

**Minutes of Meeting No. 68
of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs
15th June 2016 at 1pm
Maynooth University**

Present:	Una Halligan	Chair
	Inez Bailey	NALA
	Sorcha Carthy	HEA
	Ray Bowe	IDA Ireland
	John Burke	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
	Liz Carroll	ISME
	Margaret Cox	I.C.E. Group
	Paul Healy	Skillnets
	Tracey Donnery	Skillnets
	Bryan Fields	SOLAS
	Peter Baldwin	Department of Education & Skills
	Peter Rigney	ICTU
	Ned Costello	Irish Universities Association
	Bill Doherty	Cook Medical
Declan Hughes	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation	
William Parnell	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation	
Apologies:	Mark Christal	Enterprise Ireland
	Frank Mulvihill	Former President IGC
	Brendan Murphy	CIT
	Peter Rigney	ICTU
	Tony Donohoe	IBEC
	Vivienne Patterson	HEA
In Attendance from Secretariat:	Gerard Walker	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
	Catherine MacEnri	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
	Don O'Connor	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
	John McGrath	SLMRU

The Chair welcomed the Members to Maynooth University and thanked the university for hosting the Group's meeting.

Philip Nolan, President of Maynooth University, gave the Group a detailed update on the current state and progress of the University. He highlighted a number of issues, including that Maynooth is Ireland's fastest organically growing university. The college now has 11,200 students and 875 staff. The university focuses on broad entry routes, exposing students to both qualitative and quantitative reasoning during their degree. Another innovation is the facility to choose inter-disciplinary subjects, such as to study economics and chemistry, or to take a language with any degree course. Professor Nolan also complemented the work of the EGFSN and underlined the importance for Maynooth University of being evidence-based, following the recommendations of the EGFSN and also working with the new Regional Skills Fora.

The Chair noted apologies and mentioned the resignation from the Group of Frank Mulvihill, on health grounds. The Group will send a letter to Frank, wishing him well.

1 Minutes of the last meeting, 6th April

The Chair asked the Group for comments on the Minutes, as circulated, and then confirmed that they were agreed.

2 Updates since the last meeting

a) Springboard Launch

The successful Springboard applications was launched this morning, June 15th. Sorcha Carthy provided an update. There have been 498 applications so far this year. There are three strands: 13% traditional Springboard full-time; 33% part-time; 11% 2 year part time, open to employed people; 52% of the places are in Higher Education, 47% in private sector and not for profit; the majority are at level 8; and there's a good regional spread. There are 980 places for Biopharma.

b) New Skills Architecture

The Chair emphasized the importance for the work of the Group of increased clarity on the new Skills Architecture, and, in particular, the establishment of the National Skills Council. DES is hopeful that further clarification will be available shortly.

c) Communications Strategy

It will not be possible to expand or be specific on this topic in the context of the above. However, the secretariat, in conjunction with the SLMRU, have considered the possibility of making use of a mobile App to improve the Group's communication. A subsequent meeting with the Institute of Guidance Counsellors also underlined the importance of improving the Group's communication. This must be done, of course, without undermining the quality of the research and data analysis that underpins the Group's work.

d) SLMRU Work Demands

The Chair asked the representatives from DES / SOLAS how we might be able to schedule some of the EGFSN's key annual publications, in particular the *National Skills Bulletin*, in the context of the demands being placed on the SLMRU to carry out regional labour market profiles for the Regional Skills Fora. The Group heard that this remains a resourcing issue, but it is being discussed. The National Skills Bulletin is being prioritized and is nearing completion.

e) Lifelong Learning Bulletin

The Group discussed whether a short report, presented at the last meeting of the Group, should be published. Most of the discussion focused on the fact that we have a relatively low level of lifelong learning in Ireland, compared to European norms, and also that we appear yet to have little in the way of recommendations or actions to improve the situation. Thus, possibly, publication should await the development of such actions, and should not overshadow the broader National Skills Strategy.

3 Skills Needs in the Bio-pharma Sector

Gerard Walker presented a summary of the study reviewing the skills needs of the Biopharma sector. This is a key item on the Group's Work Programme for 2016 and it is also an action in the Action Plan for Jobs. The study was carried out in an inclusive manner, with two workshops, a structured survey of companies, and a broad steering-group, as integral parts of the methodology.

The main conclusion of the study is that there is a sufficient quantity of graduates, coming through various fields of related study, to meet the needs of the Biopharma sector out to 2020. But industry must be sure to attract a greater share of graduates from those fields to work in the sector. The

recommendations are largely around awareness and communication, aligning skills provision with industry needs. Both the education providers and businesses in the sector need to continue to ensure that the required number of graduates is produced, and with the skill-sets necessary for the sector.

The Group discussed both the outcomes of the study and the form of the report, which is shorter than was often the case previously. Members were uniformly supportive of the shorter report format and the easy-to-access style and language used. The importance of the sector for Ireland was emphasized, as well as the future pipeline of projects. While the majority of skills needed in this sector derive from the Higher Education sector, the contribution of Further Education should not be neglected.

4 Regional Skills Agenda

John McGrath provided a summary of some of the data, provided by SOLAS, available on the new Regionalskills.ie website.

The Group discussed the importance of having relevant regional data available, both in terms of the working of the Regional Skills Fora and for the regional implementation groups for the Action Plan for Jobs. It was noted additionally that it is targeted that unemployment should not vary by more than 1% above the national level in the regions, and that this target might also be tracked through the data available on the Regionalskills.ie website.

5 Review of EGFSN Recommendations, 2008-2015

Catherine MacEnri provided a summary of the progress that has been made in assessing the status of recommendations made in EGFSN reports since 2008. 314 recommendations were considered across 13 sectoral reports. The purpose is to identify progress as well as identify any outstanding recommendations. Progress was summarized using a traffic lights system. The key outstanding recommendations tend to be those that are cross-cutting, requiring multiple actors to work together. Examples are: education-enterprise engagement; language skills; business skills; internships; clear career paths; up-skilling.

By their nature these need to be addressed horizontally across the system. Possibly this could be an issue for the National Skills Council to take up. In any case, the structures put in place for co-ordinating the implementation and monitoring of such cross-cutting recommendations need to be more robust in future. Recommendations always need to be clear, and a lead body must be agreed to ensure delivery.

6 Terms of Reference – Design Skills

This is an action in the Action Plan for Jobs 2016. Here we're focusing on skills and talent, the objective being to identify the current provision of design skills in Ireland. Once this provision is profiled we can ask if this is what companies need. This is also to do with design thinking and the degree of inter-disciplinary activity at academic level. So the study focuses on the current provision and whether this meets the needs of the market. It is proposed to survey companies asking whether they are getting the skills they need.

Discussing the presentation, the Group emphasized the need for focus, given that the area is quite diverse. It would be important to identify clearly that we are looking at skills needs. Also, drawing a distinction between the areas or sectors where design is important and those where it doesn't add as much value would also be useful.

7 Skillnets Strategy

Paul Healy summarized Skillnets' 2015 activity and then posed five questions to the Group, feeding in to the consultation phase of their current strategy renewal process.

In 2015 Skillnets worked with almost 13,000 member companies, provided almost 6,000 training courses, and trained 42,600 employed people and 6,695 unemployed people. €25.6 million was invested, 13.9m by Skillnets and €11.7m by member companies. Skillnets creates an impetus for companies to engage in training; the organization's core competence is enterprise-led training; flexibility and access are important. There appears to be scope to engage more companies in skills development; thus it is essential to drive more participation where possible; the relevance and impact of training must be enhanced.

Five Questions:

1 How might Skillnets help SMEs to more accurately identify and address their skills needs and ensure that programme design and delivery remain relevant to SMEs?

Members mentioned the importance of connections to the CEBs. The importance of workforce plans as a diagnostic tool for SMEs was emphasized. The Identification of Training Needs was a tool used by FAS; it is useful for companies to have someone come in and do a Training Needs Analysis with them. Skillnets needs to avoid becoming institutionalized; it was always enterprise-led.

2 How can Skillnets better support both the training and management development needs of startups?

The flexibility of engagement was emphasized, including in the evenings. Intelligence should also arise from the general networking of companies.

3 How can Skillnets better support career planning and increased employee retention in the SME sector?

An audit of employees and their interests should help to retain staff by better fitting aptitudes to roles. Excellence Through People, a HR management and improvement tool provided by the NSAI, was also mentioned.

4 How can Skillnets support the development of transversal skills in enterprise?

Members believe that transversal skills need to be important in the culture of companies; and companies also need to provide experiential learning on the job so that they support transversal skills.

5 Where are the opportunities for Skillnets to support the life-long learning agenda?

It was suggested that companies will need support if they are to engage in life-long learning activities; thus, engagement with local Chambers and industry associations will be important.

8 Any Other Business

There was no other business.

The next meeting of the Group will be on 21st September.