

**Draft Minutes of Meeting No. 86
of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs
15 March 2021 - Zoom**

Present	Tony Donohoe	Chair
	Jonathan McMillan	EI
	Breda O'Toole	IDA
	Vivienne Patterson	HEA
	Joan McNaboe	SOLAS
	Shauna Dunlop	SOLAS
	Joanne Tobin	DFHERIS
Apologies:	Stephanie O'Brien	DFHERIS
	William Beausang	DFHERIS
	Laura Bambrick	ICTU
Secretariat:	Kevin Daly	DETE
	Don O'Connor	DETE
	Niamh Martin	DETE
	Ruth Morrissy	DETE
	Rhodri Lloyd	DETE
	Alan Power	DETE
	Claire Martinez	Department of Transport
	Andrew Bradley	Chair of IDG on Design
	Aisling Soden	IDA

1 Introductions, Minutes

The Chair welcomed the members and invited new members and secretariat members to introduce themselves:

Rhodri Lloyd EGFSN Secretariat; Breda O'Toole, IDA; Aisling Soden, (guest) IDA; Jonathan McMillan, EI.

The Minutes of the last meeting were approved.

2 Implementation Process Review

The Chair introduced the day's agenda as a little different from usual. The Expert Group's revised terms of reference emphasises implementation. The Chair explained that the purpose of today's meeting was to hear how three reports were implemented and to start a discussion on the governance process and how things could be improved and how a template could be devised.

The Secretariat explained that the purpose of the exercise was to invite feedback on the process of carrying out EGFSN research from the members and inviting solutions on ways of doing things better. The EGFSN

research drives change. The question directed to members was how the implementation governance should be set up for future projects.

2.a Brexit

Alan Power from the Secretariat described the Brexit report Implementation process. He set out the background of the report **Addressing the Skills Needs Arising from the Potential Trade Implications of Brexit** to begin with:

- EGFSN's contribution towards Government's contingency planning for UK departure from European Union
- Focus on implications of "Hard Brexit" scenario and more restrictive trading environment vis-à-vis the UK
 - Need to diversify trade with non-UK markets
 - Need to navigate more restrictive trading environment to support Irish trade
- Focus on:
 - Skills for trade diversification (sales, marketing, customer service, foreign languages, cultural awareness)
 - Skills related to logistics and supply chain management, including customs clearance

The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI is now DETE) accepted the responsibility for monitoring implementation of actions and to maximise coordination, information sharing on Brexit related skills needs.

There were many learnings from the implementation process including: that the adoption by the Department of an implementation/advocacy role in translating a number of actions into policy (e.g. awareness raising campaign, development of customs training programmes, international talent/diaspora actions) was important. Cross governmental representation maximised coordination and information sharing around Brexit skills needs and interventions. The uncertainty around the Brexit outcome hampered engagement with skills solutions, despite the benefits of trade -related skills development being acknowledged.

One of the implementation tools used for the Brexit project was the establishment of a Logistics and Supply Chain Skills Group, which was a recommendation in the report and also had featured as a recommendation in a previous 2015 EGFSN piece of research. The Group has been established for over a year now and it provides a forum for ongoing communication & collaboration by the Logistics and Supply Chain sector in addressing skills needs. The aim is for the members (e.g. industry rep bodies, ed and training sector, gov departments) to work together to improve the profile of Logistics/Supply Chain roles, making it easier to recruit talent including by improving knowledge of roles among secondary students. This will increase visibility of progression pathways to those entering or already working in sector, particularly for those at lower skilled levels. The Group is chaired by the Dept of Transport. Claire Martinez, PO from the Freight Policy Division, is the Chair. Two sub-groups have been established to drive the work of the overall group. Five meetings of the main Group have taken place since establishment with strong participation and engagement from members. In September 2020, Minister of State for International Transport, Hildegard Naughton addressed the Group. The establishment of sub-groups have allowed for increased external representation on the group; however, the work output is reliant on individuals and the private sector to drive the work. A panel of 'Champions' has been established and this will be a key component of the awareness-raising piece of the Group. An annual Progress Report has been published and this has been disseminated widely and has increased awareness of the work of the Group. The Group has also recorded presentations to be delivered at the annual IGC Conference Workshop in April 2021.

Following this presentation, the Chair invited comments. He said that irrespective of Brexit, there's a real value to bringing the actors from the logistics and supply chain together in this Skills Group. Responding to a query, Ms Martinez described the panel of Champions and their role. She confirmed that the IEA were involved in the Group. She described how the ports weren't involved but that it wasn't an area where skills issues had featured up to now. A member of the Group highlighted the need to maintain a focus on Brexit despite Covid-19 and that it is very important to keep up the engagement on Brexit regarding its impacts and opportunities. The SOLAS rep confirmed that they are happy to get involved in the group in any way that might

be helpful. The Secretariat Chair and the EGFSN Chair thanked Claire and the Department of Transport for becoming proactively involved in the implementation piece.

2.b Together for Design

The Chair introduced this item by stating that the report and work of the implementation group has promoted design thinking and helped people realise the potential of design. Ruth Morrissy from the Secretariat and Andrew Bradley introduced the presentation by providing some background to, and findings of the report **Together for Design**.

- 2017 *Winning by Design* published
- 2020 *Together for Design* published
- Focus on digital, product and strategic design skills to 2025
- Growth of 21,000-33,000 jobs to 2025
- Majority of jobs in digital: design and developers
- In contrast, 1,300 students graduating annually from HE and FE

Andrew Bradley confirmed that the implementation process has helped the sector to mature and tell its story. The learnings are: there has been a pent-up desire to make change; a significant time had been dedicated to developing the implementation structure, but this has meant that the group has been smooth-running to date. The process has helped the sector to mature. It has helped the profession to recognise the contribution it makes to Ireland Inc - there's a spirit of collaboration. He confirmed that the Department has been both engaged and encouraging and a momentum has been built that can only continue over the years.

The Chair opened the floor to comments and feedback. He said that, given its importance, strategic design should it be incorporated into other activities, occupations and sectors. Andrew Bradley stated that they are trying to encourage design into the non-design sector; however, he's unsure whether the implementation group has time to make significant progress in this area. He pointed to Denmark and Germany where it is well integrated. Ruth Morrissy clarified that one of the actions in the report is to bring strategic design into non-design courses and stated that an event had recently been held targeted at ETBs and HEIs to start initial conversations on how this could be achieved.

Action: Andrew Bradley concluded by saying that the Group welcomes any feedback and ideas for action. There are leaders in the Group who will follow through on what is being sought.

2.c ICT Skills

The Chair introduced this item and said that there has been a pause in the work of the implementation group on this. He emphasised that there is still a big skills gap. Kevin Daly from the Secretariat and Joanne Tobin from DFERIS presented.

The meeting was informed that in Forfas in 1996, the EGFSN was set up in response to a skills gap in ICT and this was the beginning of the EGFSN. There have been a series of reports over the years - globally there is a shortage of talent in this area. The group was informed of the background to the report **Forecasting the Demand for High Level ICT Skills in Ireland, 2017-2022**.

It is the fourth in a series of High-Level ICT forecasts undertaken by EGFSN (2008, 2012, 2013); third as evidence-based input into ICT Skills Action Plan process. The focus is on "High Level ICT Skills" i.e. skills required to design, build and implement high level ICT systems, including emerging technologies- excluded primarily ICT user skills. It forecasts demand across NFQ Levels 6-10, broken down by computing and electrical/electronic engineering skills.

Progress so far includes:

- 3,000 participants on Springboard+ ICT courses in 2018, similar number in 2019. 4,000 places between Springboard+ and HCI Pillar 1 in 2020
- As at end Dec 2020, there was a total of 348 registrations on ICT Apprenticeships
- Over 450 unemployed trainees looking to enter the ICT profession undertook a range of programmes with Skillnet Ireland including the Future in Tech programme.

- No progress yet on Pathways to ICT project
- Implementation of recommendations of Review of Employment Permits System (2018), including removal of requirement for spouses/partners to obtain permit and direct access to labour market

The implementation process for this project is unique, given the publication of *Technology Skills 2022*, the new ICT Skills Action Plan, built upon the EGFSN analysis. Following a High Level Group discussion and engagement with industry, *Technology Skills 2022* was published in February 2019 to address level of forecast demand with sub-actions assigned owners and timelines for delivery outlined. The aim was to increase education and training system output from 7,500 in 2018 to 12,500 in 2022. There are five main overarching actions also accompanied by further supporting actions in a separate document.

The learnings from the implementation process so far includes:

The existence of High Level Group is important to show commitment of policy system to ICT skills agenda and national policy response (Action Plan); shared ownership of group between key departments for enterprise and education and training (importance of collaboration and trust highlighted here) is important; the broad representation on High Level Group helps drive implementation but having a structure with two documents may lead to a reduced focus on important elements. The publication of an annual progress report and/or submission to the National Skills Council might help to drive implementation.

The Chair invited questions. He sought clarification on the issue with having two documents. It was explained that some of the longer-term actions that will have an impact on the talent pipeline may attract less focus than the actions that are required to take place to meet current targets.

2.d Implementation Process Discussion

The Chair invited comments from the Group on the implementation processes currently in use by the EGFSN as demonstrated by the three examples. He sought any feedback on general learnings that can be taken on board and be used to inform the Group's implementation plans and structures and even be used for developing a template.

Members inputted into the discussions. Members put forward the idea of a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). It was noted that the three examples highlighted indicated that there isn't one approach to report implementation and this may confuse the Group. There might be value in the creation of a reporting template to set out due dates for reports, duration of implementation groups, establishment and numbers of sub-groups. It was suggested that KPIs/performance metrics and graphs might add value in terms of monitoring the outputs from the groups. The submission of reports to the National Skills Council (NSC) and the role of the NSC were considered; also, a possible role for consultants in the implementation processes.

Another member noted that the three examples emphasised that there is a strong focus on implementing actions arising from EGFSN reports. Another takeaway was the role of advocates and champions on these groups. Some members cautioned against a one-size-fits-all procedure for implementation.

The Chair said there was value in the idea of a SOP as it would bring some order to the work of the implementation groups but cautioned against a rigid process. It could help to highlight the obstacles and barriers to implementation in a more structured way and to set out parameters for phasing out groups. Members commented that increased scrutiny of the implementation process would help the Group to define its recommendations in a more implementable way.

The Chair agreed that the Group should be doing short, sharp progress reports annually, whether visually or some other way. It was also important to highlight the broader economic and social impact of the EGFSN's work, and synergies between its recommendations and other policy initiatives. The importance of collaboration between Government Departments and stakeholder engagement was also noted.

Members suggested that awareness among stakeholders has improved. Knowledge exists about the existence of apprenticeships and educational provision for certain skills. Communication and branding were highlighted – it was important to look at the end-user of the information

Action: The Chair closed the discussion by inviting members to submit comments. The Secretariat will draft a one-page document concerning the type of procedure to follow for implementation groups.

3. Low Carbon Skills

The Secretariat updated the Group on the progress of this project which examines the demand for, and nature of, the skills required to deliver on key elements of Ireland's Climate Action Plan to Tackle Climate Breakdown over the years to 2030. These include objectives around energy efficient retrofit, heat pump installation, enhancement of Ireland's wind and solar energy generation capacity, and the rollout of skills and charging infrastructure to support an expansion of Ireland's electric vehicle fleet. These objectives are deemed critical to supporting Ireland's transition to a low carbon economy. In order to properly support their delivery over the coming decade, this study will seek to:

1. Identify the nature and quantify the scale of the skills needs of enterprises supporting the transition to a low carbon economy in the coming years; and
2. Develop a suite of recommendations that can be drawn upon to ensure that these future skills needs are fully addressed.

The Group had its first meeting on xx date. Workshops have taken place. A final report arising from the study is due to be delivered by the end of May 2021 and will be presented to the National Skills Council for approval at its September 2021 meeting. To date it has involved comprehensive engagement with enterprises across low carbon economy activities and is being guided by a steering group composed of key public and private sector stakeholders.

4. AI Skills

The Secretariat updated the Group on the progress of this project. The proposal was approved in December 2020. It concerns the skills Implications of the Deployment, Management and Regulation of AI. To date work has progressed with the literature review - reports on this exist largely since 2018. Work on setting up a Steering Group - with Professor Barry O'Sullivan, UCC as Chair - has continued with weekly meetings. Currently the project plan is being fleshed out and details for the meetings are being scoped. There are three key parts: literature review (data where possible); consultation (Steering Group and Workshop); a survey (currently working on the questions). The steering group has been set up and will have its first meeting on Tuesday 30th March.

5. AOB

The Chair mentioned a plan by the OGCIO to migrate all department websites to [Gov.ie](https://gov.ie) - a question for the Group: it is independent; is the Group content to be part of the [Gov.ie](https://gov.ie) infrastructure? There is a need to be pragmatic about independence due to potential operation challenges.

Action: The Chair asked whether members had any strong views on this and invited comments to be submitted to Kevin Daly in the Secretariat.

EGFSN Secretariat
April 2021