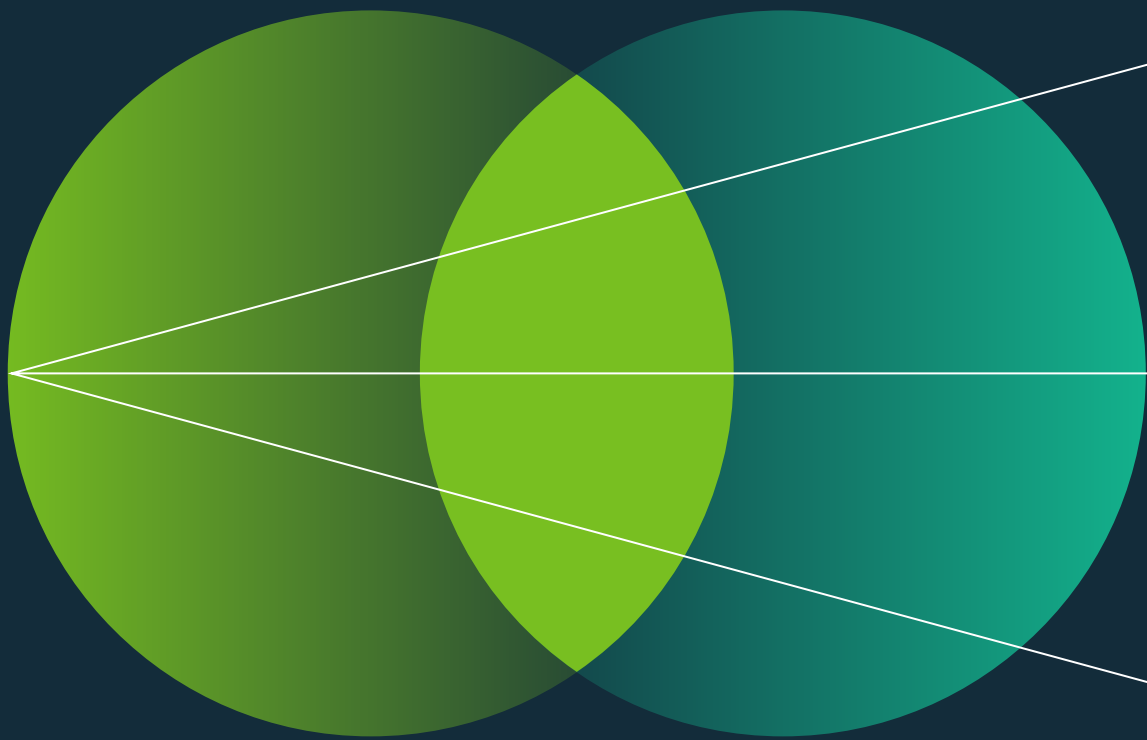


# Empowering Enterprise

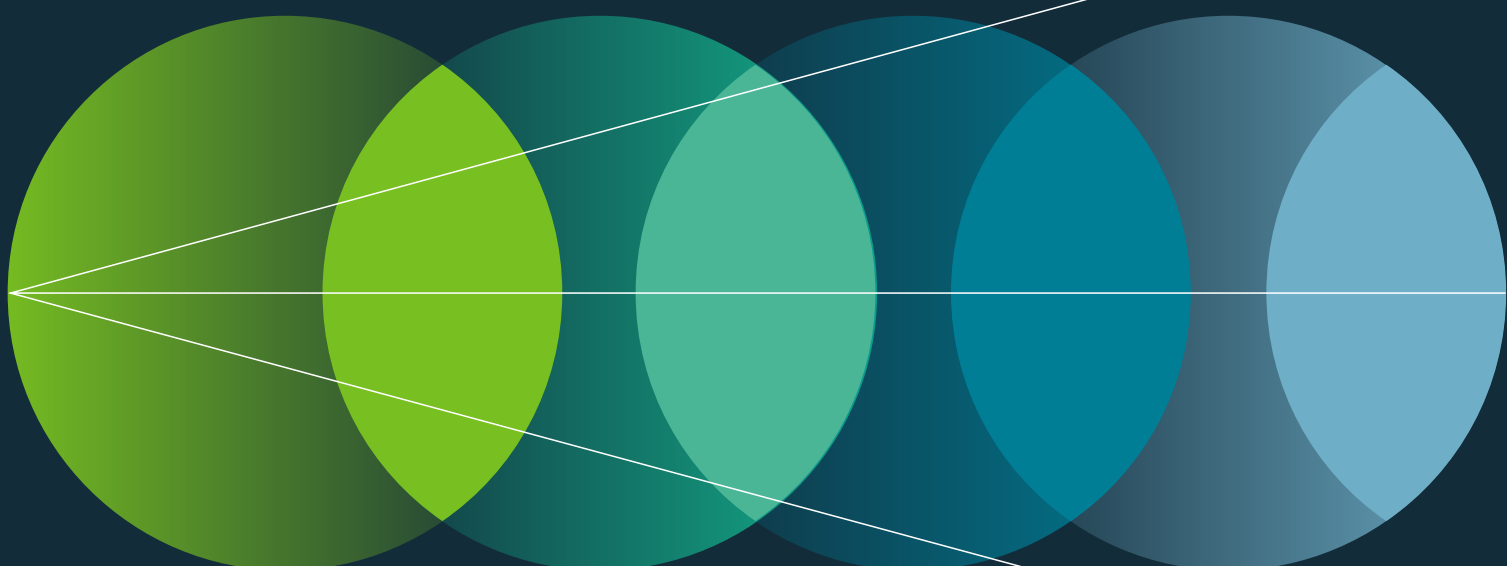
## 2026–2028



A Strategy for  
Next-Generation  
Capability

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# Minister's Foreword

Ireland's economic success is built on the talent of our people. The world around us is changing at extraordinary speed, bringing both significant challenges and new opportunities. Our skilled workforce has long been central to our economic resilience, and continued strategic investment in skills development will be essential to ensuring that Ireland remains prepared, competitive, and forward-looking in the years ahead.

Ireland's continued success depends on a sustained focus on developing skills and capabilities. Over the past 25 years, Skillnet Ireland has built an ambitious vision for developing a workforce that is highly skilled, adaptable, inclusive, and ready for the opportunities and challenges of the decades to come. This strategy strengthens the organisation's enterprise-led model by supporting the development of impactful skills programmes and by responding to emerging business needs in areas such as digitalisation, artificial intelligence (AI), and green technologies.

As businesses navigate technological disruption, including the rapid evolution of AI, alongside demographic shifts and increased automation, the demand for timely and relevant skills has never been greater. By nurturing talent, supporting career progression, and helping to build a competitive operating environment, Skillnet Ireland enables enterprises to address skills gaps and enhance their long-term success.

Workforce development is a central pillar of Government's economic and competitiveness strategy, helping to sustain Ireland's position as an attractive location for start-ups, scale-ups, and international investment. Skillnet Ireland plays a key role within this broader skills ecosystem, driving partnerships across Government, enterprise agencies, the tertiary education system, and industry. Through these collaborations, the organisation delivers upskilling and reskilling initiatives that meet the needs of businesses, particularly SMEs, while anticipating future demands.

This strategy strengthens Ireland's long-term economic position by creating an environment that attracts global corporations, while also fostering innovation and supporting the creation of high-value, sustainable jobs across companies of all sizes. Skillnet Ireland is widening the path of engagement with businesses and shaping a national workforce ready for future success. The direction of travel is clear: the organisation is preparing individuals not only for today's roles, but equipping them with the inquisitiveness, critical thinking, and resilience required to navigate careers not yet mapped.

**James Lawless, T.D.**

*Minister for Further and Higher Education,  
Research, Innovation and Science*



# Chairperson and Chief Executive Introduction

Ireland's economic success has long been underpinned by its people, whose talent, innovation and adaptability have positioned the country as a competitive and resilient economy. Rapid technological change, the transition to a green economy, evolving patterns of work and demographic pressures are reshaping labour markets and redefining the skills required for sustained growth. In this increasingly volatile and uncertain global context, maintaining and strengthening Ireland's workforce capability and agility is more important than ever.

Skillnet Ireland's 2026–2028 Strategy is an ambitious and positive approach to this fast-evolving environment, strengthening its role as the national workforce development agency connecting enterprise needs with labour market policy. A strong focus on future skills and cutting-edge innovation will enhance Ireland's capacity for productivity gains and sustainable growth across all sectors.

Aligned with the Programme for Government and the Action Plan on Competitiveness, this strategy supports national targets for job creation and recognises the need to attract, develop and retain world-class talent. Moreover, addressing structural challenges such as housing, transport and energy infrastructure will require a highly skilled workforce, making investment in talent essential to balanced and sustainable growth.

Skillnet Ireland will continue to work in partnership with enterprises and industry bodies to support the competitiveness of Irish firms by equipping businesses with the knowledge, tools and capabilities to adapt and succeed within the rapidly changing global economy. Targeted investment in future-ready upskilling will strengthen innovation capacity and digital capability, and deliver the skills required to build economic resilience and drive business transformation.

Three enablers for business transformation have been identified; to enable enterprises to leverage new opportunities in **(1) digitalisation, (2) artificial intelligence (AI) and (3) sustainability**. A significant barrier to AI adoption is lack of access to skills, training, and uncertainty around implementation. A coordinated approach across government, industry and education will provide Ireland's workforce with the tools to acquire the foundational, technical and ethical knowledge needed within an AI-driven economy.

Skillnet Ireland's enterprise-led model has proven effective in building the skilled workforce required to attract foreign direct investment and support indigenous enterprises across all sectors. A continued emphasis on regional development, sectoral clusters, and partnerships will support economic growth and the creation of sustainable communities.

Strengthening Ireland's culture of lifelong learning is a priority for Skillnet Ireland. We are committed to building a more agile and responsive learning ecosystem that supports people to continuously develop their skills, as technologies, industries, and roles evolve. To that end, this strategy reinforces collaboration between government, industry and the tertiary education sector.



We will expand our activities, increasing the numbers of businesses supported by Skillnet Ireland over the three year period to 2028 to **100,000**, through targeted upskilling, mentoring, and business supports.

Through ‘Empowering Enterprise: Next Generation Capability’, Skillnet Ireland will support 100,000 companies by 2028, including 15,000 new businesses, by implementing targeted upskilling, mentoring, and business supports.

We will deliver this strategy working in partnership with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) and the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment. We will also collaborate with Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Research Ireland

and other enterprise agencies together with our industry partners to meet the needs of enterprise and the workforce.

At the heart of this strategy is close collaboration with our industry partners and their networks, cultivated with business leaders and their teams, who play a pivotal role in driving the workforce development objectives of Skillnet Ireland. Our commitment to partnership and shared innovation will continue to be a cornerstone of our success.



*Brendan McGearty*  
Chairperson



*Mark Jordan*  
Chief Executive Officer

# Our Vision, Mission and Values

This strategy reflects a renewed vision and mission, shaped by our ambition to create lasting social and economic value for the businesses and people of Ireland.

## Our Vision

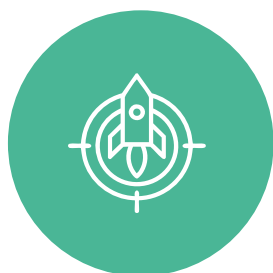
Ireland is a world leader in enterprise-driven learning for innovation, economic resilience, and shared prosperity.



In this vision, Ireland becomes an exemplar of how enterprise, education, and government collaborate to build the capabilities necessary for a dynamic, sustainable economy and society. Enterprise-powered learning enables skills development to keep pace with digital transformation, environmental change, and market disruption. This in turn helps businesses to innovate, people to progress, and regions to prosper. Ireland will continue to strengthen its international reputation as a nation that invests in its people, embraces innovation, and achieves sustainable, inclusive growth.

## Our Mission

Empowering Ireland's enterprises and workforce with the skills and capabilities to drive national competitiveness.



Skillnet Ireland's mission is to empower enterprises and individuals across every region and sector to build the skills, confidence, and innovation capacity to drive national competitiveness and to succeed in a changing world. We work in partnership with business, government, and education to deliver upskilling driven by enterprise needs, and aligned with Ireland's national priorities in digital transformation, sustainability, and inclusive growth. Our mission is to create a connected learning ecosystem that accelerates innovation, supports lifelong learning, and supports Ireland's workforce to be competitive, adaptable, and future-ready.

# Our Values



Our values unite our Skillnet Ireland community and inspire us all to achieve the ambitious goals set out in this strategy and remind us of the purpose behind our work. Our values guide our culture and keep us aligned and focused on what matters most – our people, our industry partners, and the enterprise communities we serve.

## Making a Difference Together

Our values map to **Our Three Powerful Ps** which firmly underpin Skillnet Ireland's passionate belief in the transformative power of enterprise-led learning:

### Partnership



#### Collaborate Together

By uniting our talents, insights and resources, we create outcomes that none of us could achieve alone. We believe the best ideas come from collaborative relationships and working together.

#### Act with Integrity

We hold ourselves to the highest standards in everything we do. We strive to provide exemplary service to all of our stakeholders.

### People



#### Empower People

We are enthusiastic about developing Ireland's businesses and workforce and we focus on helping others succeed.

#### Embrace Inclusion

By embracing diverse perspectives and fostering belonging we strengthen our capacity as a nation to drive collective success.

### Progress



#### Champion Agility

We push boundaries and embrace new challenges. We have the flexibility to adapt and enable positive transformation for businesses.

#### Focus on Impact

We enable positive transformation for businesses and careers. Our passion drives quality and results.

# Our Enterprise-Led Approach

Skillnet Ireland is Ireland's national agency responsible for developing the skills and talent to support the competitiveness and growth of Ireland's economy. Skillnet Ireland's mission supports Ireland's economic and social future through enterprise-driven skills leadership. We bridge enterprise and public policy ensuring that skills investments deliver tangible value to business, workers, and the wider economy.

Our model is enterprise-led, meaning that we are led by the talent and skills needs of businesses. We combine agility with trust, innovation with inclusion, and impact with responsibility. Skillnet Ireland's purpose is to forge partnerships among industry, government, worker representative organisations, academia and business support agencies to support businesses throughout Ireland to be the best they can be.

**We empower businesses to achieve their ambitions by building their future skills, capabilities, and leadership capacity.**

A defining feature of the Skillnet Ireland model is its emphasis on agility and forward planning. By maintaining close engagement with industry, Skillnet Ireland can rapidly identify emerging skills gaps such as those arising from digitalisation, artificial intelligence, sustainability transitions and evolving business models, and mobilise training responses at pace. This creates an environment for Ireland's skills ecosystem to be responsive, future-focused, and aligned with economic demands.

Co-funded by Government and enterprise, Skillnet Ireland is recognised internationally



as a best-practice example of an enterprise-driven workforce development agency. This approach aligns public investment with the skills requirements of Ireland's economy while leveraging the commitment and insight of industry to help shape national skills priorities.

Built on strong collaboration between businesses, sectoral bodies, and the education and training system, the model ensures skills programmes are directly aligned with real-world industry needs, is future focused and responsive to emerging economic and technological trends.

At its core, the Skillnet Ireland model brings companies together in enterprise-led learning networks, typically organised around sectors, regions, or strategic themes where businesses jointly assess their skills requirements and co-

design targeted training solutions. This collective approach helps firms, particularly SMEs, access high-quality, industry-relevant training that would often be too costly or complex to develop independently.

## Skillnet Ireland's Ecosystem Empowering Enterprise to Lead & Succeed



Skillnet Ireland also plays a strategic role in promoting lifelong learning, supporting workers at all stages of their careers to upskill and reskill in line with changing job requirements. We prepare workers for the future world of work by delivering a wide range of upskilling and learning and development supports, including strategic talent planning, specialist and technical upskilling, management development, mentoring, and formal education programmes. Through both short, targeted programmes and more intensive development pathways, Skillnet Ireland expands access to learning while fostering a culture of continuous skills development across the workforce.

## Skillnet Ireland's Upskilling Supports include:



Strategic  
Talent Planning



Specialist  
Upskilling



Management  
Development



Business  
Mentoring



Industry  
Insights

# Ireland's Evolving Landscape

## Skills for a Changing Economic Environment

Ireland's economic success is built on talent and innovation and now more than at any other time, it is critical to support Ireland's talented workforce and agility. An evolving global economic landscape, shaped by geopolitical risk, is creating increased uncertainty for enterprises and markets. Targeted investment in workforce skills and capability is therefore critical to mitigating shocks and sustaining long-term economic performance.

Rapid advances in digital technologies, the transition to a green economy, and new models of work are reshaping how enterprises compete and how people build careers. Skills gaps persist in critical sectors, smaller enterprises need greater access to

talent, innovation and digital capability, and greater collaboration is needed across the skills ecosystem.

Together, these megatrends are reshaping the future of work in Ireland, creating urgent demand for a workforce that is adaptable, highly skilled, and capable of navigating rapid digitalisation, sustainability transitions, and new models of work. To remain competitive, Ireland must sustain a future focused policy agenda that strengthens productivity, builds workforce agility, skills and resilience and ensures that enterprises can adapt and compete in an increasingly volatile and technologically advanced global landscape which is redefining job roles and productivity.

## Mega Trends Shaping Future Competitiveness and Skills Supply

- Rapid Digital Transformation and Technological Disruption
- Expansion of AI Adoption and Automation
- Climate Change Impacts and Circular Economy Transitions
- Geopolitical Fragmentation and Economic Uncertainty
- Changing Regulatory Environment
- Demographic Change and Labour Market Constraints
- Evolving Work Organisation and Diverse Employment Models
- Social Inclusion & Labour Market Participation Challenges

# Enabling Sustainable Economic Growth and Competitiveness through Workforce Development

Skills and talent development are central to both European and national economic strategies. *The Future of European Competitiveness Report* and the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment's *Action Plan on Competitiveness and Productivity* both emphasise the need for a strategic focus on upskilling, with more frequent, flexible and responsive skills development systems that can adapt to emerging technologies, sectoral needs and economic disruption. Empowering workers to continually update and broaden their capabilities is critical to enhancing productivity and competitiveness, particularly amongst SMEs.

*The Future Forty: A Fiscal and Economic Outlook to 2065* identifies the period to 2035 as a crucial window for Ireland to strengthen foundational capacity, particularly in skills, to support long-term growth and fiscal sustainability. While Ireland's workforce remains among the most adaptable internationally, maintaining this advantage requires sustained investment in education, training, skills and lifelong learning to ensure readiness for future economic transitions.

Investment in skills is fundamental to Ireland's attractiveness as a target destination for foreign direct investment. To sustain this position, Ireland must address structural challenges affecting talent retention, including cost of living pressures, housing availability and infrastructure constraints. Delivering critical housing, transport, water and energy projects will require strengthened technical, digital and managerial capabilities, particularly in engineering, construction and advanced technologies.

The transformative impact of artificial intelligence on job roles and workforce design is progressing at a pace and scale not previously experienced, making it essential for economies and businesses to

move beyond disparate training interventions and adopt coordinated upskilling strategies that prepare workers to adapt and respond to continuous change. Preparing the workforce for artificial intelligence requires not only technical capabilities but also strong competencies in areas such as critical thinking, problem solving, and sound judgement to ensure responsible and effective adoption of the technology. All nations will require upskilling frameworks to ensure their workforces have the skills, agility, and resilience required in a rapidly evolving labour market in the age of artificial intelligence.

An ageing population and ongoing labour shortages intensify the need to fill critical skills gaps and increase workforce participation, particularly among underrepresented groups. Maintaining Ireland's attractiveness as a place to live and work is essential in an increasingly competitive global market for skilled talent. At the same time, workers are seeking more personalised, flexible and accessible learning opportunities as part of their career progression. Employers that prioritise continuous learning and development are better positioned to attract, retain, and engage talent.

To encourage balanced economic growth, targeted support is required for locally traded enterprises, particularly SMEs, to improve productivity and competitiveness. Small and medium sized companies play a vital role in employment, regional development and long-term economic stability, and require enhanced investment in skills, digital tools, management capability and innovation. In parallel, continued support for advanced skills in research and technology adoption is essential to strengthen Ireland's export-oriented and multinational sectors and sustain the country's Research, Development and Innovation (RD&I) ecosystem.

# Positioning Ireland as a Centre of Excellence for Talent

Meeting the pace and scale of future enterprise workforce development needs must rely on strong collaboration between Government, industry, and higher and further education – a partnership model already embodied by Skillnet Ireland. This collaborative approach supports the development of an enterprise-powered, responsive skills ecosystem aligned to labour market demand and long-term economic strategies and is viewed as an effective workforce development model by other countries.

Active enterprise engagement in programme design and delivery ensures that training provision reflects emerging trends and the priority skills needs of enterprise, while sectoral skills frameworks support

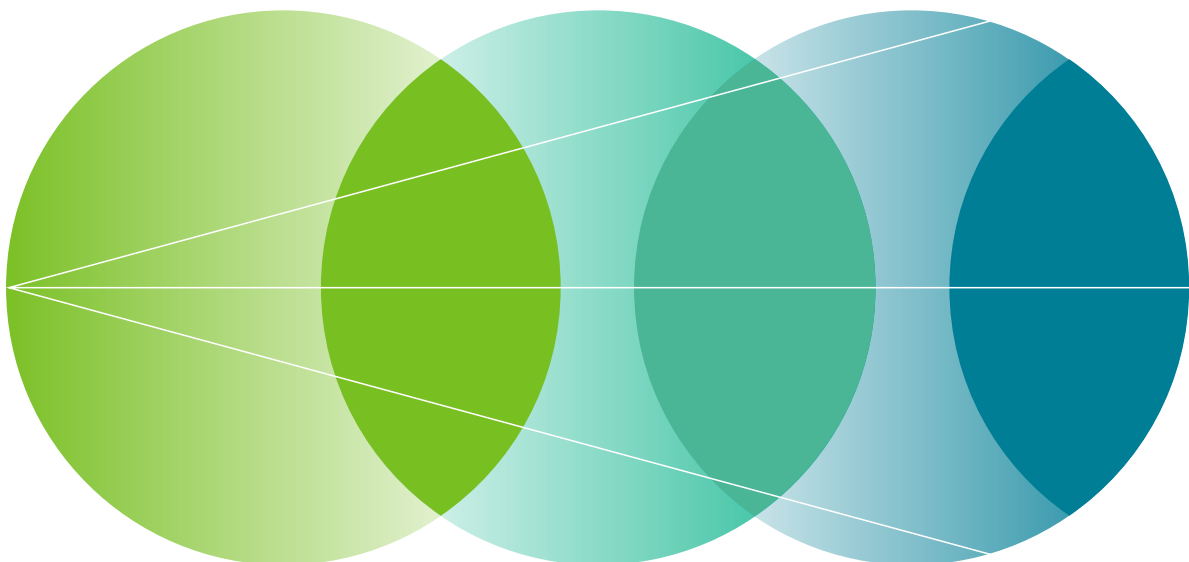
coordinated and efficient skills planning. Improved use of data, common skills languages and robust governance will enable better anticipation of future workforce requirements and support the transition towards a responsive and dynamic skills-based labour market.

Strengthening Ireland’s culture of lifelong learning remains critical to increasing participation levels. While participation already exceeds the EU average, Ireland continues to lag behind the leading performers. A more agile, demand-responsive system is required to respond effectively to technological change and economic shocks.

## Workforce Development as a Strategic Priority

Enterprise-led workforce development is a cornerstone of sustainable economic growth and long-term competitiveness. A future-ready workforce will underpin innovation, productivity and resilience, enabling Ireland to attract investment, support enterprise growth and maximise opportunities for individuals and society. Ultimately, a future-ready skilled workforce is the foundation

on which Ireland’s long-term competitiveness is secured. By strengthening workforce development policies and systems, Ireland can build a resilient talent ecosystem capable of sustaining economic prosperity and maintaining its global competitiveness in an era of accelerated change and artificial intelligence.



# Our Strategic Objectives (2026–2028)

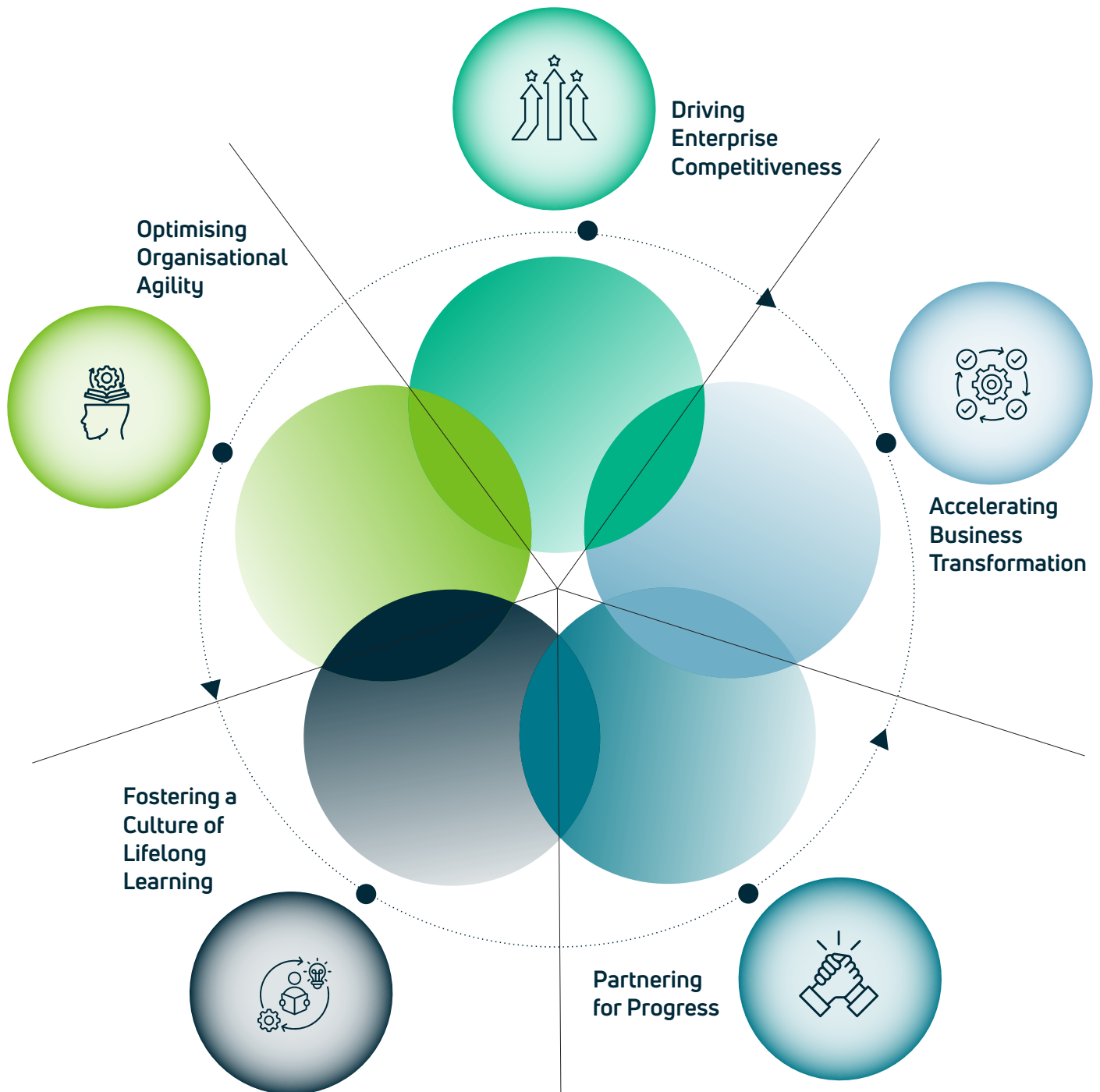
**Five strategic priorities** will empower Skillnet Ireland and our industry partners to deliver on its mission and set the direction for the organisation over the next three years. They reflect our ambition to strengthen Ireland’s competitiveness and foster a culture of lifelong learning as well as defining where Skillnet Ireland will focus to create meaningful impact for business, workers, and the wider economy.

Skillnet Ireland will evolve its role as the national workforce development agency to become a system catalyst as a national convener that aligns enterprise, education, and government around shared workforce priorities.

By delivering on these five strategic priorities, this means we will expand enterprise participation, embed lifelong learning as a business norm, strengthen system coordination and foresight, and build our organisation’s capacity and visibility as a thought leader.



# A Strategy for Building Next Generation Capability



Expanding participation in workforce development is essential to Ireland's social and economic resilience and productivity. This will create an environment where enterprises of all sizes, across all regions can access the learning opportunities they need to adopt innovative technologies, improve productivity, and compete effectively.

# Over the course of this Strategy from 2026 to 2028, we aim to achieve:



## Scale

We will support **100,000 businesses** and **400,000 workers** over the next three years to 2028, through a range of workforce development opportunities – to enable businesses to compete and innovate.



## Reach

We will maintain our track record of over 90% of businesses supported being SMEs. Within this we will increase the number of new Irish SMEs engaged in talent development and upskilling with Skillnet Ireland for the first time, supporting **15,000 new businesses** through our upskilling, mentoring and business supports by 2028.



## Innovation

Enhance the pipeline of innovative and scalable start-ups by supporting them with the skills and talent to support their growth ambitions. We will support **1,000 start-ups and scale-ups** focusing on innovation capability.



## Partnership

Contribute to developing an enhanced, internationally recognised, and interconnected skills ecosystem for Ireland that meets business needs and drives enterprise competitiveness.



## Impact

Develop and implement a robust performance measurement framework that tracks key indicators such as participation and impact on business productivity and innovation as well as on the career development and employability of learners.



## Optimisation

Drive continuous improvement within our operations to address and streamline our processes and enhance our supports for our partners.

Each of our strategic objectives and targets will be supported by clear performance measures that are systematically tracked and monitored for impact to ensure accountability and effective delivery.

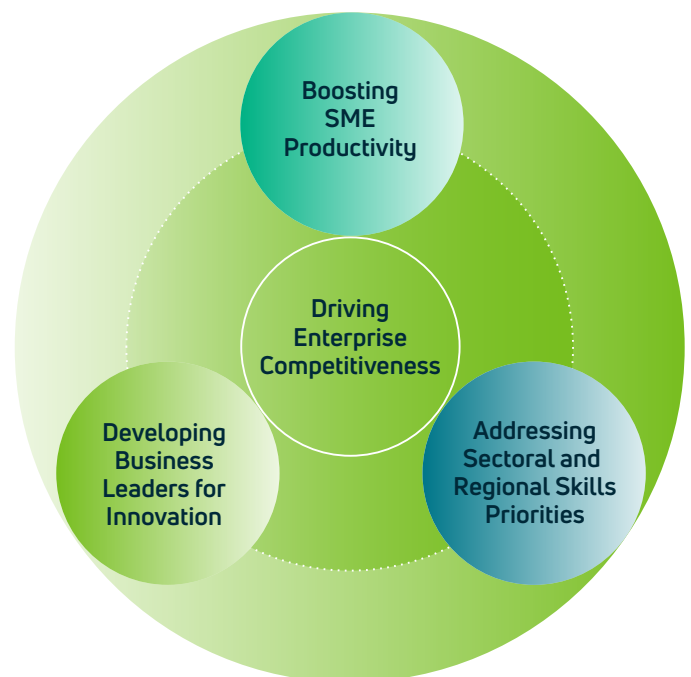
# Objective 1: Driving Enterprise Competitiveness

We will strengthen Ireland's business competitiveness by developing the skills and leadership needed for innovation, adaptability and growth. Through targeted industry-led programmes we will help enterprises of all sizes boost productivity, embrace change and compete successfully in national and international markets.

Skills and upskilling are central to enterprise competitiveness. Skillnet Ireland will focus on building capability and enabling businesses to innovate, adapt, and retain their talented workforces. We will deliver a coordinated suite of initiatives that support skills development in areas such as digitalisation, advanced manufacturing, leadership and management, innovation and design thinking, export readiness, and financial performance.

Programmes will be designed to address the diverse needs of businesses from startups and scale-ups to established enterprises to reflect how skill priorities evolve as businesses mature. We will work with industry partners, other agencies and further and higher education providers to deliver practical, accessible training aligned with future workforce needs.

The development of leadership and workforce capabilities that can adapt to changing markets, technologies and sustainability expectations is a vital component of strengthening business competitiveness. In today's economic environment, business leaders must possess a blend of agility, innovation capability, and strategic systems



thinking to anticipate emerging opportunities, embrace creativity, and translate new ideas into tangible commercial outcomes. We will invest in management development programmes to support startups, scaling enterprises, and established businesses to thrive in an increasingly complex and fast-changing economy.

## Strengthening SME Competitiveness

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are critical to the economic vitality of Ireland, employing almost two thirds of Ireland's workforce. Supporting SMEs to be competitive requires a different approach to that of larger companies. SMEs often face financial, human, and technological constraints, so development interventions must be practical, cost-effective, and deliver high impact. Smaller sized companies may be able to adopt new technologies, skills, and business models quickly, but they also

often lack access to networks, partnerships, and specialist expertise. Effective supports will focus on building versatile skills, facilitating connections, and enabling the adoption of technology and innovation, helping SMEs to thrive through partnership and networking in ways that larger companies can often manage internally. We will invest in targeted programmes to help SMEs build the strategic, digital, financial, and management capabilities needed to grow and adapt.

## Boosting talent within large businesses

Investing in skills is a strategic imperative for large indigenous businesses and multinational firms pursuing innovation and growth in an increasingly dynamic world economy. Skillnet Ireland has a strong track record of supporting large companies to build highly capable and adaptable workforces in a wide range of sectors

including advanced manufacturing, biopharma, construction, technology, engineering, financial services, semi-conductors and aviation. Upskilling and reskilling will enable these firms to innovate, respond effectively to emerging opportunities and disruptions or risks, and to attract and retain their talented people.

## Sectoral and Regional Skills Priorities

To foster sustainable growth, Skillnet Ireland will prioritise upskilling across all sectors, tailoring training to the specialist needs of each industry – which are wide ranging, from software development and cybersecurity expertise, healthcare innovation and digital health skills, robotics and automation for manufacturing, to marketing and sales. Developing these capabilities will enable businesses of all sizes to innovate, compete, and scale effectively.

Equally, thriving regions depend on a workforce equipped with the specialist skills and networking opportunities to support both local enterprises and multinational investment. By aligning our upskilling and training supports with both sectoral demands and regional strengths whenever possible, we can strengthen Ireland's economic resilience and promote inclusive growth nationwide.

# Enabling Actions

- Prioritise our upskilling solutions and business supports to **drive competitiveness** and enable businesses to increase their productivity and innovation capacity.
- Enhance our focus on the delivery of **specialist upskilling** to key labour market sectors, addressing defined talent shortages vital for economic growth and competitiveness.
- Increase our focus on **leadership and management development** programmes and initiatives that drive productivity, growth and innovation.
- Develop tailored capability-building initiatives for **SMEs and locally traded enterprises** in areas including digitalisation, sustainability, and innovation amongst others.
- Expand our focus on **securing participation** from businesses that are not currently engaging in upskilling and enhancing their experience of workforce development.
- Invest in upskilling initiatives within **sectors experiencing disruption** and for groups within the labour market whose jobs have been lost or seriously impacted by technological convergence or market forces.



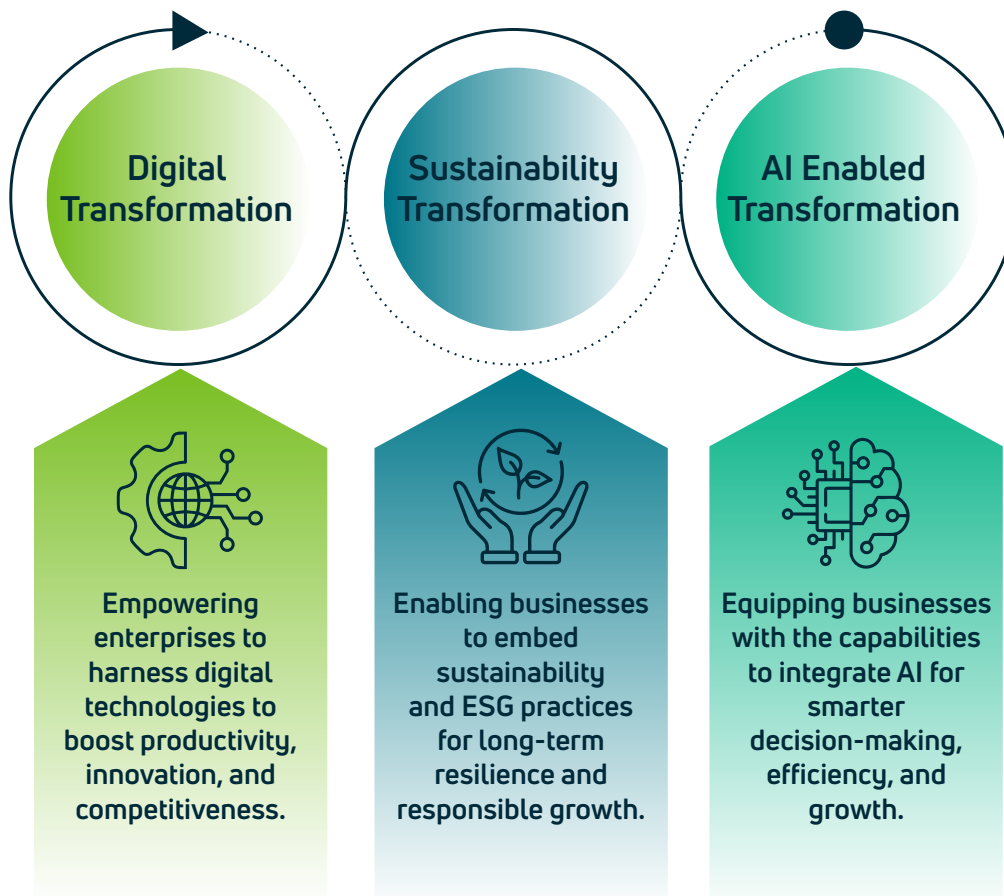
# Objective 2: Accelerating Business Transformation

We will support enterprises to adapt and thrive amid technological disruption, changing markets and evolving customer needs. We will help businesses transform their operations and workforce capabilities by enabling digital innovation, AI powered transformation and productivity gains and prioritising sustainable business practices.

Organisations must continuously adapt their operations, business models, and workforce capabilities to remain resilient and efficient in the face of technological disruption, evolving customer expectations, and market volatility. Transformation enables businesses to harness digital innovation, improve productivity, enhance customer

experiences, and strengthen sustainability practices, all of which are critical for long-term growth and competitiveness. Supporting and enabling business transformation helps foster a more agile, innovative, and inclusive economy capable of withstanding future challenges.

We have identified three **Key Transformation Enablers** for businesses to unlock new opportunities for growth and long-term competitiveness.



## Digitalisation

Digital disruption is reshaping every industry. Businesses that fail to adopt digitalisation and automation strategies risk falling behind more agile competitors. Embracing business transformation allows businesses to leverage technology to improve efficiency, lower costs, and innovate faster. We will

support businesses in developing the skills and capabilities to harness digitalisation and innovative technologies to evolve their business model, increase efficiencies, and advance their digital infrastructure and cybersecurity resilience.

## Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is critical for future business transformations by driving automation, innovation, and data-driven decision-making. It will enhance efficiency, reduce costs, and enable predictive insights across operations and markets. AI-powered tools will personalise customer experiences and optimise supply chains. Skillnet Ireland is well positioned to lead on supports to enterprise as part of a human-centred, ethical and inclusive approach to digital and AI adoption across the workforce. While we face many challenges, these are exciting

times with endless possibilities. Even when AI results in job redesign or displacement, evidence shows that roles considered 'at risk' are more likely to be replaced by people who understand and can work effectively with AI. We will equip business leaders with knowledge, skills and confidence to lead AI enabled business transformation, innovation and organisational change including supply-chain optimisation, quality control measures and enhanced customer service.

## Sustainability

Sustainability and ESG-driven business transformation efforts are also critical to the future competitiveness, profitability, and resilience of companies because they align economic growth with environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and robust governance. Through upskilling, companies can acquire the knowledge and skillsets to integrate sustainability practices and principles within their business models to better anticipate regulatory shifts, mitigate climate related risks, and meet growing investor and consumer expectations for ethical and transparent operations. Transformation measures in areas such as energy efficiency, water stewardship and biodiversity, help strengthen competitiveness and ensure that businesses contribute to a resilient, inclusive, and low-carbon economy.

Sustainability is not only about environmental and social responsibility, but also about securing the long-term financial health and resilience of a business. It involves embedding financial diligence, operational efficiency, and diversification into core strategies to withstand economic fluctuations and build a stronger foundation for profitability and competitiveness. Building on existing initiatives, we will develop tailored learning pathways to help businesses of all sizes and sectors to embed sustainability and resilience at the heart of their operations and decision-making.

**All three areas require a range of leadership, management and technical skills to enable businesses to mobilise and succeed in their transformation ambitions.**

# Enabling Actions

- Develop **sector-specific and specialist area upskilling initiatives** to position Ireland at the frontier of digitalisation and new technology, advanced manufacturing, health, financial services, energy and semiconductors.
- Establish an enterprise-led national initiative to empower **SME business leaders** to harness digital technologies and innovate to transform operations and drive new sources of competitive advantage.
- Lead on the development of a new state-of-the-art **National AI Talent Centre of Excellence**, bringing together industry and academic expertise, and fostering collaboration, research, and innovation.
- Target **specific AI initiatives** to upskill the workforce with strong foundations in digital literacy, data and computational skills, critical thinking, and the ability to learn and adapt rapidly to new AI technologies.
- Strengthen and expand our specialist sustainability and ESG upskilling initiatives to build capability across the green economy including biodiversity, **offshore wind, green hydrogen and the emerging green economy**, and investments of scale in support of the *Powering Prosperity* national strategy.
- Evolve our **business transformation upskilling** initiatives into a coordinated sustainability capability framework, spanning strategy, operations, circularity, and financial management.
- Develop a **European Engagement Strategy** to inform future EU project engagement to maximise engagement from Irish enterprise in EU funded initiatives, including digitalisation, AI and sustainability projects and facilitate the sharing of best practice internationally.



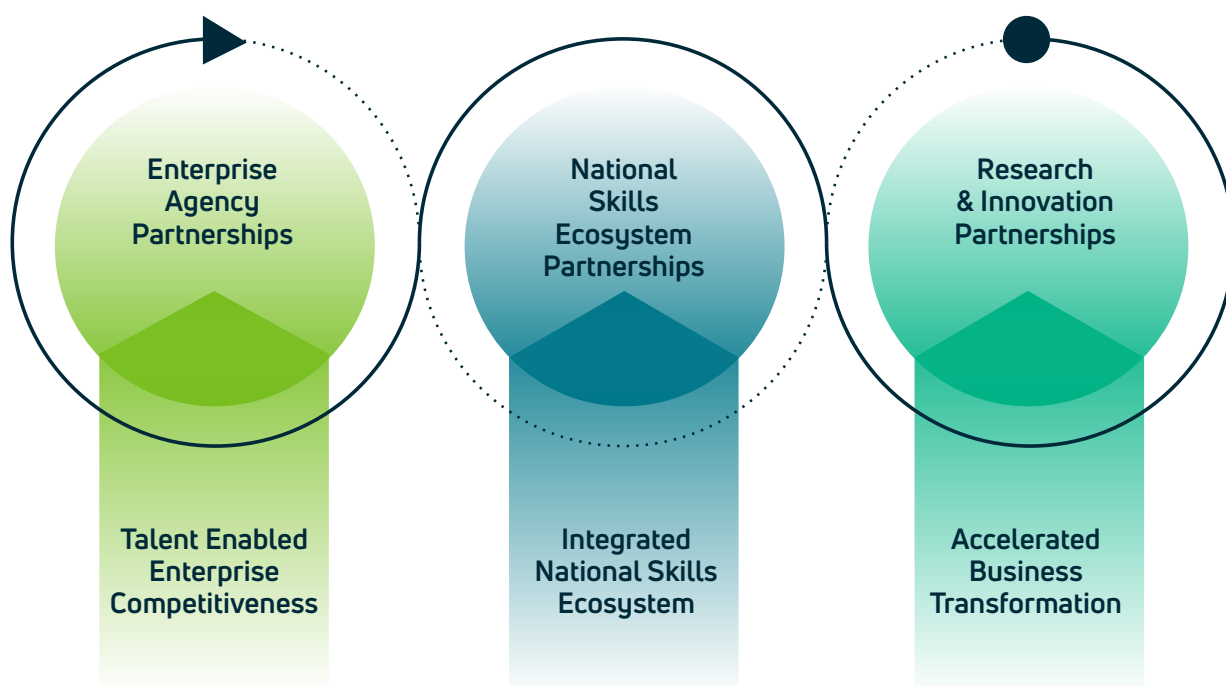
# Objective 3: Partnering for Progress

We will strengthen collaboration across industry, government, and education to build a more connected and effective national skills ecosystem. We will foster partnerships that unite enterprise insight with policy and innovation to address Ireland’s future skills needs.

At Skillnet Ireland, our deep roots with enterprise, and our ability to identify and respond swiftly to policy and skills challenges has long been a hallmark of our success. Collaboration across the skills and enterprise ecosystem is central to our mission. For Ireland to be a leading location for world-class talent and skills, we need a joined-up national approach to and increased investment in future skills needs.

Over the lifetime of this strategy, we aim to deepen our existing partnerships and develop new partnerships and strategic collaborations with key national and international stakeholders within the education and skills ecosystem. The result will be a stronger, more agile national skills framework that empowers enterprises to innovate and workers to succeed.

We have identified three **Key Priority Partnership Enablers** to deliver Skillnet Ireland’s mission.



This involves deepening our partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders including Enterprise Agencies, Education and Research Institutions, Government Departments and other development partners to play our part in creating a connected national skills and innovation ecosystem for enterprise.

## National Skills Ecosystem

The “*OECD Skills Strategy Ireland: Assessment and Recommendations*”, highlights the challenge presented by a fragmented skills ecosystem. In close partnership with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and

Science (DFHERIS), the National Skills Council and other stakeholders, we will work to address current and future skills priorities and ensure that workforce development is responsive, data-driven, and connected to enterprise and learner needs.

## Research and Innovation

The next decade demands that we strengthen innovation capability at every level of enterprise. *The Action Plan on Competitiveness and Productivity* highlights skills as the cornerstone of a high-performing RD&I system, essential for generating ideas, translating research into tangible impact, and scaling innovation. Aligned with *Impact 2030: Ireland’s Research and Innovation Strategy*, Skillnet Ireland will deepen its partnerships with enterprise, research institutions, and innovation agencies to

embed talent at the centre of the research and innovation ecosystem. By supporting leadership development and innovation capability within high-impact sectors and specialist areas such as medtech, biopharma, semiconductors, renewable energy, agrifood, fintech, and early-stage SME entrepreneurs, Skillnet Ireland will contribute directly to Ireland’s ambition to become a centre of excellence for innovation-driven enterprise.

## Enterprise Agencies

We will expand our partnerships with other enterprise agencies, including Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland, our industry partners, training providers, the tertiary education sector, and regional development agencies to co-design upskilling initiatives and programmes that meet the needs of businesses operating in Ireland. We will seek to increase our collaborative partnerships and co-

design programmes that reflect emerging industry needs, share best practice, and develop flexible learning pathways for business leaders and our workforce. Through these collaborations, we will ensure that the skills system supports continuous learning, enables mobility between sectors, and creates an environment for increased productivity and competitiveness across enterprise.

# Enabling Actions

- Collaborate across the **national skills ecosystem** to facilitate coordinated and accessible skills support for enterprises.
- Partner with the **tertiary education sector** to co-design responsive education and training pathways with industry that enable workforce adaptation, redeployment, and innovation across industries with new or emerging job roles.
- Partner with national and sector-based **research agencies to build research and development and innovation capability** within enterprises.
- Leverage strategic partnerships with key **enterprise agencies** to design targeted upskilling supports to enable transformation through digitalisation and emerging technologies.
- Establish a **Skillnet Ireland Workforce Development Advisory Council** with nominated representatives from relevant stakeholders focused on workforce development strategy and policy.
- Expand partnerships with **industry bodies**, training providers, and higher education institutions to deliver programmes that are responsive to emerging sustainability standards, regulatory shifts, and innovation trends.
- Establish **international partnerships** to facilitate collaborative enterprise-led skills initiatives and enable knowledge transfer and sharing of best practice.



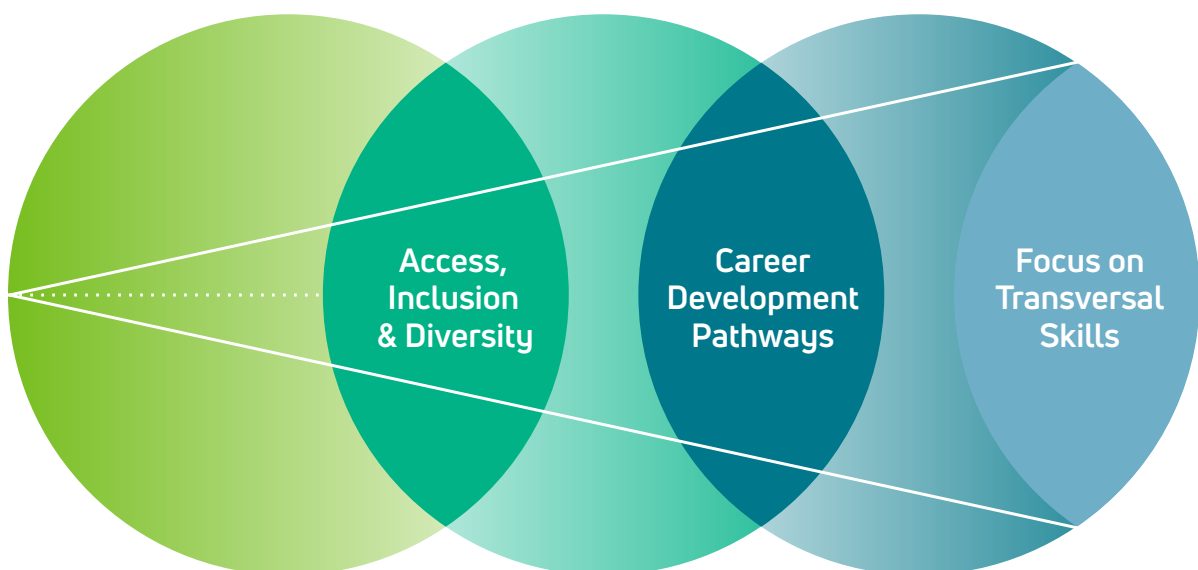
# Objective 4: Fostering a Culture of Lifelong Learning

We will foster a culture of continuous learning to enhance Ireland’s productivity, innovation capacity, and competitiveness. By promoting flexible career upskilling pathways, we will help workers to adapt to technological, digital, and sustainability transitions.

Boosting productivity, competitiveness, and innovation depends on upskilling and lifelong learning, yet Ireland’s lifelong learning rate remains below the EU benchmark. To compete as a knowledge economy, a culture of continuous learning must be embedded across the workforce, enhancing employability, entrepreneurial capability, and adaptability. Rapid digital transformation, sustainability transitions, and innovation require workforce capabilities to keep pace, with SMEs facing challenges in dedicating time and resources to upskilling.

Well-designed career pathways, targeted reskilling, and access to lifelong learning will equip workers to thrive as roles evolve or become obsolete, ensuring both career mobility and workforce agility. As highlighted in *Ireland’s Talent Landscape Report 2025*, flexibility and a growth mindset will be essential attributes for Ireland’s future workforce. Transversal skills such as critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and cross-functional collaboration enable individuals to navigate change and drive innovation. Learning programmes will need to be accessible, flexible, and inclusive, addressing diverse needs and ensuring equitable opportunities for all workers across sectors and regions.

We have identified three **Key Priority Enablers** to boost engagement in lifelong learning within private enterprise.



# Enabling Actions

- Drive a national shift to continuous capability-building and a **lifelong learning culture** within enterprise through actionable research, industry insights, and sharing of best practices across our stakeholders and government.
- Place a focus on **career development pathways** for emerging roles and new sectors to provide structured routes for individuals to build the skills to navigate career transitions successfully within disrupted or evolving industries.
- Provide high-quality training that pairs **technical capabilities with broader transversal competencies** to empower learners to advance in their careers and to drive organisational growth and productivity.
- Invest in **innovative learning methodologies** and approaches like microlearning, AI-driven personalised learning, and virtual and augmented reality that create impactful adult learning experiences.
- Design and deliver learning programmes that are accessible, flexible, and responsive to the needs of learners to **empower a diverse workforce**, enhance social equity, and strengthen innovation and productivity across all sectors.
- Enhance the mechanisms for **evaluating the impact** of our programmes, so that their contribution to productivity and innovation is measured in terms of efficiency and effectiveness.



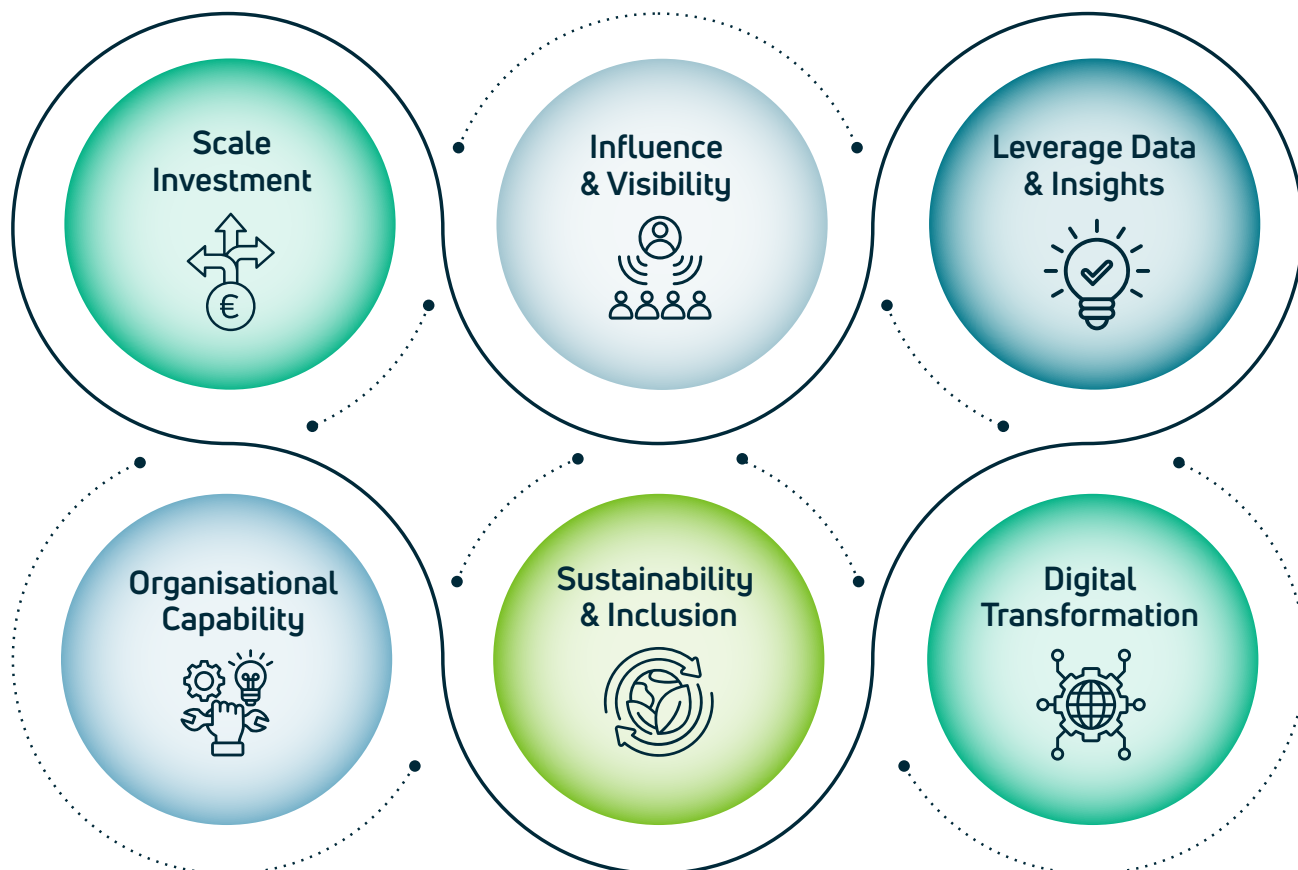
# Objective 5: Optimising Organisational Agility

We will strengthen Skillnet Ireland’s internal capabilities to operate as a high-performing, data-led, and responsive organisation. By investing in analytical, digital, and leadership capacity, we will enhance agility and ensure excellence in delivering our strategic goals.

We will build Skillnet Ireland’s internal analytical, digital and leadership capacity to operate as an agile data-led learning organisation. Skillnet Ireland will measure its progress against six strategic levers for organisational agility. Each lever acts as a catalyst

for system-wide improvement, strengthening collaboration, enhancing agility, and ensuring lasting impact across the organisation and our wider stakeholder partners.

## Strategic Levers for Organisational Change



# Enabling Actions

- **Scale Investment in Future Skills Needs** – Skillnet Ireland will continue to engage with DFHERIS to proactively anticipate and respond to opportunities arising from National Training Fund (NTF) legislation and new funding approaches for areas of strategic importance for workforce development in Ireland. Skillnet Ireland will focus on ensuring the agency has the requisite investment to deliver on this strategy, and support workforce development in priority areas. Through adaptive co-investment funding models, Skillnet Ireland will ensure that funding supports not only current skills requirements but also the capabilities required for future economic growth.
- **Strengthen Influence and Visibility** – Over the next three years, we will deepen the understanding of Skillnet Ireland’s value proposition and offering with the aim of inspiring business leaders and workers to engage in lifelong learning. We will find new ways to engage with stakeholders to expand our reach and build a deeper understanding amongst businesses of Skillnet Ireland’s offering.
- **Leverage Data and Insights** – We will strengthen our capabilities and capacity to monitor, analyse, and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of our programmes. Insights gained will enable the development of targeted enterprise support solutions and ensure value for money. We will also develop our research and thought leadership capabilities by enabling the agency to share industry insights to increase our policy engagement and meet business needs. Leveraging this data and utilising AI will be critical factors in enabling us to respond to and anticipate economic trends, and to develop the upskilling solutions demanded by industry and the future workforce.
- **Organisational Capability** – Skillnet Ireland will continue to evolve the agency’s organisational structure and governance to align with our offering to enterprise which includes network upskilling, business transformation supports, incentivisation schemes and EU projects. Skillnet Ireland aims to be an employer of choice and to attract, develop and retain the best talent required to deliver our mission. We will review our skillsets to ensure we can deliver and proactively support the career development of our dedicated team.
- **Sustainability and Inclusion** – Sustainable development is central to our strategic objectives. Skillnet Ireland will implement its own Climate Action Plan to ensure we demonstrate the leadership in environmental sustainability, from decarbonisation to biodiversity, that we are also seeking within Skillnet Business Networks and National Initiatives. Skillnet Ireland will also continue to play an active role in promoting transformation and growth that is inclusive, including through ongoing work with the Irish Centre for Diversity to enhance our own equality, diversity and inclusion efforts, and the wellbeing of our team.

- **Digital Transformation** – We will aim to harness technology and artificial intelligence to optimise digital services to deliver greater effectiveness and efficiencies at Skillnet Ireland and to improve company engagement and user experience in accessing Skillnet Ireland supports and services. Skillnet Ireland will continue its system alignment programme over the lifetime of this strategy to enhance our industry partner engagement from initial grant application design to programme delivery lifecycle. This will enable robust compliance and governance processes and facilitate streamlined administrative requirements for our networks and our team.

These six enabling actions form the engine of Skillnet Ireland’s transformation agenda. By aligning collaboration, inclusion, insight, innovation, investment, and influence, these priorities will create a more connected, confident, and future-ready Skillnet Ireland. Skillnet Ireland’s influence will extend beyond funding and coordination to acting as a source of strategic foresight, data insight, and policy influence and guidance, while demonstrating measurable economic impact. Internationally, Skillnet Ireland will continue to be recognised as a leader in how enterprise-led learning can drive competitiveness, innovation, and sustainable national growth.

Over the next three years the socio-economic and geopolitical environment in which Irish businesses operate will inevitably change. Ireland has a rapidly growing labour market, and the Government has set a target to expand the workforce by 300,000 additional workers by 2030.

Skillnet Ireland consistently faces demand for workforce development supports that exceeds its available funding capacity, highlighting a persistent gap between the upskilling needs of enterprise and the resources required to meet them. Given the competitive environment and the increasing demand for upskilling from businesses across the economy, additional resources will be required over the lifetime of the strategy to enable its delivery.



# Measuring Success

Skillnet Ireland's progress over the next three years will be assessed through a performance measurement framework that captures both impact and effectiveness. This framework will ensure accountability to our partners and the public while reflecting the tangible benefits for enterprises, learners, and the wider economy.

## Success will be demonstrated through four key dimensions:



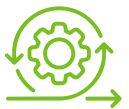
### Enterprise and Learner Impact

Measurable improvements in participation, productivity, and innovation.



### Financial Stewardship

Effective use of public funds and growth in enterprise co-investment.



### Internal Agility

Enhanced collaboration, digital capability, and governance.



### Learning and Growth

Continuous improvement across Skillnet Ireland's people, networks, and partners.

Success will mean increased numbers of companies developing the future skillsets needed to secure their competitiveness, innovation capacity and future growth. It will also see a connected Skillnet

Ireland ecosystem of business networks and clusters engaged with enterprise to develop the capabilities of enterprise and the workforce to embrace digitalisation and sustainability.

# Looking Ahead – Ireland’s Learning Nation

Sustaining Ireland’s reputation for a talented and highly educated workforce requires consistent investment and a deeper, long-term commitment to workforce development. In the age of AI, the next three years offer a defining and transformative opportunity for Ireland’s skills ecosystem. By aligning enterprise ambition with public purpose, Skillnet Ireland will continue to build the nation’s capacity for innovation, inclusion, and shared prosperity so Ireland not only adapts to change but shapes it.

Skillnet Ireland’s 2026–2028 Strategy calls for collective action to strengthen partnerships between enterprise, government, and education to shape Ireland’s future through talent and skills. Coordinated action across government, industry and education will be required to build the technical, foundational and ethical capabilities for an AI-enabled economy.

**By aligning strategic goals with clear priorities, Skillnet Ireland will turn ambition into impact, capability into competitiveness, and innovation into sustainable growth.**

The strategy aims to boost Ireland’s innovation capacity, productivity and sustainable growth by supporting the competitiveness of Irish businesses and the employability of workers, with a strong emphasis on future skills and leading-edge innovation across all sectors. Over the coming years, this approach will connect systems, empower people, and unlock the innovation potential of every business, sector and region, to deliver sustainable progress and prosperity for all.

Aligned with national policy, including the Programme for Government and the *Action Plan on Competitiveness and Productivity*, this strategy recognises the need to attract, develop and retain world-class talent. Addressing broader structural challenges such as housing, transport and energy infrastructure will require a skilled workforce, making investment in talent critical to achieving balanced and sustained economic development.

Through the *Empowering Enterprise: Next Generation Capability Strategy*, Skillnet Ireland will support 100,000 companies and 400,000 workers over the period to 2028. Working in partnership with government, enterprise agencies and industry networks, the agency will play a fundamental role in building a more cohesive and responsive skills ecosystem that supports regional and sectoral development.

Ireland’s future prosperity depends on our ability to unlock the full potential of our talented workforce. As global competition intensifies and technologies reshape every sector, investing in skills is no longer optional. It is the cornerstone of innovation, resilience, and sustainable growth.

By taking bold action now, Ireland can empower its people, strengthen its enterprises, and secure a thriving, competitive economy for decades to come.

# Appendix One – Key National Strategies & Plans

Skillnet Ireland is committed to aligning its supports with both enterprise needs and government policy to drive sustainable economic growth. By ensuring that its business development initiatives, skills programmes, and innovation supports reflect national policy priorities, Skillnet Ireland enables enterprise competitiveness and labour market agility for the long-term success of the economy and society.

## Key Strategies and Plans include:

- White Paper on Enterprise
- National Skills Strategy 2025
- Action Plan on Competitiveness and Productivity 2025
- Impact 2030 - Ireland's Research & Innovation Strategy
- The Shared Island Initiative
- Enterprise Ireland Strategy 2025-2029
- IDA Strategy 2025-2029
- Housing for All
- AI – Here for Good: National Artificial Intelligence Strategy for Ireland
- Powering Prosperity - Ireland's Offshore Wind Industrial Strategy
- Harnessing Digital – The Digital Ireland Framework
- Government Action Plan on Market Diversification
- National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022 – 2027
- Quantum 2030 - A National Quantum Technologies Strategy for Ireland
- Foodwise 2030 – World Leader in Sustainable Food Systems
- Creative Ireland Programme 2023-2027
- The Future of European Competitiveness 2024
- OECD Skills Strategy Ireland: 2023

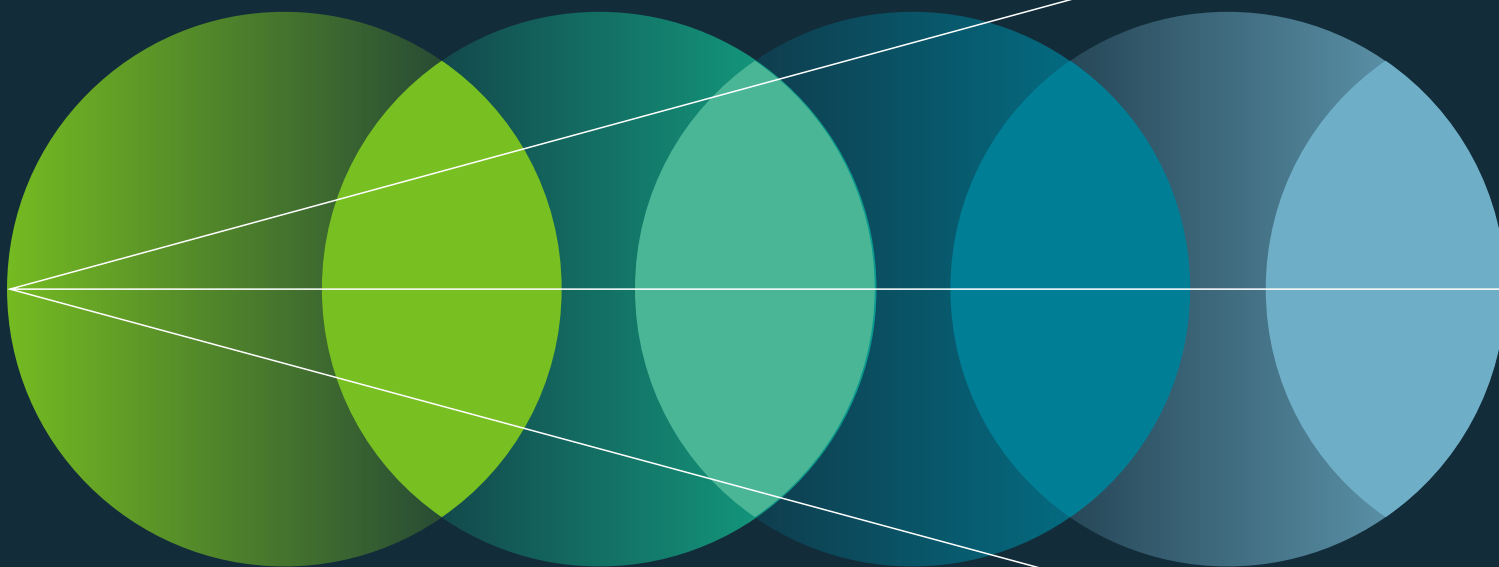
# Acknowledgements

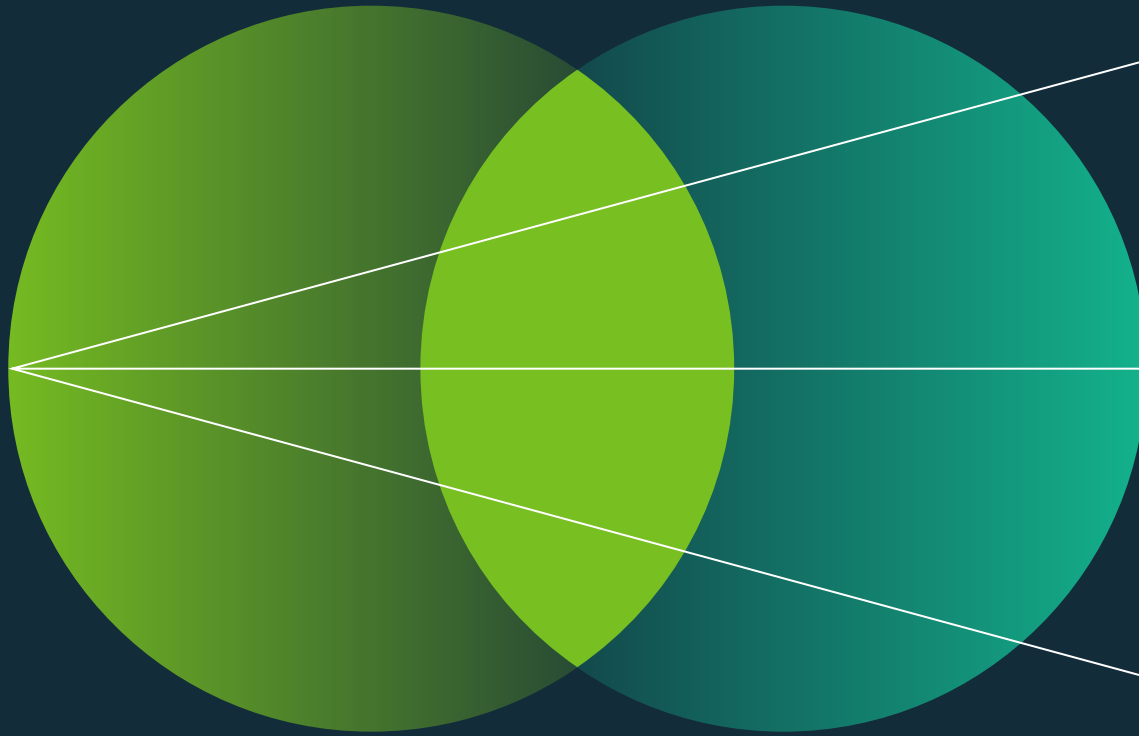
We would like to extend our gratitude to the stakeholders of Skillnet Ireland and to their representatives on the Board of Skillnet Ireland for their guidance in the preparation of this Statement of Strategy. These are: Ibec, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Chambers Ireland, the Construction Industry Federation and the Small Firms Association.

Ireland's enterprise base is fortunate to be effectively served by well organised trade associations, chambers of commerce, industry clusters and enterprise-led regional development associations. These bodies form the core of Skillnet Ireland, and we wish to acknowledge their time and insights in formulating this strategy.

We wish also to acknowledge the commitment of the 70 Skillnet Network Steering Groups, Promoters and Network Managers – industry leaders who give their time, energy and expertise in service of their sectors and regions. We greatly appreciate the support we receive from Government, particularly Ministers and colleagues at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

We wish also to thank colleagues in the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, the Department of Health and other Departments, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, National Skills Council, SOLAS, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs and the Higher Education Institutes for their contributions to this strategy.





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