

PRESS RELEASE

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## Expert Group calls for focus on skills needs of the food and drinks sector

The Irish food and beverage processing industry will continue to provide sustainable employment as one of our major exporting sectors, according to a new report launched today by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN). While employment growth is not forecast in an increasingly competitive environment, the sector will continue to provide significant direct and indirect employment. The study also identifies a number of skills challenges and makes recommendations on how they might be addressed to ensure the industry's future success.

Launching the report, Minister for Lifelong Learning, Seán Haughey, TD, emphasised the importance of the sector to the Irish economy, commenting, "The food and beverage sector is Ireland's largest indigenous sector, accounting for 8% of GDP and employing 50,000 people directly, with a further 60,000 indirect employees and some 120,000 farmers. In a rapidly changing environment, we must ensure that those working in the sector are continually upskilled and those joining the industry are equipped with the appropriate skills. We need to ensure that the supports provided are the right ones for the sector today and for the development of the sector in the future. This will enable companies and workers to seize the opportunities that this sector presents. I commend the EGFSN for its analysis of those skills requirements and for its recommendations on how those needs can be met."

The study is the result of extensive research and consultation with industry, government departments, state agencies and the education sector. It identifies the main drivers of change and skills challenges in the industry. Consumer trends, health and wellness, sustainability and ethical concerns, policy, consolidation of retailers and technology are considered to be the main change drivers. These contribute to a number of skills challenges in the following areas: international trade, supply chain management, operative skills, innovation, lean operations, commercial acumen and leadership.

Una Halligan, Chairperson, EGFSN commented, "Our research points to skills requirements at each end of the spectrum, particularly the importance of skills development for the lower-skilled. 30,000 of those employed in the food and beverage sector have low or no level of formal second level education and are a vulnerable group in the current economic climate. We are recommending an upskilling programme for operatives and recognition of skills and competencies gained through on the job experience. The report also highlights a need for skills at management level, particularly supply chain management and leadership skills that can be addressed through programmes run by the state agencies."

The study analyses education and training provision in Ireland and identifies key learnings from other leading food and beverage manufacturing countries. The research indicates that in third level institutes, the vast majority of courses are concentrated on one discipline - food science and technology - and questions whether there is an oversupply of such courses. State agencies, including BIM, Bord Bia, Enterprise Ireland, FÁS, Skillnets and Teagasc are identified as providing valuable training interventions, but more inter-agency collaboration is recommended. In response to this, the EGFSN proposes the establishment of an inter-agency, third level institute and industry

forum to discuss and address ongoing skills, training and development needs of the industry. The study concludes that such a forum would result in less duplication of education and training provision and better collaboration between stakeholders.

“Prompt implementation of this report’s recommendations will help ensure that the food and beverage processing sector is equipped with a high calibre workforce, and well-placed to succeed in the future”, concluded Una Halligan.

## ENDS

### Notes to Editors

*Future Skills Requirements of the Food and Beverage Sector* makes nine recommendations in response to the skills gaps identified. These recommendations are proposed on the basis that they are funded from within existing resources.

Recommendations	Driver
Establishment of an interagency, third level institute and industry forum to discuss and address the ongoing skills, training and development needs of the industry	Dept of Agriculture, Forestry and Food
Develop and roll-out an operative and supervisor accredited upskilling programme	FÁS
Develop and roll-out an operative technical accreditation programme	FÁS
Develop recognised and accredited craft accreditations for operatives	FÁS
Enterprise Ireland’s Supply Chain Management initiative to be tailored and promoted to the food sector	Enterprise Ireland
Pilot the development of supply partner networks comprising retailers (with Irish operations), FMCG, logistics and warehousing companies	Bord Bia
Development of a pilot international graduate marketing and management programme for SMEs	FÁS to explore under the Labour Activation Measure Work Experience Scheme
Enterprise Ireland’s Leadership 4 Growth Programme to be tailored and marketed to CEOs and MDs within Irish food companies	Enterprise Ireland
More widespread promotion and rollout of programmes like Enterprise Ireland’s Transform Programme to middle management in the food and beverage sector	Enterprise Ireland
Develop bespoke modularised interventions to improve commercial acumen of line managers, functional heads and operatives	Enterprise Ireland / Bord Bia/ Teagasc