI. The **Innovation and Agility stream/pillar 3** aims to promote innovative methods of teaching and delivery, so that learners will benefit from improved quality and more engaging ways of learning on enterprise-focused courses. It also aims to increase institutions' ongoing capacity to anticipate, understand and respond rapidly to emerging skill needs of enterprise. A call advisory group was set up and devised a call document.

Proposals were also encouraged to show evidence of a partnership with other education providers at local, regional, national and international level; to outline progression pathways for workforce upskilling and lifelong learning objectives; to be responsive to emerging skill needs within enterprise and enable enterprise to upskill employees and to demonstrate awareness of innovative international best practice.

The call for 2020 opened in March and recipients were notified in October. Sixty six proposals were submitted for funding and the Minister approved twenty two programmes for funding. An annual conference is proposed to highlight the progress of the programmes awarded funding.

Proposals came from a wide range of interests and from multiple partners to fewer partners. Project proposals ranged from topics such as engineering and creative arts; some spanned multiple discipline areas; and some were on focused discipline areas such as sustainability and low carbon

economy, the built environment, cyberskills, the funds industry and pharma. New delivery methods for teaching and learning like virtual laboratories were proposed and new proposals on restructuring undergraduate education were received

Reference was also made to Pillars 1 and 2 of the HCI.

Pillar 1 - Graduate Conversion Programmes – this differs from Springboard in that there’s multi-annual funding available for these courses mostly at levels 8 and 9. 7,500 places over 5 years, to commence in Autumn 2020. Final offering of 2,295 places in 2020 but it is felt that this number won’t be reached. There is a difficulty that while there are a lot of courses available offered online through the HEA or SOLAS, they have a lot of content so might not be that appealing for those in employment. Some didn’t go ahead due to covid.

Pillar 2 concerns the expansion of places on existing undergraduate courses NFQ Level 6,7,8 with 2200 places on offer commencing in Autumn 2020.

The Chair commented that HCI was a significant initiative, particularly Pillar 3, and that it was great to see the results of the evaluation process in more detail. He added that an annual conference is a good idea but that it would be useful to capture the learnings as we go. The HEA clarified that there will be at least two monitoring reports from the institutions each year and there will be site visits where there will be an opportunity to talk to students about their engagement and how it is impacting them. There will also be input from enterprise. The HEA will provide oversight for this. There will also be financial monitoring.

A member of the Group wished to note how the creative industries are represented in the initiative and this was welcome.

5. IDA Labour Market Pulse/ LinkedIn Economic Graph/ MS

The Labour Market Pulse is a partnership between IDA, MS and LinkedIn designed to help a labour market response to Covid - combining LinkedIn data with publicly available IDA data and CSO data. This new tool, developed by the IDA in collaboration with LinkedIn and Microsoft, gives important insights into how companies using LinkedIn to recruit are managing during the pandemic, the skills they are looking for and other emerging trends.

The Pulse is a quarterly publication, and includes data on:

- Hiring rates
- In-demand occupations
- In-demand skills
- LinkedIn membership by sector
- Sectoral deep dives

The members were informed by the LinkedIn guest presenter that the LinkedIn Hiring Rate is deployed in economies around the world and has its basis is people changing their job profile in a given month and seeing the rate of change of that over time. The LinkedIn Economic graph shows that at the beginning of 2020, hiring in Ireland was stronger than previously, but fell to almost 60% lower than it was by April. This was followed by a systematic recovery in the latter part of the year. The Irish economy had not fully recovered - but this was a pattern similar to other European countries

The In-demand occupations by job title are: Software Engineer, followed by human-facing roles such as Account Manager, Accountant, etc. The Economic graph shows what the skills are that are most associated with occupations that are most in demand, and what sectors are growing strongly.

The Chair stressed that this survey is hugely valuable for its timeliness as CSO and LFS surveys can be a snapshot of a time when the world has already moved on. He asked whether Ireland seems to be an outlier in recording hiring growth in 2020 and asked whether this is reflected in the data. The presenters clarified that the hiring activity patterns in Ireland are very similar to the US, UK, etc., - but hiring is only one piece - Ireland is much more V-shaped and the recovery in the UK and the US seems to be happening more slowly. The IDA representative at the meeting confirmed that while there are risks in their client base, there are many companies still growing strongly; it was expected that evidence from the annual employment survey would show a good recovery.

The EGFSN Secretariat asked whether there was data for the last two months and that it would be interesting to see data on the 52,000 people who have signed up to the LinkedIn courses. The presenters confirmed that the LinkedIn hiring rate will pass the 2019 rate in September 2020 but will go down a little for December 2020 and this will be reflected in the next virtual pulse in January 2021. There is no data currently available on the >50,000 who have signed up to courses.

The Chair thanked the LinkedIn/MS/IDA guests for their presentation and stated that they should attend these meetings regularly and recommended that they keep updating the tool. The EGFSN was invited to advise them of their needs and to see if they can provide the information sought as they wish to maintain alignment with the needs of policy makers.

6. Implementation Updates

The Secretariat advised the Chair that due to preceding agenda items going overtime, the Secretariat would send out written updates by email to members after the meeting. The Group members were also informed that the presentations that were delivered at the meeting would also be circulated.

7 AOB

The Chair informed the Group of Ray Bowe's forthcoming retirement from IDA, and that this was his last EGFSN. He wanted to acknowledge all Ray's work Ray and wished him well in the future. Ray Bowe thanked colleagues and acknowledged the EGFSN's work in the last decade to contribute to positive change.

The Chair advised that the Secretariat would be in touch to advise of meeting dates in the new year.