

**Minutes of Meeting No. 66
of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs
2nd December 2015 at 1.30 p.m.
Royal College of Physicians, Kildare St.**

Present:	Una Halligan	Chair
	William Parnell	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
	Inez Bailey	NALA
	Tom Boland	HEA
	Ray Bowe	IDA Ireland
	John Burke	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
	Liz Carroll	ISME
	Ned Costello	Irish Universities Association
	Margaret Cox	I.C.E. Group
	Tracey Donnery	Skillnets
	Tony Donohoe	IBEC
	Bryan Fields	SOLAS
	Deirdre McDonnell	Department of Education & Skills
	Colm Mac Fhionnlaoich	Enterprise Ireland
Peter Rigney	ICTU	
Apologies:	Frank Mulvihill	Former President IGC
	Brendan Murphy	CIT
	Bill Doherty	Cook Medical
	Declan Hughes	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
	Joe Hogan	Openet
	Peter Baldwin	Department of Education & Skills
In Attendance from Secretariat:	Aisling Penrose	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
	Gerard Walker	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
	Catherine MacEnri	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
	Louise Esmonde	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
	John McGrath	SLMRU, SOLAS
	Jasmina Behan	SLMRU, SOLAS
	Ivica Milicevic	SLMRU, SOLAS
	Nora Condon	SLMRU, SOLAS
	Joan McNaboe	SLMRU, SOLAS
	Caroline Shally	SLMRU, SOLAS
	Nina Brennan	SLMRU, SOLAS

1. Minutes of EGFSN Meeting Number 65 and Matters Arising

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 23rd September 2015, were approved.

2. Chairperson's Report

- The *Regional Labour Markets Bulletin 2015* was published on 6th October 2015.
- The Hospitality Skills report was published on 12th November 2015. This report was jointly launched by Minister Damien English and Minister for State for Tourism and Sport, Michael Ring.

3. National Skills Strategy

A public consultation process on the new National Skills Strategy had just been completed and the Department of Education & Skills provided an overview of the themes contained in submissions made through that process. These included:

- The need to address Digital ICT skills at basic and high level, including through Coding being provided as a Leaving Cert subject. There were positive messages around Springboard/ICT Conversion Programmes and suggestions to extend these initiatives to Levels 6/7. Concerns were raised in submissions regarding the levels of digital literacy skills of teachers and trainers and also the digital infrastructure in schools.
- The need to build basic and transversal skills.
- The requirement for business acumen and foreign language skills, particularly German, Mandarin and Arabic.
- Work Experience, including the structure and duration of placements. The value of work experience for the Long Term Unemployed and people with disabilities also arose.
- The potential for cooperation at regional level between enterprise and education and training providers, including the involvement of enterprise in education and training course design.
- The importance of flexibility in the education and training system, offering different modes of delivery of programmes and taster courses.
- Recognition of prior learning.
- Facilitating the completion of Springboard course where individuals leave to take up employment.
- Promotion of Lifelong Learning, assisting employers to support learning by their employees, and developing a certificate for skills learnt on the job.
- Apprenticeships.
- Access to Guidance resources in order to make informed decisions.
- Childcare: Skills and qualifications of care workers and also the importance of childcare provision in enabling return to the labour market.
- Initiatives for disadvantaged groups.
- Gender issues around education and training, of young males in particular.
- Public sector employment and workforce planning.

The aim is to publish the new National Skills Strategy in January 2016.

Key Issues Arising

Following the summary of the submissions received to date by DES on the new National Skills Strategy, the Members agreed that the key messages arising from an EGFSN perspective appeared to be captured. As a result, no additional input from the EGFSN was proposed.

4. EGFSN-HEI engagement report

The final report on the EGFSN's engagement with the Higher Education Institutions undertaken by Tom Martin and Associates was circulated to members in advance of the meeting. The principles contained in the report were previously agreed by the Group; however, as the recommendations in the report could potentially impact on the Group's 2016 Work Programme, further discussion was considered appropriate. The main views expressed by Members arising from this discussion are set out below. Much of the discussion focused on how

to improve the EGFSN's communications with a range of stakeholders, from students, to Guidance Counsellors and education and training providers, at both national and regional level.

- It was agreed that it is important for the Group to have a good level of engagement, not just with the Higher Education sector, but the Further Education & Training sector also. Overall, the objective should be to develop a well-skilled economy, recognising that all individuals have a contribution to make to the economy and looking at skills needs across the spectrum. If the EGFSN anticipates skills needs well, it can make a difference to meeting the requirements of the enterprise sector and the economy.
- Recommendations in sectoral EGFSN reports should be targeted, measurable and specific, and clearly tasked to one particular organisation to action rather than generically to "industry bodies" or "HEIs", for example. Not all HEIs are required to action all recommendations; some recommendations may require one, or a small number, of HEIs to respond. More context around the recommendations could also be helpful.

A counterpoint was made that the allocation of responsibility for delivering recommendations to specific institutions has been done in instances where it is possible to do so. On other occasions, tasking recommendations to individual institutions can be problematic as they may not have, or be given, the necessary resources to deliver. For this to be happen, this will require that the HEA/ SOLAS engage in more medium to long-term strategic planning of provision.

- In relation to the recommendations in the Tom Martin report where the EGFSN is listed as the lead actor, all Members of the Group - not just to the Chair and the Secretariat – can play a role as ambassadors to convey the key messages from the EGFSN's research.
- There is an issue around prioritisation of recommendations - lack of funding in the context of increased demands on HEIs and reduced resources is a challenge to achieving implementation. Recommendations should be prioritised to highlight those requiring urgent attention. It was also discussed that this requires DES/HEA/SOLAS to plan service plan provision 3 to 5 years ahead rather than on a year-to-year budget basis- also taking into account the reallocation of existing funding to new provision.
- There was a strong consensus on the need to make the Group's reports more user-friendly and accessible, not just for HEIs, but also for a more general audience. More concise formats, the language used, and better visual elements such as infographics, should be utilised. However, the quality of the EGFSN's product should not be diluted.
- To ensure standardisation of dissemination of the Expert Group's reports and findings, it was suggested that the reports should be mailed to the Heads of College in the Universities. The Group should also engage with the Registrars of the HEIs. There was support also for the idea of plenary engagements between the Group and representatives from the HEIs.
- The EGFSN's key messages critically need to reach individuals making decisions on careers, such as students, parents and Guidance Counsellors.
- There is also an opportunity to deliver the messages from the EGFSN's reports through the new Regional Skills Fora. The input of the EGFSN should bring a national perspective on the skills needs of the economy to the regional level.
- It was recognised that there is a limit to how responsive any system can be with a 4 year cycle in place. It is important to find a way to incentivise change. Initiatives such as Springboard/ICT Conversion Programme are examples of recent successful collaboration between the EGFSN, HEA and the HEIs on areas on immediate skills shortages.
- The Performance Compacts and Strategic Dialogue offer a structure for more formal engagement between the EGFSN and the HEIs.

- The HEA advised it was prepared to engage with the Secretariat on how to more actively promote the EGFSN's messages. The IUA also advised it could assist with access to up-to-date mailing lists for universities.
- Regional stakeholders aren't always aware of, or can't access, data relevant to their area. The SLMRU is involved in presenting at Regional Skills Fora on an ongoing basis, providing relevant local data and encouraging fora to provide regional information to the SLMRU so that it can be factored into the National Skills Database.
- It was noted that the EGFSN is not the only source of labour market intelligence for HEIs; there are many existing relationships between industry and HEIs at local level.
- Sectoral reports provide valuable in-depth detail, while the SLMRU's quantitative reports are also vital.
- It was suggested that consideration should be given to benchmarking the Group to other international models for predicting skills needs. The view was also held that Ireland is well ahead of other countries in identifying skills needs, but that there is a disconnect between industry and academia in terms of the language used and in time horizons for responding to changing needs.
- It was suggested that more could possibly be done with the available budget of the Group, to improve communications.
- It was suggested that it would be valuable to look back over EGFSN recommendations, identify the progress made, as well as the significant trends and the systematic changes needed over time.

5. EGFSN Work Programme 2016

Following on from the previous item, a discussion on the Group's Work Programme for 2016 took place. A document was circulated in advance of the meeting to facilitate discussion. The main points arising from the discussion, under relevant thematic headings, are set out below.

Sectoral reports

- Sectors suggested for consideration in the 2016 Work Programme include Biopharma, Food and Beverage, Design, Construction, Care Sector (elder and child), and Financial Services. Biopharma is important for IDA clients due to growth in the sector and technological changes. A full scale sectoral report was undertaken in 2010 by the EGFSN; a shorter more targeted piece of research may be sufficient now.
- The Care Sector is a large employer; a snapshot of the numbers and skills gaps in that sector could be useful.

Implementation of previous Recommendations

- Review recommendations made over the last number of years, identify which have been implemented and any still relevant which require to be driven forward.
- Focus on common themes emerging from recent sectoral reports: aligning education and training provision with industry requirements, structured work placements, and establishment of clear career paths are the main areas.

Labour Market

- The SLMRU reported that CSO vacancy data is now being produced at sectoral level, and the Unit is looking at the possibility of producing the Vacancy Overview on a sectoral basis in 2016.

Work Placement and Generic Skills

- On the upskilling agenda, an increased focus is required on general operative grades and individuals at the lower skills levels who haven't been as successful at upskilling. The latest PIAAC report also indicates that core skills have not significantly improved over the last number of years.

- Work placement and Work-readiness of graduates is a recurring matter raised by enterprise. Exploring what skills this encompasses and how they can be obtained is a possible piece of work.

EGFSN Role

- Anticipation of skills needs and alerting the system to these needs (including the ETBs at local level) is a vital role, including horizon scanning and identification of emerging skills so as to enable providers put in place delivery, rather than reacting when a skills shortage occurs.
- Goal is to develop the EGFSN to become the authority on skills, the go-to group for national media to contact or IDA/EI to involve in conferences. In order to do this we need to raise our profile, increase interaction with stakeholders on a national and regional level, and become more recognised as a valuable resource.

Communications

- Improved accessibility of the key messages in reports for different audiences should be a key area of focus for 2016. A simpler, more accessible format, with greater use of visual displays (such as infographics) should be considered.
- In addition to enterprise and education/training providers, the EGFSN requires to convey its messages to career guidance professionals, and second level students and their parents, in order to enable students to make a more informed call on where areas of job opportunities will arise.
- Social media is becoming a more widely used method not only for disseminating information but also by enterprise for advertising available jobs. The EGFSN needs to tap into this avenue of communication.
- A deeper engagement with SMEs on skills issues was seen as desirable.
- Significant opportunity exists with the establishment of the Regional Skills Fora to convey key messages from EGFSN research at local level.

The Secretariat undertook to compile a draft 2016 Work Programme on the basis of this discussion and circulate to Members for approval.

6. Documents for Noting

The following documents were circulated for noting:

- EGFSN Communications Schedule
- EGFSN Meeting Schedule 2016 – the dates proposed are 6th April, 15th June, 21st September, 7th December.

7. Any Other Business

The Secretariat advised that the LGMA which currently hosts the EGFSN extranet will cease to provide hosting services from March 2016. An alternative service provider will be sought. Members agreed that it was beneficial to retain an extranet site, as a resource for sharing of documentation and information of interest to the Group.

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place at 1.00pm on Wednesday 6th April 2016.