Skillnets
Enterprise-led learning networks

STATEMENT OF STRATEGY 2016–2019

Strategic Review

Chairman's Message

Brendan McGinty
Chairman
Skillnets

I am pleased to present Skillnets' *Statement of Strategy 2016-2019*. This sets out the strategic review and goals that will guide our organisation over the coming years. We will focus on helping enterprises in Ireland to flourish by providing the vital workforce development necessary for sustained economic development.

Over the next four years, Skillnets will be driven by strategic goals that take into consideration our funding, national policy, the needs of enterprise and the economic context. This strategy reflects the essential needs of industry as articulated by enterprises during the broad consultation process. It is also closely aligned with national policy on skills and talent development and will contribute to the implementation of national workforce development aims highlighted in *Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025*, and other relevant policies.

Skillnets will promote continuous improvement in the learning experiences provided to enterprise through our networks, and be a model for training excellence in an enterprise context. Skillnets will play a pivotal role in sustaining national competitiveness through the up-skilling of those in employment.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) will continue to remain the key priority for all Skillnets programmes. Skillnets will ensure that the leaders of these enterprises have the capacity to maximise the potential of both their businesses and their workforce. It was evident from the consultation that as more SMEs shift into 'prosper' mode they are willing to invest in the development of their employees. This represents a strategic challenge for Skillnets to engage yet more SMEs in our training networks.

Whilst recognising the risks to the Irish economy from Brexit, an increased level of investment in our skills and talent strategies at enterprise level is necessary to support enterprises in remaining competitive. This will assist companies in sustaining existing employment and create new employment opportunities, including those which Brexit may bring.

In addition to supporting a wide range of sectors across the economy, Skillnets plays an important role in regional skills development, facilitating dialogue between employers, and education and training providers at local level to meet enterprise needs. We intend to further raise the visibility of Skillnets at a regional level and to continue supporting regional development overall.

Time and again the Skillnets enterprise-led model has proven itself to be innovative, resilient and adaptable to the ever-changing needs of enterprise. We are proud of our core competence in enterprise-led training and the reputation we have established with businesses across Ireland. Over the next four years we look forward to engaging yet more employers in our unique proposition.

CEO Introduction

Paul Healy
CEO Skillnets

Our organisation model, with its deep roots in enterprise, has enabled Skillnets to make a substantial and enduring contribution to the national skills agenda and to the competitiveness of Irish enterprise. However, advances in technology, shifts in market forces, changing demographics and a competitive necessity for up-skilling are combining to disrupt workplace learning. In this context a key challenge for Skillnets is to remain firmly focused on the effectiveness of our programmes and to be a champion for innovation in enterprise learning and development.

Up-skilling those in employment and creating a vigorous talent base enhances productivity and innovation at enterprise level. It also underpins our national competitiveness and the strategies that build on our successful track record in attracting foreign direct investment. A key challenge confronting Ireland now is to increase participation by enterprises in workforce development and to embed a culture of lifelong learning both at enterprise and national level. Skillnets can play a major role in this.

Skillnets has a strong track record in up-skilling low, medium and high-skilled workers, and we will ensure our future activities continue to focus on people of all levels in the workforce. We will also continue our successful involvement in employment activation initiatives. We will focus these activities specifically in areas that are closely aligned with the Skillnets mandate and where skills deficits have been highlighted.

A critical challenge is to supply the quantity and quality of skills required for 220,000 new jobs targeted by the Government over the next five years[1], whilst simultaneously meeting the demand for an estimated 400,000 job replacements by 2020.[2] As the economy grows, an increasing number of sectors and occupations are likely to experience skills shortages. In fact, skills shortages are already a challenge faced by several high-growth sectors such as ICT, life sciences and international financial services. As an enterprise-led agency, Skillnets is strategically positioned to fulfill many of these skill demands over the coming years.
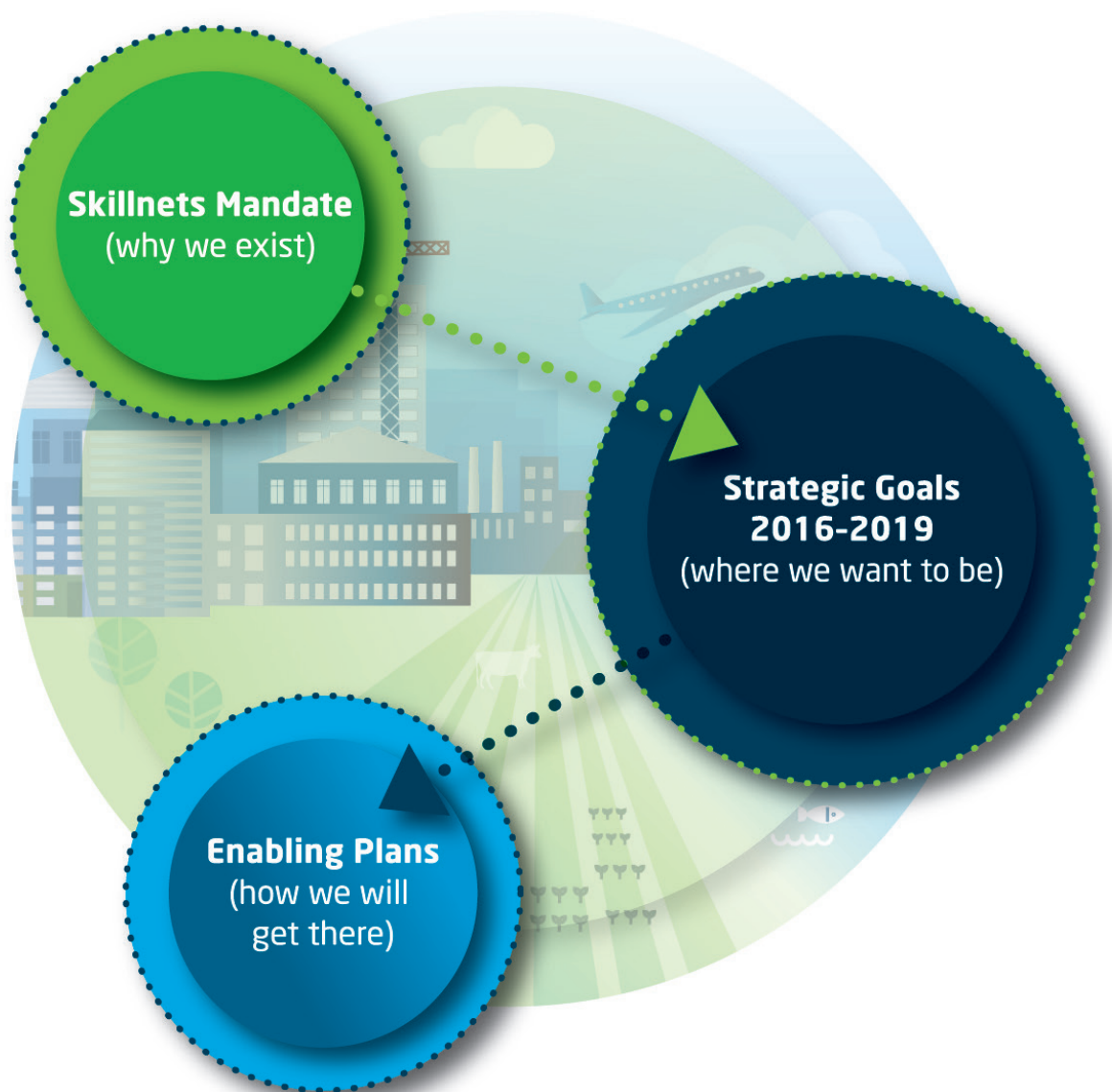
We are confident about the contribution we can make in addressing these challenges. I look forward to working closely with all our stakeholders in the successful implementation of this strategy over the next four years.

[1]   Enterprise 2025, Department of Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation 2015, p.8.
[2]   National Skills Strategy 2025, Department of Education & Skills 2016, p.26.

Developing our Strategy

- **Skillnets Mandate** (why we exist)
- **Strategic Goals 2016-2019** (where we want to be)
- **Enabling Plans** (how we will get there)

Executive Summary

This document sets out the strategic goals that will guide Skillnets over the coming years. It builds on a previous strategy that was framed in a very different economic context, when Skillnets' primary focus was to sustain enterprises throughout Ireland and help them turn the corner. We anticipate that this strategy will be implemented during a period of economic growth. Our key focus will be to help enterprises to flourish.
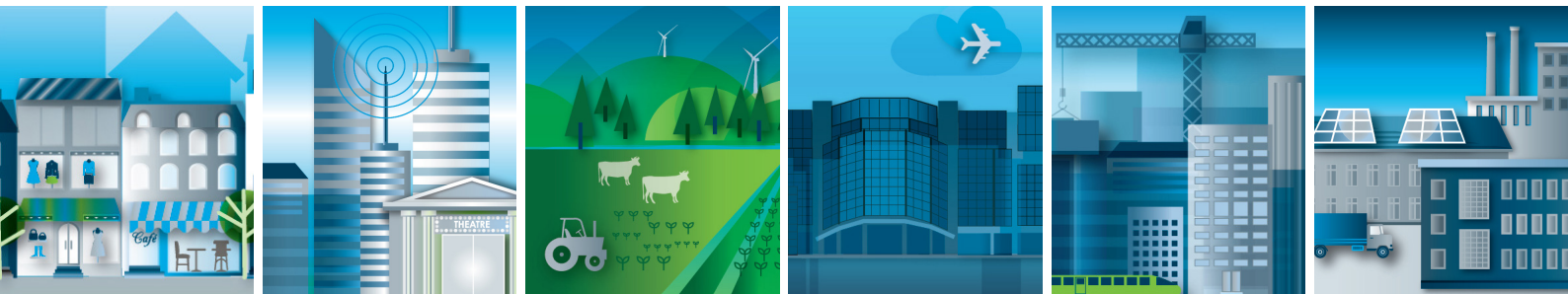
Over the next four years, Skillnets will be driven by three strategic goals. Firstly, Skillnets will be a model for training excellence in an enterprise context, promoting continuous improvement in enterprise learning thus enabling further relevance, effectiveness and impact. Secondly, Skillnets will play a pivotal role in maintaining a supply of the specific skills and future skills that impact the growth potential and competitiveness of Irish enterprise. Thirdly, Skillnets will be a key enabler in sustaining national competitiveness, building the capability of Irish companies through our deep roots with enterprise.

These goals reflect the essential needs of industry, as articulated by enterprises during the broad consultation process that has underpinned this strategy. These goals are also closely aligned with national policy and will contribute to the implementation of national workforce development aims, as highlighted in *Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025*.

As the economy grows, an increasing number of sectors and occupations are likely to experience skills shortages. In fact, skills shortages are a challenge currently faced by high-growth sectors such as ICT, life sciences and international financial services. Skillnets' networks are working intensively within these sectors to address specific gaps as well as the broader task of attracting, managing and retaining talented people.

Up-skilling those in employment and creating a vigorous talent base enhances productivity and innovation at enterprise level. It also underpins national competitiveness and strategies that build on our successful track record in attracting foreign direct investment. The key challenge is to increase participation by enterprises in workforce development and further embed a culture of lifelong learning at enterprise and at national level. Skillnets has a strong track record in up-skilling low, medium and high-skilled workers, and we will ensure our future activities continue to develop people of all skills levels.

Skillnets plays an important role within national and regional entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystems. Against a policy backdrop of initiatives to promote clustering and partnerships, our model fosters cohesive and collaborative enterprise networking.

Support for SMEs cross-cuts all programmes co-ordinated by Skillnets. SMEs will continue to remain the key priority for the Skillnets Training Networks Programme, Finuas Networks Programme and ManagementWorks. SMEs face particular barriers to development. Skillnets will ensure that the leaders of these enterprises have the capacity to maximise the potential of their business and their workforce.

Skillnets has a compelling proposition and we are proud of our core competence in the provision of enterprise-led, high-impact training. Rapid changes are taking place within the world of business, work and learning. In the midst of these changes, a challenge for Skillnets will be to remain firmly focused on the effectiveness of our offering and become a champion for innovation in enterprise learning and development. We are excited by this challenge. Time and again, the Skillnets model has proven itself to be innovative, resilient and adaptable to the ever-changing needs of enterprise.

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Appendices

1: About Skillnets

1.1   Our Mandate

Skillnets' mission is set out in a mandate with the Department of Education and Skills (DES). Importantly, the mandate provides scope to adapt to changing enterprise needs and outlines the role played by Skillnets as follows:

1   Skillnets' role is to act as an enterprise-led support body dedicated to the promotion and facilitation of enterprise training and workforce learning, as a key element in sustaining national competitiveness.

2   The primary aim of Skillnets should be to increase participation in enterprise training by companies to improve competitiveness and provide improved access for workers to skills development.

3   Skillnets will continue to foster and support an enterprise-led, networked and partnership approach to the provision of enterprise training and expand and develop that approach by supporting innovation and enhanced workplace and workforce retention/activation-related training.

4   Skillnets' broadly-based approach will encompass support for higher growth as well as vulnerable sectors ensuring, insofar as possible, that training is available to employees at all levels in participating private enterprises.

5   Clear focus is given at all times to value for money, efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of training and up-skilling.

1.2 Background to Skillnets

Established in 1999, Skillnets supports and works with businesses in Ireland, and their employees, to address their current and future skills needs. Skillnets provides high-quality training and development through 63 training networks in a range of regions and sectors. Our organisation is actively supported and guided by national employer and employee bodies such as Ibec, Small Firms Association (SFA), Construction Industry Federation (CIF), Chambers Ireland and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU). Skillnets receives funding from the National Training Fund (NTF) through the Department of Education and Skills (DES). Our organisation model, with its deep roots in enterprise, has enabled Skillnets to make a substantial and enduring contribution to the national skills agenda and to the competitiveness of Irish enterprise. Our key activities are:

Training Networks Programme (TNP)

A highly diverse range of programmes are delivered through the TNP, which is focused primarily on the SME sector. Training and education is delivered by 60 training networks in a wide range of industry sectors. 11,937 businesses participated in 5,337 TNP training and education courses delivered nationally in 2015.

Finuas Networks Programme (Finuas)

Finuas is dedicated to specialised training and education within the international financial services (IFS) sector. A range of industry-specific programmes are delivered by three Finuas training networks. Finuas training and education programmes focus on financial technology, banking and asset financing, corporate treasury, investment management, aviation finance, securitisation, re-insurance, legal and other professional services. 433 businesses in the IFS sector participated in 200 Finuas training and education courses delivered nationally in 2015.

ManagementWorks

ManagementWorks offers a suite of high-impact management development training and mentoring programmes to businesses (SMEs and owner-managers) in all industry sectors to assist them to grow in terms of sales, output and employment. 491 businesses participated in 42 ManagementWorks programmes delivered nationally in 2015.

Support for Job-seekers

Skillnets supports the needs of job-seekers by focusing on integrated training with enterprise on programmes delivered through TNP and Finuas, and dedicated conversion courses combined with work placements in areas of high employment potential through the Job-seekers Support Programme (JSSP). Skillnets networks trained 6,695 unemployed people, including 2,721 JSSP participants, in 2015.

Skillnets supports companies from all sectors in the economy to engage in training with their employees, and does so through networks of companies (training networks). Participating companies provide up to 50% in match funding to the grants approved by Skillnets for the various networks. This approach allows companies to achieve economies of scale, increase efficiency and provide training that is relevant to employees in specific sectors, regions or types of companies. There is also a significant benefit to be achieved through the sharing of business experience and advice via networking opportunities afforded by membership of a Skillnets training network.

1.3   Skillnets Stakeholder Environment

Department of Education and Skills (DES)

Department of Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation (DJEI)

Department of Social Protection (DSP)

Enterprise Ireland

IDA Ireland

Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN)

Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI)

SOLAS

Higher Education Authority (HEA)

National Skills Council

Member Companies   Learning Networks   Trainees

Skillnets
Enterprise-led learning networks

Skillnets Board & Staff

Industry Representative Groups

Employee Representative Groups

Training Providers

Higher/Further Education Institutions

Regional Skills Fora

Future Companies

New/Emerging Industry Sectors

Future Networks

1.4 Outputs in 2015

62 Networks

€25.6m
Total Investment

of which **€13.9m** was invested by Skillnets in grant support and **€11.7m** was invested by member companies

12,861
Member Companies

261,282
Training Days delivered to Employed People

60,419
Training Days delivered to Unemployed People

5,842
Training Courses

42,228
Employed People Trained

6,695
Unemployed People Trained
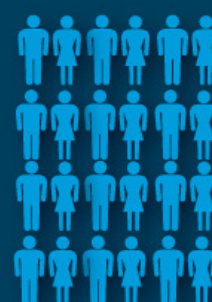
Skillnets Training Networks

1.5 Training Network Model

Training networks are comprised of a number of key stakeholders as per Figure 1.1 below. A steering group oversees and directs the training network and is made up of representatives of member companies. The group meets on a regular basis and makes management decisions. A contracting organisation manages the activities of the training network and receives the funds from Skillnets on behalf of the training network group and also collects the match funding from participating member companies.

A network manager manages the training network on a day-to-day basis. Member companies span the full range of industry sectors and can be enterprises of any size. Networks also interact regularly with a wide range of other bodies on behalf of their members, including training providers, higher education institutions and awarding bodies.

Figure 1.1: **Skillnets Training Network**

1.6 National Training Fund

Skillnets receives funding from the National Training Fund (NTF) through the Department of Education and Skills (DES). The NTF provides for expenditure to raise the skills of people in employment and those seeking employment, as well as funding for the identification of existing and future skills needs for the economy. The NTF is resourced by a levy on employers. Total budgeted NTF expenditure in 2015 was €362m[3], of which Skillnets received €16.2m.

An independent evaluation of all programmes managed by Skillnets is conducted on an annual basis in order to assess a range of key measures including adherence to NTF funding conditions. All independent evaluations undertaken since 2011 are available on the Skillnets website.

1.7 Development of the Statement of Strategy: Methodology and Summary Feedback

Methodology

Given the breadth of the Skillnets mandate and in line with good practice, the Board of Skillnets approved an extensive consultation process designed to gather feedback and recommendations from a wide range of stakeholders. Consultations were undertaken over a three-month period, commencing in May 2016 and comprised:

- The development of a strategy consultation position paper, which utilised a series of thematic headings and questions to enable interested stakeholders to input their feedback.

- The promotion of a public consultation campaign, facilitating individuals and organisations to make formal submissions to Skillnets for our Statement of Strategy.

- Focus groups with Governmental departments and other key stakeholder agencies.

- Focus groups with executives from network contracting organisations i.e. network promoters and representative bodies associated with Skillnets-funded training networks.

- Focus groups with the Skillnets network manager community who lead our training networks.

- Bilateral consultations with employer and employee representative groups.

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[3]   Part IV Estimates for Public Services 2015, p.26.

The development of the *Skillnets Statement of Strategy 2016–2019* is also influenced by:

- Ireland's economy, labour market, business environment and enterprise base.

- Ireland's standing with regard to competitiveness, entrepreneurship, innovation and talent.

- Provision within the higher education, further education and training sectors.

- Human resource development (HRD) in Ireland and learning and development best practice.

- The National Skills Strategy and other policy imperatives.

Summary of Feedback from the Consultation Process

- **Value of the Skillnets Proposition:**
  Skillnets is regarded as being of strategic importance to the national competitiveness agenda despite its comparatively small scale. Throughout the consultation phase, Skillnets was consistently highlighted as an example of an effective model of workforce development.

- **From Enterprise in General:**
  A pronounced shift from 'survive' to 'prosper'. Strong exports, a recovery in consumer spending and a general improvement in private investment sentiment has seen enterprise (on the whole) move from the survive phase to the prosper phase, with many growing and others actively considering growth/investment opportunities. This is tempered however, with concerns regarding both domestic and external risk factors.

- **From Skillnets Member Companies:**
  A willingness and capacity to increase match funding to invest in increased workforce development opportunities through Skillnets.

- **Talent Sourcing and Retention:**
  As labour market conditions improve, for many employers (particularly those in the ICT, food and beverage, and life sciences sectors) attracting and retaining skilled employees has become an issue. Scope to provide more training support is seen as vital.

- **Lifelong Learning:**
  There appears to be a greater appreciation of lifelong learning participation as a structural issue for Ireland, and the capacity within the Skillnets model in particular to address this challenge.

- **International Perspective:**
  It was noted throughout the consultations how positively Skillnets benchmarks as a best-practice example of a government-sponsored and enterprise-led training agency.

- **Role in Policy:**
  Skillnets is strongly encouraged to use its close proximity and broad access to enterprise to increase its contribution to the development of labour market policy in the area of skills and workforce development.

- **STEM Participation:**
  Skillnets has a significant presence in the key industry sectors that are linked to the STEM disciplines, including ICT, pharmachem and financial services. Feedback from Skillnets member companies active in these sectors emphasised the necessity to produce a higher number of work-ready graduates from STEM disciplines; and inculcate greater STEM competence amongst those already in employment.

- **Transversal Skills:**
  All stakeholders have highlighted the importance of developing transversal skills in the workforce (such as critical thinking, collaboration, commercial awareness, communication skills and general management competence). These skills are seen as vital for career progression and to underpin the capacity of enterprise to adapt to an ever-changing environment.

- **Employment Activation:**
  Feedback suggests a change of emphasis needs to be considered from initiatives appropriate for a time of crisis, to initiatives appropriate for a time of growth, with a significant focus now needed on the up-skilling of those in employment.

2: Review of Skillnets Strategic Goals 2012-2015

2.1 Introduction

In recent years, Skillnets' activities and strategic direction were driven by four strategic goals under the **Statement of Strategy 2012-2015**. This section examines achievements and progress made against each of these goals, outlined as follows:

1 To maintain and increase participation by enterprise in relevant learning activity that benefits the competitiveness of enterprise and the employability of the workforce.

2 To support learning in growth sectors by enabling enterprise to make the most of the available human capital in the workforce in pursuit of a sustainable growth path.

3 To provide meaningful support to job-seekers in an enterprise context, which provides opportunities to enhance their chances of gaining employment.

4 To contribute to the development of national enterprise and labour market activation policy.

2.2 Goal One

To maintain and increase participation by enterprise in relevant
learning activity that benefits the competitiveness of enterprise
and the employability of the workforce.

Participation

The number of participating member companies has remained broadly consistent, with
gradual increases year on year. There was a significant increase of 18% in the number
of member companies between 2014 and 2015. There is also a high percentage of new
companies availing of support from Skillnets training networks each year, indicating that
companies' needs and demands change over time. While these new companies seek
support every year, many also return after a period of absence, indicating a broader span
of company representation. The below figures reflect the number of member companies
between 2012 and 2015.

Between 2012 and 2015, network member companies invested approximately €44m in
Skillnets' subsidised, in-employment, training, up-skilling and re-skilling 157,684 employed
trainees.

Figure 2.1: **Member Companies 2012-2015**

Year	Member Companies
2015	12,861
2014	10,879
2013	10,145
2012	10,273
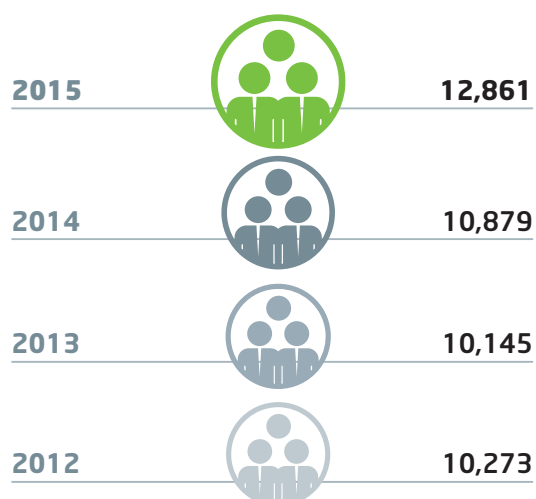
The number of employed trainees has seen steady growth year on year. The figures
overleaf reflect the number of employed trainees between 2012 and 2015.

Figure 2.2: **Employed Trainees 2012–2015**

2015	42,228
2014	39,591
2013	38,572
2012	37,293

The number of training days for people in employment increased by 41% between 2012 and 2015.

Figure 2.3: **Training Days for Employees 2012–2015**

2015	261,282
2014	232,844
2013	215,608
2012	185,729
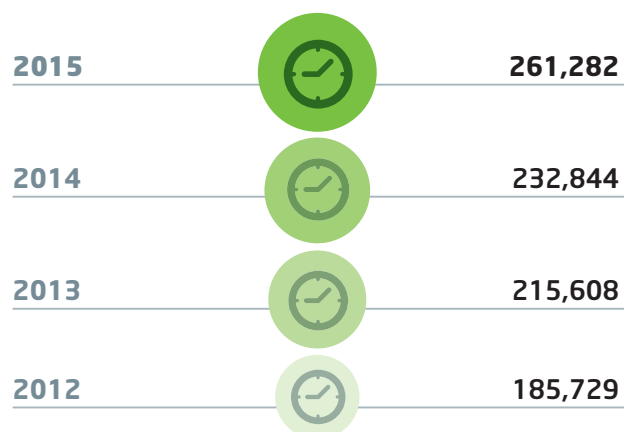
Investment in training by member companies has also remained consistent.

Figure 2.4: **Member Company Investment 2012–2015 (in Millions)**

2015	€11.7
2014	€11.1
2013	€10.4
2012	€10.9

Relevance

A key feature of the Skillnets model is the enterprise-led nature. Skillnets training networks led by enterprise steering groups provided training that assisted companies in filling skill gaps and enhancing the long-term performance of their business.

As part of Skillnets' aim to remain responsive to the labour market, we operate an 'Open Call for Proposals' to attract new training networks. This has typically happened on a two-year cycle. However, since 2015 this process has become more regular, with at least one new Call for Proposals (with two dates for application) in any given year to allow for a steadier stream of developing training networks.

The Call for Proposals in 2015–2016 resulted in eleven new training networks in a variety of sectors including agriculture, aviation, green energy, construction and freight, transport and logistics.

Competitiveness

Skillnets facilitates an annual independent evaluation measuring the outputs and impact of the Training Networks Programme (TNP), Finuas Networks Programme, ManagementWorks and Job-seekers Support Programme (JSSP). This yearly evaluation has returned consistently positive feedback from employers regarding the business benefits of Skillnets training.

Some business benefits cited by employers (between 2013 and 2015) are referenced below.

The percentage of companies who **agreed that Skillnets training enhanced the long-term performance of their business**:

2015	2014	2013
76%	82%	78%
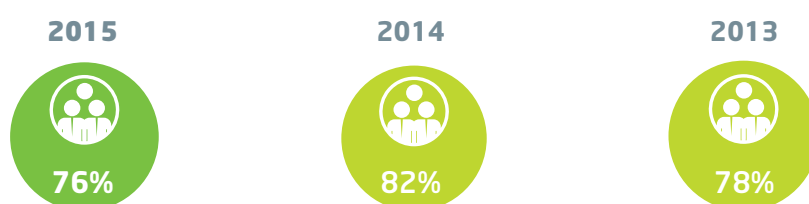
The percentage of companies who **agreed that Skillnets training helped to tackle skills shortages/skills gaps**:

2015	2014	2013
89%	97%	85%
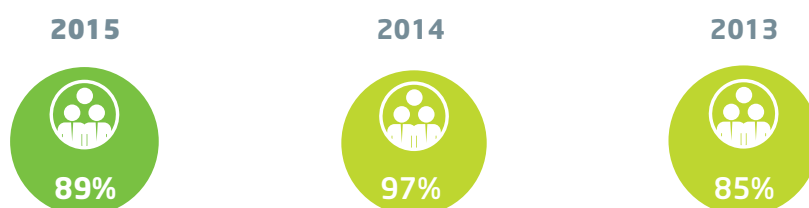
2.3 Goal Two

To support learning in growth sectors by enabling enterprise to make the most of the available human capital in the workforce, in pursuit of a sustainable growth path.

Growth Sectors

Skillnets placed considerable focus on supporting priority sectors to enable enterprise to maximise human capital through all Skillnets programmes. In total, 19 high-priority sector-specific networks provided quality training solutions to their relevant sectors, including ICT, medical devices, bio pharma, retail, food and beverage, manufacturing, green economy, agriculture and international financial services (IFS).

The aims and objectives of the Training Networks Programme (TNP), Finuas Networks Programme and ManagementWorks are consistent with the objectives and recommendations of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN). This includes industry-academia collaboration and the design and provision of flexible innovative learning methodologies that are aligned with identified training needs.

Alignment with National Strategy

A key element of Skillnets' strategy to date has been to ensure alignment with national policy, other national agencies and development plans.

In 2015, Skillnets made a contribution to the formulation of the *National Skills Strategy 2025*. There are two areas in this strategy where Skillnets has been assigned specific actions: to encourage companies to engage in our networks and assist them in meeting their skills needs; and to support the further development of skills assessment resources to help companies, especially SMEs, to accurately identify their skills needs. Skillnets also contributed to the development of the *Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019*.

Skillnets delivered a number of key actions targeted within successive *Action Plan for Jobs (2013-2016)*, mainly in regard to supports for the manufacturing, ICT and IFS sectors. Skillnets contributed to the development of the national *ICT Skills Action Plan 2014-2018* and *IFS 2020 – A Strategy for Ireland's International Financial Services Sector 2015-2020*. During the period, TNP and Finuas networks were centrally involved in implementing actions contained in these national policy publications to support learning in the high-growth ICT and IFS sectors.

UX design, aviation leasing, bio manufacturing and medical technology regulatory affairs are examples of a much broader range of new programmes developed by Skillnets training networks to support growth sectors.

2.4 Goal Three

To provide meaningful support to job-seekers in an enterprise context, which provides opportunities to enhance their chances of gaining employment.

In 2010 Skillnets made the decision, with support from the Department of Education and Skills (DES), to adapt its operating model to accommodate the skills-development needs of job-seekers. By focusing on the emerging needs of industry and identified skills gaps, Skillnets has sought to implement relevant training programmes to enable job activation, conversion programmes and employment progression.

There are two primary entry routes for unemployed trainees on to Skillnets programmes:

- **TNP and Finuas Programmes –**
  Participation in training with employees on courses in demand from enterprise.

- **Job-seekers Support Programme (JSSP) –**
  Exclusive courses for the unemployed, including a key work placement component to gain relevant skills and on-the-job experience.

The figures below (Figure 2.5) reflect the number of job-seekers trained and correlating training days across all programmes between 2012 and 2015.

Figure 2.5: **Training for the Unemployed 2012–2015**

Job-seekers

Year		Total
2015	👤👤👤👤👤👤👤👤👤👤👤	**6,695**
2014	👤👤👤👤👤👤👤👤👤👤👤	**6,858**
2013	👤👤👤👤👤👤👤👤👤👤	**7,306**
2012	👤👤👤👤👤👤👤👤👤👤	**7,012**

Training Days

Year	Days
2015	60,419
2014	58,686
2013	64,567
2012	53,381
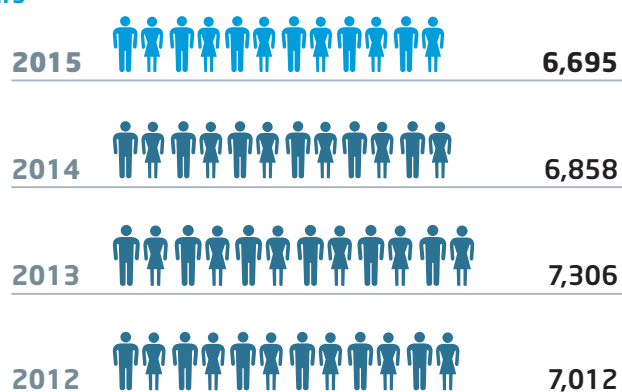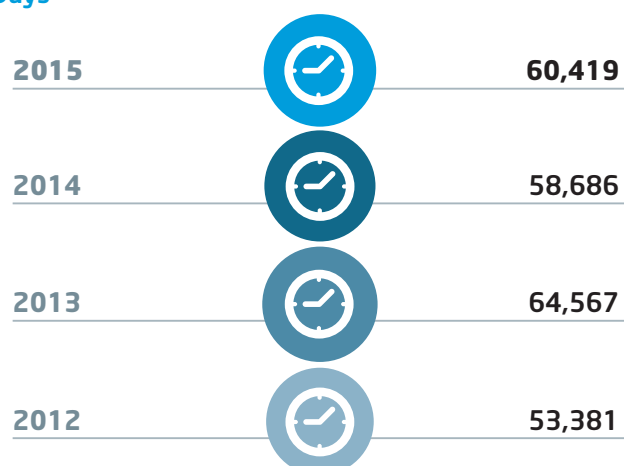
Outcomes from the JSSP have been documented in independent evaluations and indicate strong employment progression outcomes for participants. The figures below indicate the percentage of participants **who secured employment or started their own business after participating in the JSSP programme**:

2015	2014	2013
76%	82%	78%
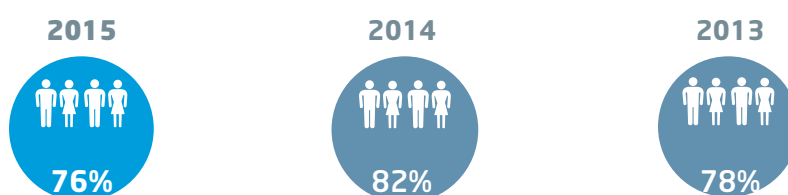
Skillnets and the Department of Social Protection (DSP) agreed a Protocol for Co-operation in 2013, which aims to establish stronger links between Skillnets and DSP at national and local level. This protocol was subsequently cited by the OECD[4] as an example of effective inter-agency collaboration to raise awareness and uptake of training by those on the Live Register.

It has become increasingly difficult in recent years to source suitable job-seekers for courses, an issue compounded by a significant reduction in available job-seekers as the economy recovers and businesses move towards growth and expansion.

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[4] Local Job Creation: How Employment & Training Agencies Can Help, OECD Programme on Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED). Sept. 2013, pp.58-59.

2.5 Goal Four

To contribute to the development of national enterprise and labour
market activation policy.

Skillnets has engaged in a wide range of collaborative activities with many stakeholders,
resulting in an improved provision of support for enterprise and the workforce. Some
specific examples include:

- Membership of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN). Skillnets continues
  to work with the EGFSN to determine demand for the skills identified in their wide
  range of sectoral skills studies. This has included the participation of Skillnet
  network managers and steering groups in research on the future skills needs of the
  manufacturing sector.

- The Regional Skills Fora, led by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) aims
  to foster better engagement between the public education and training system,
  employers and other regional stakeholders, in order to build skills in regions across
  the country. Skillnets is represented on each of these Skills Fora by regionally-based
  Skillnets network managers. Other Skills Fora participants include representatives
  from industry and from the further and higher education bodies in each region.

- Skillnets also strengthened links with other state-funded training schemes for
  job-seekers and employers through its participation in the 'Skills to Work' initiative
  which is coordinated by the Department of the Taoiseach. The Skills to Work portal
  provides a one-stop-shop, making it easier for job-seekers and employers to access
  the broad range of skills initiatives and supports available from the Department of
  Education and Skills (DES) and the Department of Social Protection (DSP), including
  Skillnets, JobBridge, JobsPlus, Springboard and Momentum.

Skillnets has also contributed to a wide range of policy areas, through membership of specific groups, partnerships, submissions, and through the implementation of designated actions agreed across a range of national policy and strategy publications:

- Action Plan for Jobs - National Plan

- Action Plan for Jobs - Regional Plans

- Construction 2020 - A Strategy for a Renewed Construction Sector

- DES Regional Skills Fora

- DJEI Retail Forum

- Enterprise 2025 - Ireland's National Enterprise Policy 2015-2025

- European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP)

- Future Skills Needs in the Freight, Transport & Logistics Sector 2015-2020

- Future Skills Needs of the Biopharma Industry in Ireland 2016

- Future Skills Requirements in the Hospitality Sector 2015-2020

- Future Skills Requirements in the Manufacturing Sector to 2020

- Higher Education Authority (HEA) - Enterprise Engagement Strategy

- ICT Skills Action Plan 2014-2018

- IFS2020 – A Strategy for Ireland's International Financial Services Sector 2015-2020

- Ireland's Competitiveness Challenge 2015

- Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025

- Mentoring Review Group

- Pathways to Work 2016-2020

- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) - Occupational Standards group

- SME State Bodies group

- Further Education and Training (FET) National Strategy 2014-2019

3: Skillnets Strategy: Contextual Factors

3.1 Introduction

In this section, consideration is given to important contextual factors which are likely to have an impact on the current and future activities of Skillnets.

3.2 Ireland's Economy

The Irish economy has emerged from a financial crisis and a deep recession. In 2016, it is envisaged that the economy will expand by over 4%, maintaining Ireland's position as the fastest-growing OECD economy for the third year running. The public deficit has fallen steadily to 2% of GDP and employment growth is considered robust. The unemployment rate has declined significantly from a peak of 15.1%[5] to 7.8% in July 2016.[6] Market conditions have remained favourable to Ireland following the exit from the bailout in 2013.[7]

Risks remain. A deceleration in demand from trading partners or significant currency fluctuations have the potential to expose an open economy like Ireland's.[8] Debt levels, both private and public, continue to be elevated, and both long-term and youth unemployment remain high.

Against this backdrop, the Government has an ambitious plan to maximise Ireland's economic growth. Entitled *Building on Recovery: Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2016–2021*, the Capital Plan aims to underpin economic recovery by directly investing €27 billion over six years to boost competitiveness, improve public services, and lay the foundations for future growth.[9]

5   'Ireland's Economy – Still Riding the Globalisation Wave', OECD Observer, 2016 [Online].
6   'Irish unemployment rate steady at 7.8% in July', Business World, 2016 [Online].
7   IHS Country Report, 2016, p.2.
8   European Economic Forecast, Spring 2016, p.78.
9   2016 Action Plan for Jobs, 2015, p.57.

3.3 Economic Growth

The early phase of Ireland's economic recovery was primarily export-led[10], and exporting companies are vitally important from the perspective of sustainable job creation and economic growth. In recent years, the composition and range of goods exported from Ireland has become increasingly concentrated within computer and business services, and on chemical, medical and pharmaceutical products.[11] Skillnets has a significant presence in each of these sectors.

The National Competitiveness Council (NCC) notes that recent economic growth is being driven by significant increases in the contribution of domestic demand and personal consumption.[12] Personal consumption grew by 3.5% during 2015, due to the improving situation in employment and low consumer price inflation.[13] Driven by multinational enterprises and the domestic sector, the OECD has characterised the strength of the Irish economy as 'broad-based',[14] while the European Commission has highlighted the resilience of the Irish economy to the recent deceleration in world output.[15] The Irish economy is projected to continue its robust expansion and it is envisaged that both exports and business investment will remain solid and that employment will grow steadily.[16]

Whilst uncertainty surrounds any long-term economic outlook, the forecasts suggest that Irish economic growth will continue and the domestic sector will play an increasingly important role in this growth. This has implications for enterprises associated with Skillnets, many of whom are SMEs reliant on domestic markets. It suggests that an increasing number of SMEs will have both the requirement and the financial capacity to engage in workforce development. This is important from the perspective of leveraging Skillnets to increase the number of domestic SMEs involved in in-employment training and workforce development.

[10]   Ireland's Competitiveness Scorecard 2016, National Competitiveness Council, 2016, pp.57-59.
[11]   Ibid.
[12]   Ibid., p.108.
[13]   European Economic Forecast, 2016, p.78.
[14]   Developments in Individual OECD and Selected Non-Member Economies, OECD, 2016, p.158.
[15]   European Economic Forecast, Spring 2016, p.78.
[16]   Developments in individual OECD and Selected Non-Member Economies, OECD, 2016, p.158.

3.4 Recent Referendum in the United Kingdom

While the general economic outlook is positive, consideration must be given to the potential impact of the decision by the UK electorate to leave the European Union (Brexit). Irish manufacturing companies sell approximately 43% of their exports to the UK and 30% of all employment in Ireland is in sectors that are heavily related to exports to the UK.[17] The Central Bank of Ireland predicts that Brexit will have a negative impact on Ireland, while acknowledging that the impact cannot as yet be fully determined.[18]

Clearly, much depends on the capacity of the UK political system, as highlighted by Ibec, to instil confidence in consumers and business over the coming months.[19] Nevertheless, the UK decision has heightened uncertainty in many economic spheres, eroding confidence in the future of the European Union and the Single Market.[20]

Given the impact of Brexit on the decline of the Sterling exchange rate, the immediate effect of Brexit is to make Irish exports to the UK more expensive. The agri-food and tourism sectors are likely to be disproportionately affected[21] and representative bodies have highlighted the importance of additional supports for such sectors and for SMEs, given that the UK remains a particularly important market for small indigenous businesses.[22]

While Brexit will undoubtedly create challenges for enterprise in Ireland, it may also create opportunities. PwC has highlighted the attractiveness of the UK for financial technology (FinTech) companies. If the impact of Brexit is to restrict the free movement of labour and to increase regulatory complexity, Ireland could benefit as the only English-speaking location within the EU, potentially becoming a new FinTech Global Hub.[23]

Supporting the FinTech sector is a policy priority within *IFS2020*, the Government's action plan for the international financial services sector. It is also a priority for Skillnets' Finuas networks, with a number of relevant actions targeted within the *Finuas 2020 Strategy*. Two of the three Finuas networks are currently involved in developing a series of post-graduate, part-time and online FinTech programme offerings.

One in six of Skillnets networks operate in the agri-business, food and beverage sectors, so Brexit will clearly have implications for a significant number of network member companies. In order to moderate the impact of Brexit, it is likely that these businesses will require specific training interventions in the coming years to enhance their productivity, their capacity to enter new export markets and to further improve their competitiveness.

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[17] Brexit – The Implications for Business, PwC, 2016, p.13.
[18] Central Bank of Ireland, Quarterly Bulletin 3, July 2016, p.8.
[19] Ibec Priorities Budget 2017, 2016, p.6.
[20] OECD Economic Outlook, Volume 2016, Issue 1, p.7.
[21] Central Bank of Ireland, Quarterly Bulletin 3, July 2016, p.8.
[22] Ibec Priorities Budget 2017, 2016, p.1.
[23] Brexit – The Implications for Business, PwC, 2016, p.26.

3.5 Regional Economic Perspective

The five-year €250m *Regional Action Plan for Jobs* was launched by the Government in 2015 in order to harness the full potential of Ireland's regions to create employment.[24] All regions (as listed below) have now developed their own Regional Action Plan, with an over-arching target of increasing the number of people in employment per region by 10 to 15%:

- South East: Carlow, Kilkenny, South Tipperary, Wexford, Waterford
- South West: Kerry and Cork
- Mid West: Clare, North Tipperary, Limerick
- West: Mayo, Roscommon, Galway
- Midlands: Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath
- Border: Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan, Sligo
- Mid East: Kildare, Meath, Wicklow
- Dublin

The National Competitiveness Council notes that regions successful in facilitating industry clusters "have been found to achieve higher levels of productivity, innovation, employment and prosperity."[25] Ireland's international standing in relation to national cluster development exceeds the EU average[26] with well-established regional clusters in biopharma, medical devices, ICT and financial services.

Through the National Clustering Initiative, the Government will further advance regional clustering through a range of measures that enhance co-operation between industry, research institutions, education and other stakeholders, as well as through the establishment of industry networks, the appointment of cluster development managers and the development of regional brands.[27]

From a skills perspective, the Regional Skills Fora established by the Department of Education and Skills in 2015 will facilitate dialogue between employers, and education and training providers at local level, in order to match provision with identified enterprise needs. Since its inception, Skillnets has been a stakeholder in the development of each Regional Skills Forum.

Skillnets plays an important role in regional skills development. Every network funded by Skillnets is a cluster of companies based on sector, location or a combination of both. A unique benefit of Skillnets' model is that it creates a space for competitors to learn together, fostering a spirit of networking and collaboration. Many of these clusters/networks are mature, having been established between 8-10 years ago, and are deeply embedded within the regions.

Given the obvious synergies between Skillnets networks, the Regional Skills Fora and the industry networks planned as part of the National Clustering Initiative, there remains a clear function for Skillnets in regional development. These initiatives can be strengthened by their connection with well-established, cohesive and collaborative enterprise training networks via Skillnets.

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[24] Regional Action Plan for Jobs, 2015.
[25] Ireland's Competitiveness Scorecard 2016, National Competitiveness Council, 2016, p.30.
[26] Ibid., p.15.
[27] 2016 Action Plan for Jobs, 2015, p.28.

3.6 National Competitiveness

Competitiveness has been an essential component in Ireland's economic recovery and in our continued ability to secure Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). IDA Ireland has stated that a continued focus on competitiveness is required "if Ireland is to replicate its past successes in FDI into the future."[28] Ireland's relative international competitiveness as measured by a range of indices has improved since 2011. Ireland moved from 16th place in 2011 to 7th place in 2015 in the IMD's *World Competitiveness Yearbook,* and from 25th place to 24th place in the WEF *Global Competitiveness Report.*

Figure 3.1: **Ireland's Global Competitiveness Rankings**
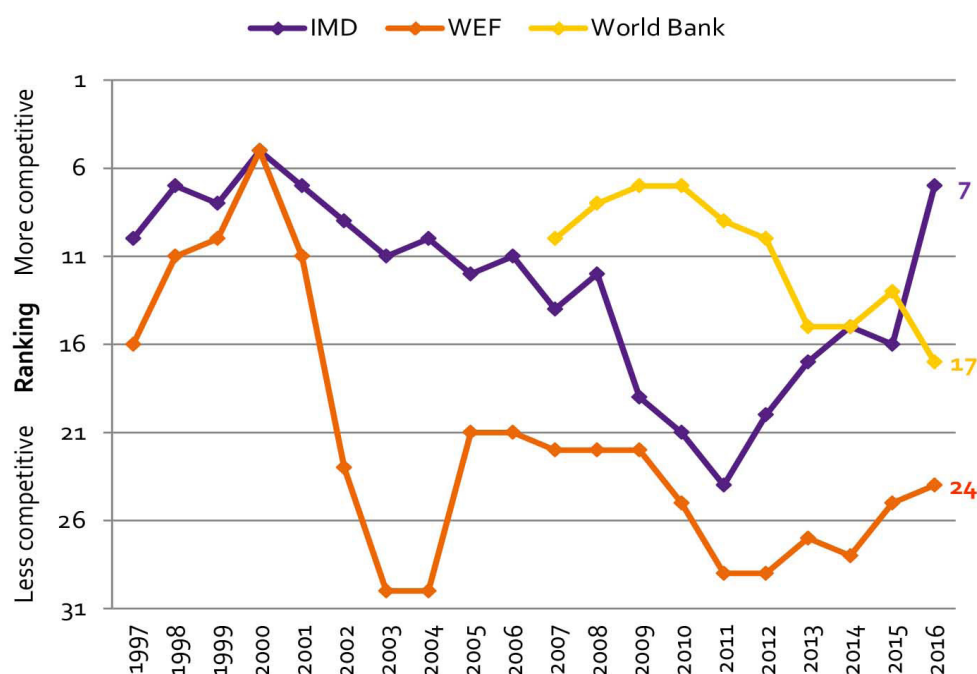
Source: Ireland's Competitiveness Scorecard 2016 (p.7)

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[28] Winning: Foreign direct Investment 2015-2019, IDA Ireland, 2015, p.12.

While the results of these international benchmarking indices are very positive, the National Competitiveness Council has highlighted a number of key challenges:[29]

i Enhancing productivity growth
There is a need to further enhance productivity with a particular emphasis on investment in people, technology and processes, while ensuring availability of a large cohort of managers who will drive productivity.

ii Broadening the export base
There is a need for greater internationalisation of Irish enterprise while ensuring that Ireland stays at the forefront of technology and innovative activity, developing new products and facilitating new sectors and markets.

iii Improving talent
There is a need for the education and training system to respond to enterprise requirements, given that up-skilling of talent is associated with large increases in both innovation and productivity. Up-skilling, talent development and career progression strategies at company level remain vital.

To sustain our competitiveness, there is an evident need for Skillnets networks to continue to provide the vital training for member companies to enhance technology utilisation, process streamlining, product development and management/workforce capability.

29   Ireland's Competitiveness Scorecard 2016, National Competitiveness Council, 2016, p.8.

3.7   Enterprise in Ireland

It is important that the Skillnets *Statement of Strategy 2016-2019* takes account of both the policy context and the general profile of enterprises operating in Ireland, in order to maximise our relevance and impact.

The policy context is shaped by Ireland's *National Enterprise Policy 2015–2025 (Enterprise 2025)*, co-ordinated by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (DJEI). *Enterprise 2025* supports enterprises in Ireland through the implementation of a range of actions designed to enhance sectoral and entrepreneurship ecosystems, cost competitiveness, infrastructure, innovation capacity and productivity, as well as assisting Irish-owned companies to scale their businesses.[30]

There were approximately 238,000 active enterprises in Ireland in 2014.[31] The services sector accounted for 51% of all businesses in 2014, making it Ireland's largest sector of enterprise. The construction sector accounted for ca. 1 in 5 enterprises in 2014, as did the retail and wholesale trade sector.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) accounted for 69% of total people employed in private enterprise, with the remainder employed in large enterprises. Figure 3.2 provides a breakdown of the total population of people employed in private enterprise by enterprise size.

Figure 3.2: **The Proportion of Employed People in Ireland by Enterprise Size Class**
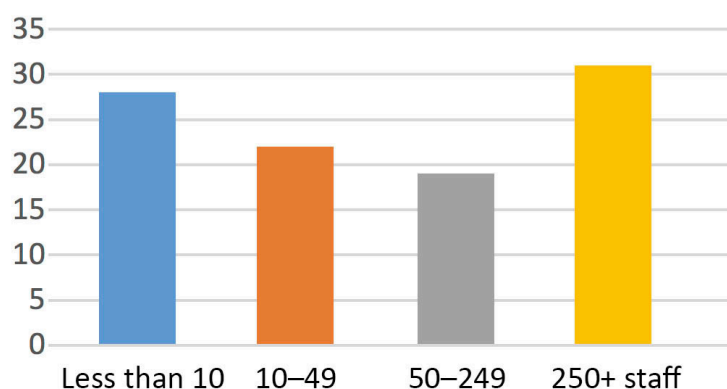
Source: Business Demography 2014, Central Statistics Office, July 2016 [Online].

The CSO business profile contains important insights for Skillnets. While enterprise participation in Skillnets training grew by 18% to ca. 13,000 businesses in 2015, this figure represents only 5% of the total number of active enterprises in Ireland. Furthermore, future provision by construction, retail and service sector training networks will need to address the particular needs of the significant number of start-ups likely to be created within these sectors.

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30   Enterprise 2025, 2015, pp.5-6.
31   Business Demography 2014, Central Statistics Office, July 2016 [Online].

3.8   Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Ireland

"Entrepreneurs need access to innovative ideas, products, processes and services. Equally, innovative products, processes and services need entrepreneurs who are prepared to take risks and develop appropriate business strategies to bring ideas to market. Maintaining and increasing our capacity for innovation requires fundamental support for entrepreneurship".

National Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship (2014, p.34)

Ireland's business landscape is conducive to entrepreneurship. The 2016 Global Entrepreneurship Index (GEI)[32] ranked Ireland 12th of 132 countries for business start-ups. Ireland ranked 19th in 2014.[33] 16,257 new start-ups (an important indicator of entrepreneurship) were created in 2014, which is the highest number of start-ups created in a single year since 2009.[34]

While Ireland ranked highly on the GEI, the index also highlighted challenges (see Figure 3.3 overleaf). Two challenges are emphasised here. The first relates to 'opportunity perception': beliefs held by entrepreneurs about the size of the domestic market in Ireland.[35] This lower score highlights the continued importance of supports that assist entrepreneurs to develop internationalisation strategies.

The second challenge relates to product/process innovation, enabled by Research and Development (R&D). When combining state and enterprise investment in R&D in 2014, Ireland ranked below the Euro Area –15 and well below the OECD – 27. Ireland is also highly reliant on foreign-owned companies based here, which accounted for 65% of business investment in R&D during 2014.[36] The data underscores the need to ensure that management development training aimed at indigenous enterprises encourages innovation and provides practical strategies for engaging in innovation, innovation networks and R&D.

[32] 2016 Global Entrepreneurship Index, GEDI, 2015.
[33] 2014 Global Entrepreneurship Index, GEDI, 2013.
[34] Business Demography 2014, Central Statistics Office, Jul. 2016 [Online].
[35] 2016 Global Entrepreneurship Index, GEDI, 2015, p.19.
[36] Ireland's Competitiveness Scorecard 2016, National Competitiveness Council, 2016, p.91.

Figure 3.3: **Comparison of 14 Entrepreneurship 'Pillars'**

Source: 2016 Global Entrepreneurship Index (p.171).

Policy makers are acutely aware of the importance of promoting a culture of innovation and entrepreneurial endeavour. The *National Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship in Ireland* (2014) highlights the key role played by education stakeholders in re-inforcing positive perceptions of entrepreneurship as part of a broader cultural shift towards entrepreneurship.[37]

Certain demographic groups are underrepresented within the entrepreneurial population, including females, young people and seniors. Work undertaken by the Government to "promote entrepreneurial role models, foster positive attitudes to risk taking, teach basic business management and address skills gaps"[38] needs to continue. The entrepreneurship strategy frames enabling actions within an entrepreneurship ecosystem (see Figure 3.4) and aims to increase the number of start-ups in Ireland, and significantly enhance their capacity to scale.

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[37]   National Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship in Ireland, p.20.
[38]   Ibid.

Figure 3.4: **Entrepreneurship Ecosystem in Ireland - 6 Essential Elements**
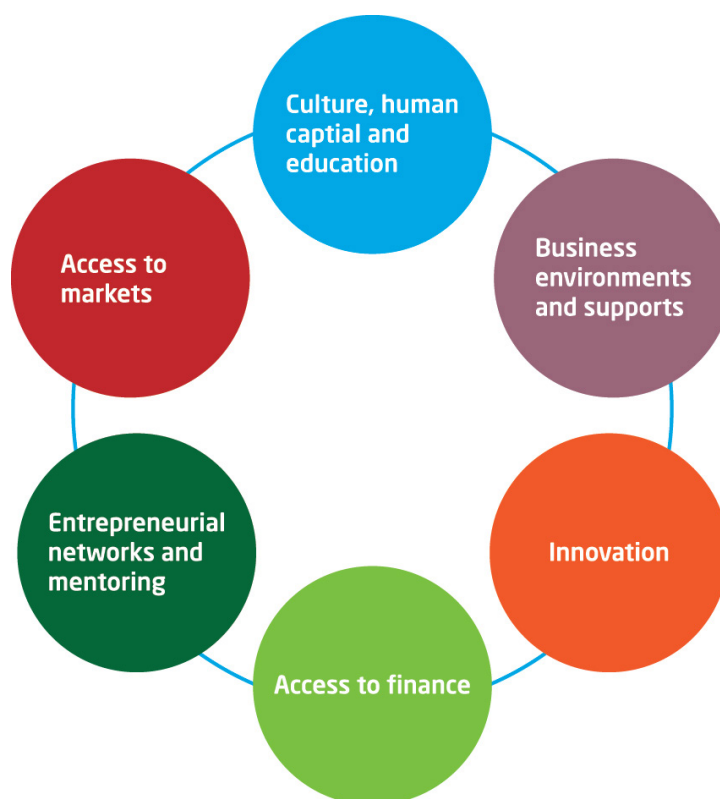
Source: National Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship in Ireland (p.11).

Skillnets plays an important role within entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystems. Firstly, training networks and the ManagementWorks initiative directly address the 'human capital' element by providing relevant training as determined by entrepreneurs.

Secondly, by providing high-quality opportunities for development, training networks help to address the innovation element. According to the National Competitiveness Council (NCC), "training and up-skilling of talent is associated with large increases in innovation."[39] While the NCC conclusion refers to up-skilling in general, it is worth noting that Skillnets training networks and ManagementWorks deliver numerous programmes relating to innovation, product and process design.

Thirdly, the NCC points out that regions that reach critical mass in the development of clusters, including SME networks, have been found to achieve higher levels of innovation.[40] There are countless examples of Skillnets member companies that have enhanced their innovation by leveraging membership of a Skillnets training network and through activities such as: deriving insights from site visits to other companies in their sector/region, benchmarking against high-performing peers in their sector/region and collaborating in business partnerships with other network member companies.

Enhancing enterprise collaboration and partnerships are at the core of Government and EU policies aimed at stimulating entrepreneurship and innovation.[41]

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[39] Ireland's Competitiveness Scorecard 2016, National Competitiveness Council, 2016, p.8.
[40] Ibid, p.30.
[41] European Semester Thematic Fiche – Industrial Competitiveness Policy, 2016, p.12.

3.9 Intrapreneurship

Intrapreneurs have been defined as employees who "initiate new business activities within their current employment, or have been involved in the development of new activities for their employer, such as developing new goods or services, or setting up a business unit, a new establishment or subsidiary."[42] Employers value employees with initiative, the ability to adapt to changing environments and to accept challenging tasks. An annual report on Ireland by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) found that 11.8% of people in employment were involved in new activities on behalf of their employer, a key measure of intrapreneurship, over the previous 3 years. Focusing only on those in employment, GEM found that Ireland ranked 2nd in a comparison of over 30 countries in relation to intrapreneurship. Ireland ranked higher than countries such as the UK, Belgium and Norway, and was second only to Denmark.[43]

During Skillnets' *Statement of Strategy 2016-2019* consultation process, stakeholders consistently highlighted the importance of developing transversal skills in the workforce (such as critical thinking, collaboration, commercial awareness, and general management competence). From a learner perspective, such skills are vital because they enhance efficacy, versatility, employability and career progression. From the business perspective, these skills are equally vital because they underpin intrapreneurship and the capacity of enterprise to adapt to an ever-changing environment.

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[42]   Global Entrepreneurship Monitor: The Annual Report for Ireland, 2014, p.27.
[43]   Ibid.

3.10 Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is vital to the success of organisations.[44] When employees feel empowered and have a sense of ownership over their jobs, levels of engagement are significantly higher.[45]

A recent international study conducted by Aon Hewitt indicates that 39% of employees are not engaged.[46] Research has found that employees' participation in HRD practices such as mentoring programmes, leadership development initiatives, and other learning opportunities are significantly related to their cognitive, behavioural, and emotional engagement levels.[47] Career development and work training initiatives that are specifically directed toward personal growth and development significantly impact engagement levels.[48]

Enterprises developing engagement strategies must carefully consider workforce demographics. In Ireland, demographic upheavals have made the workforce younger, older and more diverse. According to Deloitte, "millennials now make up more than half of the workforce, bringing with them a high expectation for rewarding, purposeful work experience, constant learning, development opportunities and dynamic career progression."[49] Research also suggests that Generation Y and Z are goal and achievement-oriented, with a preference for active learning and social activities.[50]

In an independent survey of TNP member companies undertaken in 2016, 70% of Finuas companies and 74% of TNP member companies confirmed that participation in network training and education had made a positive impact on employee engagement.[51] Clearly organisations need to embrace employee engagement and the key role played by learning and development, if they wish to attract and retain top talent.

[44]   Wollard et al. (2011). "Antecedents to Employee Engagement: A Structured Review of the Literature." Advances in Developing Human Resources.
[45]   Deloitte, Global Human Capital Trends 2016, p.49 [Online].
[46]   Aon Hewitt (2014), 2014 Trends in Global Employee Engagement, Aon Hewitt, Lincolnshire, IL.
[47]   Shuck, et al. (2014) "Human Resource Development Practices and Employee Engagement: Examining the Connection with Employee Turnover Intentions." Human Resource Development Quarterly.
[48]   Mumtaz Ali et al. (2016, p.420) "The link between training satisfaction, work engagement and turnover intention", European Journal of Training and Development.
[49]   Deloitte, Global Human Capital Trends 2016, p.4.
[50]   CIPD (2015, p.6). "Developing the Next Generation" [Online].
[51]   Evaluation of Skillnets Training Networks Programme, Finuas and ManagementWorks in 2015, Indecon, 2016, p.24.

4: Labour Market, Skills and Education

4.1 Ireland's Labour Market

After a prolonged decline from 2008 to 2012, employment is growing again. The National Competitiveness Council (NCC) notes that employment has grown for 14 consecutive quarters – it grew by 2.3% in 2015, increasing total employment by 44,000 to 1.98 million.[52] Of the 1.98 million, approximately 1.2 million are employed in the private sector.[53] The NCC also noted that full-time employment accounts for the majority of the increase and that, in the main, growth is balanced from both a sectoral and regional perspective.

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[52]   Ireland's Competitiveness Scorecard 2016, National Competitiveness Council, 2016, p.25.
[53]   CSO, QNHS Q1, 2016.

As mentioned, the unemployment rate has fallen from a peak of ca. 15% to ca. 8%. By the end of 2015, the number of unemployed and long-term unemployed people in Ireland was 187,500 and 102,100 respectively. Compared with 2010, unemployment had decreased by 40%. Despite these positive trends, the percentage of the population in Ireland living in very low work intensity (VLWI) households[54] is the highest in the EU.[55] The NCC warns that long-term unemployment and youth unemployment remain high and that long-term youth unemployment remains "a very serious challenge in Ireland."[56] See Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: **Comparison of Youth Employment across the EU**
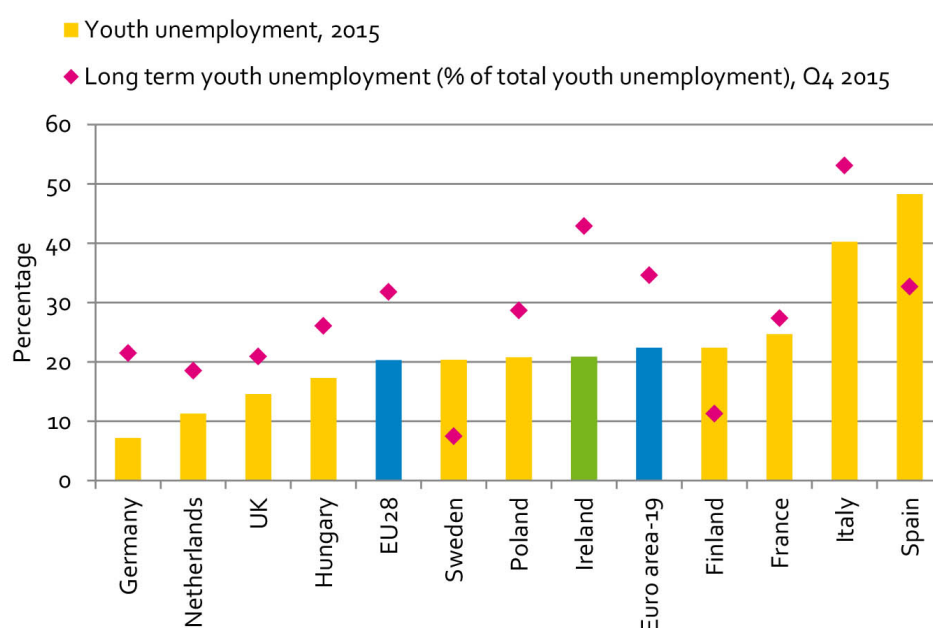
Source: Ireland's Competitiveness Scorecard 2016, (p.75).

Enterprise 2025 states an ambition to have 2.18 million people at work by the end of 2020, ensure that all regions benefit from employment increases, and reduce the national unemployment rate to 6%. In the drive to further reduce the unemployment rate, effective labour market activation strategies remain necessary.

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54 Household work intensity is the 'ratio of the total number of months that all working-age household members have worked and the total number of months the same household members theoretically could have worked during the same period' Source: Eurostat.
55 Council of the European Union – Country Specific Recommendations – Ireland, 2016, p.7.
56 Ireland's Competitiveness Scorecard 2016, National Competitiveness Council, 2016, p.26.

4.2   Labour Market Activation

Active labour market policies (ALMPs) are government interventions within the labour market that are designed to help the unemployed to secure work. Recent programmes developed by the State include the Youth Employability Initiative and JobPath, an activation programme launched in 2015 that caters mainly for the long-term unemployed. Other well-established initiatives that provide job-seekers with market-relevant skills include Springboard, Momentum, and the ICT Skills Conversion Programme, as well as Skillnets' Job-seekers Support Programme (JSSP).

Current labour market activation policy in Ireland recognises the importance of continuing to provide targeted measures to increase employment, while increasing the participation of historically under-represented groups. At the peak of Ireland's economic boom in the mid-2000s, ca. 150,000 people were in receipt of job-seeker payments while a further ca. 200,000 were in receipt of disability, one parent family and other payments.[57] According to the Government's *Pathways to Work 2016-2020* strategy, these individuals "were, in effect, excluded from the labour market."[58] For this reason, while people on the Live Register were the primary focus of activation policy in recent years, the focus has now shifted to include people with disabilities, part-time workers and carers returning to the workplace.[59]

A key objective of the *National Skills Strategy 2025* is to focus on active inclusion to support participation in education, training and the labour market. Skillnets has provided education and training to ca. 37,000 unemployed people since 2010, and independent evaluations have reported a high rate of subsequent conversion to employment. However, the number of unemployed people trained by Skillnets has declined annually since the economy has begun to recover. While Skillnets will continue to play a role in labour market activation initiatives, unemployment trends suggest that this activity will reduce and become more targeted over time.

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[57]   Pathways to Work 2016-2020, p.4.
[58]   Ibid.
[59]   Ibid.

4.3 Skills, Knowledge and Talent Management

Skills have been described as the "global currency in the 21st Century."[60] This comparison is apt because skills and currencies share some common characteristics. They are the basis of national and international trade, they are becoming less and less tied to particular jurisdictions, both fluctuate, both are prone to external shocks, and correctly estimating their future value is fraught with complexity.

Given their volatility, identifying relevant skills is an iterative process and effective skills 'diagnostics' at enterprise and national level are of pivotal importance. Once relevant skills are identified, they need to be developed throughout our workforce. If Ireland is to maximise its competitive advantage, we need to ensure that skills are effectively taught, learned and applied as part of the broader development of a strong culture of lifelong learning at enterprise and national levels.[61]

The *2016 Action Plan for Jobs* recognises that a high-quality talent pool is "becoming the defining feature of modern competitive economies" and the "attraction of talent, including the provision of attractive places to live and work, are key to building on current levels of FDI job-creation."[62] As Ireland competes with other jurisdictions, it will be vital to retain our existing talent within Ireland, to encourage our emigrants to return home and to attract high-skilled migrant workers. As more options open up for skilled workers in Ireland's growing economy, companies compete in the so-called 'war for talent'. As employment levels grow, more and more enterprises must be supported to develop and implement effective "retraining, up-skilling, talent management and career progression strategies."[63]

60   OECD Skills Strategy: The Pathway of Choice, OECD Observer, 2016 [Online].
61   National Skills Strategy 2025, 2016, p.70.
62   2016 Action Plan for Jobs, 2015, p.16.
63   Ireland's Competitiveness Scorecard 2016, National Competitiveness Council, 2016, p.8.

4.4 National Skills Strategy

Maintaining a well-skilled and educated workforce has been a key pillar of economic development and investment in Ireland. The *National Skills Strategy 2025* published by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) aims to underpin Ireland's growth as an economy and society over the coming years. The strategy places a significant emphasis on the need for up-skilling of those who are already in employment, and a requirement for employers to participate in the skills development agenda though active collaboration with education and training providers. The six strategic objectives of the *National Skills Strategy 2025* are set out below:[64]

1   Education and training providers will place a stronger focus on providing skills development opportunities that are relevant to the needs of learners, society and the economy.

2   Employers will participate actively in the development of skills and make effective use of skills in their organisations to improve productivity and competitiveness.

3   The quality of teaching and learning at all stages of education and training will be continually enhanced and evaluated.

4   People across Ireland will engage more in lifelong learning.

5   There will be a specific focus on active inclusion to support participation in education and training and the labour market.

6   Increase the supply of skills to the labour market.

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[64]   National Skills Strategy 2025, 2016, p.17.

4.5 Skills Matching

A key challenge for Ireland will be to supply the quantity and quality of skills required for 220,000 new jobs targeted by the Government over the next five years, while meeting demand for an estimated 400,000 job replacements by 2020, as people leave the workforce.[65]

While multiple factors influence the transition to employment and between employments, one of the single most important factors relates to skills. 'Skills mismatches' refer to the discrepancy between the skills sought by employers and the skills offered by job-seekers and workers. If persistent, skills mismatch can lead to economic and social losses for individuals, employers and society.[66]

A report produced by the European Commission in 2015 found that Ireland had a high level of skills mismatch within the EU, as measured by the number of workers deemed over, or under-qualified for their current roles.[67] While the report's authors stated that the findings should be interpreted cautiously, Ireland cannot become complacent in this regard. By virtue of being enterprise-led, the Skillnets model significantly reduces skills mismatch in Ireland by providing the specific skills required by employers within their region or sector.

4.6 Current Skills Shortages

As would be expected in a growing economy, Ireland is experiencing skills shortages across a number of sectors and occupations. An analysis of vacancies considered difficult to fill, and of enterprise participation in the employment permit scheme, shows the extent of shortages and the sectors within which they arise.

4.6.1 Difficult to Fill Vacancies

Demand for specialised talent outstrips supply in some key occupations and the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) anticipates job opportunities arising from both expansion and replacement demand for a range of occupational roles. Of note is the significant commonality between immediate requirements described below and the medium-term skills requirements outlined in section 4.7.1.

Vacancies classified as difficult to fill in 2015, as reported by the EGFSN, primarily occurred in the ICT industry, health and social care sectors and are predominantly related to professional and associate professional roles.[68] In addition, there are particular occupations that are proving difficult to fill within financial services, transport, construction and life sciences, among other sectors. The spectrum of difficult to fill vacancies currently includes IT programmers, system analysts, engineers (process, quality, manufacturing), technical support with languages, analysts (business, risk, financial, data, security), regulatory and

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65 Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, (2015). 2.18 million people at work targeted as Minister Bruton publishes plan to end boom-bust cycle. [Online].
66 European Semester Thematic Fiche – Skills for the Labour Market, 2016, p.6.
67 Measuring Skills Mismatch, Labour Market Report Unit, European Commission, 2015 [Online].
68 Vacancy Overview 2015, Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2016, p.22.

compliance specialists, scientists (chemical, biological, research, food), financial accountants, chefs, quantity surveyors, property managers, drivers and logistics managers.[69]

4.6.2 Employment Permits

Employment permit schemes provide an additional data point. Permit data indicates where employers were unable to find suitable candidates within the Irish labour market and the broader European Economic Area (EEA).

The EGFSN reported that the number of permits issued in Ireland has increased annually since 2013. The highest increase in recent years took place in 2015, when the number issued rose by 25% to ca. 6,000 permits. The majority of permits issued related to professional and associate professional occupations, and the IT and health sectors accounted for the largest number of permits issued. The upward trend in permit approvals is set to continue in 2016, with just under 4,000 permits issued between January and June 2016.[70]

Figure 4.2: **New Employment Permits, 2011–2015**
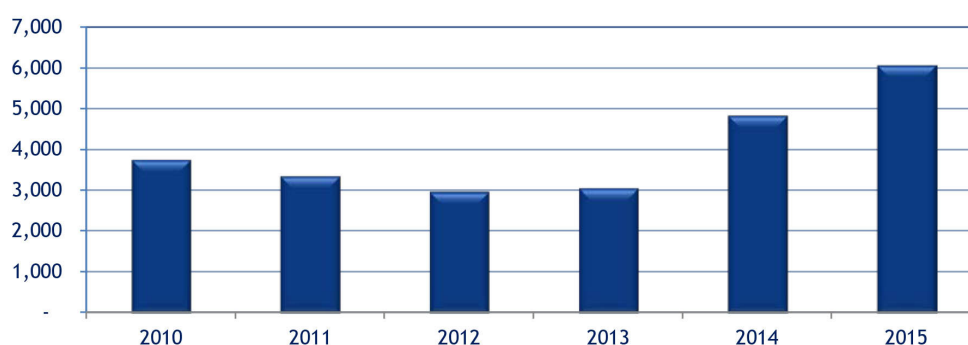
Source: Vacancy Overview 2015, Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2016, (p.23).

The up-skilling and re-skilling provided by Skillnets networks enable businesses to nurture the talent within their organisation. Skillnets training networks play a key role in moderating the impact of skills gaps and shortages. In the most recent independent evaluation of programmes delivered by training networks, undertaken by Indecon Economic Consultants in 2016, 89% of surveyed companies attested to the impact of being a Skillnet network member in addressing skills gaps within their organisation.[71]

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[69]   Ibid., pp.24-25.
[70]   Employment Permits Statistics, Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Jul. 2016 [Online].
[71]   Evaluation of Skillnets Training Networks Programme, Finuas and ManagementWorks in 2015, Indecon, 2016, p.24.

4.7 Future Skills Needs

While the labour market constantly evolves and the skills required by enterprise change over time, the *National Skills Strategy 2025* highlights a number of key sectoral, cross-sectoral and transversal skills that will be required over the next ten years.

4.7.1 Sectoral Skills

The *National Skills Strategy 2025* outlines a number of sectors that forecast jobs growth by 2020, while identifying the types of skills that will be required in these sectors – see Figures 4.3 and 4.4.[72]

Figure 4.3: **Forecast of Employment Growth in Selected Sectors**

Sector	Forecast of Employment Growth by 2020
Agriculture	Additional 16,500 employees
Construction	Additional 60,000 employees
International Financial Services	Additional 10,000 employees
ICT	Additional 44,500 employees
Manufacturing	Additional 43,000 employees
Data Analytics	Additional 18,000 employees
Freight Transport, Distribution & Logistics	Additional 10,000 employees
Hospitality	Additional 10,000 – 22,000 employees

Source: National Skills Strategy, 2016, (p. 28).

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[72] National Skills Strategy 2025, 2016, p.33.

Figure 4.4: **Forecast of Skills Required in Selected Sectors**

Sector	Skills Needed
Construction	Chartered surveyors; internationalisation of management capability; ICT, building information modelling systems and green energy skills.
International Financial Services	Risk, compliance, accounting, business intelligence, ICT and data analytics.
ICT	Software developers, cloud, security, networking and infrastructure; combination of technical skills with business/analytic/language skills.
Manufacturing	Experienced scientists and engineers.
Medical Devices	Mechanical, automation and validation engineers; polymer technicians, software/quality engineers and compliance experts.
Bio-pharma	Technicians and senior process technicians; pharma co-vigilance personnel, biotechnologists and biochemists.
Food and Beverage	R&D scientists, food technologists with technicians with new product development skills; international sales/marketing with languages.
Freight Transport, Distribution and Logistics	Graduate managers, planners and ICT staff; skilled warehouse staff and HGV drivers.
Hospitality	Chefs: commis, pastry and chef de partie.

Source: National Skills Strategy, 2016, (p. 42).

4.7.2 Cross-Sectoral Skills

Cross-sectoral skills, skills that can be transferred from one sector to another, are becoming vitally important given their impact on the employability and mobility of workers, the increasing convergence between sectors and the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of work.[73]

The key cross-sectoral skills for Ireland, as highlighted in the *National Skills Strategy 2025*[74], include technology skills in software development, data analytics and foreign languages, and business skills such as sales and marketing. Key cross-sectoral skills also include mechanical, electronic and industrial engineering as well as skills relating to production, process quality, validation and product design.

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[73]   National Skills Strategy 2025, 2015, p.33.
[74]   Ibid.

4.7.3 Transversal Skills

Transversal skills are relevant to a broad range of occupations and sectors. They include creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship, critical and analytical thinking, problem-solving, team work, communication and personal values such as persistence, integrity and tolerance.[75] Core transversal skills "enable people to move between jobs and careers, to participate in lifelong education and training and also to improve the flexibility and competitiveness of the labour market."[76]

Assessments of skills shortages typically focus on specific and technical skills but employers are placing an ever-increasing emphasis on transversal skills, as was clearly evident from Skillnets' strategy consultation process. Highly specialised technical competences can quickly become outdated.[77] Research at enterprise level suggests that there has been a "shift in focus from strong technical commercial skills towards a focus on generic meta-competence or a shift from *know-how* to *learn how*."[78]

4.7.4 Skills Development Challenges for SMEs

Beyond the need for sectoral, cross-sectoral and transversal skills, it is important to understand the particular skills challenges faced by SMEs. Scale is an issue because such organisations often don't have human resource functions to identify skills needs and appropriate responses. They find it harder to release people for training while maintaining uninterrupted operations. The *Further Education and Training Strategy 2014–2019* notes that "SMEs may lack the financial resources to invest in training, may not have access to the proper information and may experience significant staff co-ordination problems."[79]

SMEs do face co-ordination, cost and other barriers to training.[80] Skillnets network managers work with SMEs to address these co-ordination challenges and have been successful in doing so. The provision of subsidised, relevant training via TNP and Finuas helps SMEs to address their known skills requirements. However, trying to address unknown needs presents another type of challenge.

Awareness of the skills agenda is a critical issue raised by SME representative bodies who note that "those involved in small companies do not recognise a need for training or find it difficult to conduct an objective gap analysis on themselves or their own business."[81] This points to the pivotal importance of supporting SME owner-managers to identify and address not only their business but their workforce development needs. Training support to SME owner-managers creates a powerful multiplier effect because those who undergo development are more likely to invest in the development of their own staff "and therefore actions that improve participation in management development can have a significant impact on overall levels of education and training across the entire economy."[82] It is for these reasons that management development remains a key priority for Skillnets.

75 Garavan et al., (2012, p.8), 'Mapping talent development: definition, scope and architecture', European Journal of Training and Development.
76 National Skills Strategy 2025, 2016, p.38.
77 Mehdiabadi et al., (2016, p.30) Understanding Talent Development and Implications for Human Resource Development: An Integrative Literature Review", Human Resource Development Review.
78 Nilsson et al., (2012, p.36),"Employability and talent management: challenges for HRD practices", European Journal of Training and Development.
79 Further Education and Training Strategy, 2014–2019, p.77.
80 Submission to the National Skills Strategy, Small Firms Association, 2015 [Online].
81 Ibid.
82 Management Development in Ireland: The Report of the Management Council, 2010, p.10.

4.7.5   Management Development in SMEs

"Strong leadership is critical to drive the growth, innovation and adaptability required of the successful enterprise over the coming decade. Strong leaders are essential to drive our scaling agenda."

Enterprise 2025 (p.23)

The Management Development Council Report[83] published in 2010 found that the level of general management skills in Irish businesses was "relatively poor, particularly in specific functional skills such as human resources, marketing and finance, and in forward planning and strategic management."[84]

Enhancing SME management capacity in Ireland has become a national policy imperative. According to the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (DJEI), "companies that engage in management development are more likely to survive those critical first five years."[85] The *National Skills Strategy 2025* highlights the economic benefits,[86] and this view was recently echoed by the National Competitiveness Council which concluded that the availability "of a large and talented cohort of managers is a key driver of enterprise productivity and competitiveness."[87]

A survey of members undertaken by the Small Firms Association (SFA) found that the highest demand for management development capacity-building was in the following areas:[88]

1   Human resources and industrial relations
2   Leadership/management skills
3   Strategy
4   Sales/business development
5   Business/employment law

Scaling a business is another significant skills challenge highlighted at national policy level.[89] A recent UK report on scale-ups found that "leaders in companies scaling rapidly struggle to develop their managerial talent because of a lack of scale-up leadership talent i.e. people who have previously scaled up companies to significant revenues and employees".[90] Developing these skills in existing in-house managers "requires taking the time to learn from other companies and entrepreneurs who have scaled businesses successfully."[91]

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83   Ibid.
84   National Skills Strategy 2025, 2016, p.83.
85   Enterprise 2025, 2015, p.165.
86   National Skills Strategy 2025, 2016, p.83.
87   Ireland's Competitiveness Scorecard 2016, National Competitiveness Council, 2016, p.8.
88   Submission to the National Skills Strategy, Small Firms Association, 2015 [Online].
89   National Skills Strategy 2025, 2016, p.17.
90   The Scale-up Report on UK Economic Growth, Information Economy Council, 2014, p.54.
91   Ibid.

A number of state-funded agencies are deeply involved in developing SME management capacity. Enterprise Ireland offers a range of tailored programmes for client companies, as do Local Enterprise Offices, which are co-ordinated by the national network of Local Authorities. A number of Skillnets' training networks are highly active in the SME management development space, particularly in the software, ICT, food and beverage and international financial services sectors.

ManagementWorks was established by Skillnets under the Government's Action Plan for Jobs in 2012 with a specific remit to enhance management capacity within small and medium-sized enterprises. Over two thousand business owners and managers have participated in ManagementWorks' programmes since its establishment, which have assisted SMEs to scale their business, harness the talent of their management teams, and enhance specific skills relating to business strategy and innovation, leadership and continuous improvement using lean principles.

Whether it is strategy, sales or scaling a business, there is clearly a need for organisations such as Skillnets to ensure that provision is aligned with SME management development requirements. Our brand is already synonymous with high-quality training and education that is valued by enterprise. Skillnets' TNP, Finuas and ManagementWorks programmes create value for SMEs by: developing the capacity of SMEs to identify and address their business and skills needs; helping SME owner-managers to understand the interconnection between these needs, and consequently the importance of investing in their own development and the development of their staff.
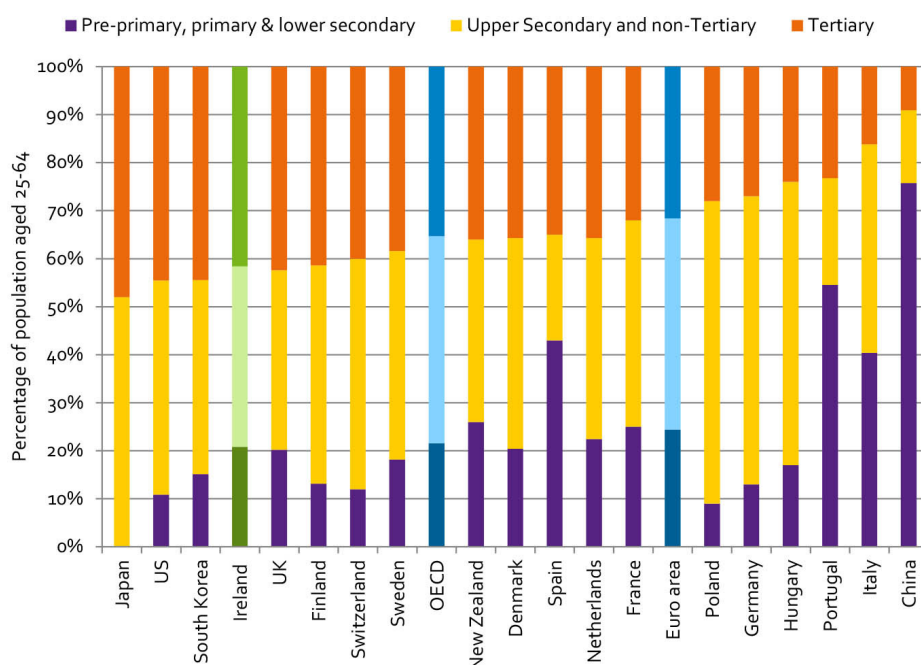
4.8   Education and Training in Ireland

The education sector in Ireland has undergone unprecedented structural reform in recent years. Within the Further Education and Training (FET) sector, these reforms have resulted in the establishment of SOLAS, 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), as well as the expansion of the apprenticeship system. Reform is also underway within higher education (HE), supported by the *Higher Education System Performance Framework 2014–2016*.[92] A key objective of this reform process is to ensure that the system creates "the right opportunities for Irish adults"[93] in the context of the skills required by Ireland's economy.

One of the unique aspects of the Skillnets model is that training networks are not tied to a fixed suite of courses, or to particular institutions or training providers. Training networks cross-cut both the HE and FET sectors and their offering constantly evolves because they are driven by the wide-ranging and ever-changing needs of enterprise.

4.8.1   Challenges in the Higher Education Sector

In Ireland, the proportion of the working age population with tertiary (third level) education increased from 36% in 2009 to 42% in 2014, against an OECD average of 36%. However, the proportion of the working age population with pre-primary, primary or lower secondary is below the OECD average[94]. See Figure 4.5 below.

Figure 4.5: **Educational Attainment of Population Aged 25-64 by Highest Level of Education (%)**

Source: National Competitiveness Scorecard, 2016, (p.96).

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92   Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019, p.39.
93   Ibid., p.4.
94   National Competitiveness Scorecard 2016, National Competitiveness Council, 2016, p.96.

While Ireland's investment per student at primary and secondary level compares favourably with the OECD 32, expenditure at third-level is below the OECD average and significantly below the UK and the US.[95] Demographic trends and trends in third-level participation will continue to place increasing pressure on Ireland's higher education system.

A key objective of the *National Skills Strategy 2025* is to increase the supply of skills to the labour market. However, funding remains a constraint. The *Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education* stresses that continuation of the status quo will be incompatible with aims to develop capable graduates to meet the changing needs of enterprise and to enhance access, innovation and knowledge creation.[96] The report highlights the urgent need to increase investment in higher education if Ireland is to achieve national ambitions as outlined in the *National Skills Strategy 2025* and other policies.[97]

Skillnets' Future Skills Needs Programme (FSNP) is designed to facilitate training networks to develop innovative programmes that address future skills needs. The programme is essentially a fund that allows network member companies to collaborate with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to develop new programmes. Established in 2011, FSNP has operated against a backdrop of HE sector funding constraints. Given these constraints, the deployment of appropriate academic staff to develop curricula has been a challenge faced by training networks and HE institutions during the period.

Nevertheless, the FSNP has succeeded in developing a strong suite of new programmes each year. Importantly, businesses co-invest in programme development through the FSNP. They also make significant non-financial investments by deploying HR and other specialist staff to work with training networks and relevant HE institutions to identify learning outcomes that address future business requirements.

These collaborations have produced a range of postgraduate qualifications that have proven to be particularly successful in terms of participation rates and subsequent business impact. Exemplars include specialist NFQ Level 9 qualifications in software product development, medical technologies and aviation finance. The development of qualifications like these makes a positive contribution to workforce development in key sectors including technology, medical devices and international financial services. The evidence suggests that programmes such as FSNP will play an important role in the coming years, given the ambition at national policy level to increase the supply of skills to the labour market.

4.8.2. Programme Accreditation

Skillnets plays an important role in the provision of accredited training and education to industry and learners throughout Ireland. For example, Skillnets networks delivered in excess of 320,000 training days in 2015. 80% of these days were accredited either on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) or by industry/professional bodies.[98] Formal accreditation is not an exclusive validation of training effectiveness in an enterprise context. Nevertheless, it represents a mark of quality for a significant cohort of employers supported by Skillnets annually. In the context of lifelong learning, accreditation is valued by learners because it provides an opportunity to enhance their employability and professional development via access to other accredited learning experiences throughout their careers. For these reasons, Skillnets will continue to collaborate with QQI and industry/professional accreditation bodies.

95   Ibid.
96   Investing in National Ambition – A Strategy for Funding Higher Education, Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education, 2016, p.6.
97   Ibid., p.5.
98   Evaluation of Skillnets Training Networks Programme, Finuas and ManagementWorks in 2015, Indecon, 2016, p.10

4.9 Lifelong Learning

Increasing engagement in lifelong learning is a key target of the European Commission and a key objective of the *National Skills Strategy 2025.* The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) recently analysed the prevalence of lifelong learning in Ireland and found that:[99]

- 168,000 people were lifelong learning participants, giving a lifelong learning participation rate of 6.8%, less than half the benchmark set by the EU under *ET 2020.*

- Ireland's workforce lags behind that of most EU countries in the extent to which it engages in lifelong learning activities, ranking 20th out of 28 countries for employed people.

- The gap between Ireland and the EU 28 average actually widened between 2009 and 2014.

- There were significant variations between regions, levels of educational attainment and age.

Figure 4.6: **Number of lifelong learning participants by education, region and age**
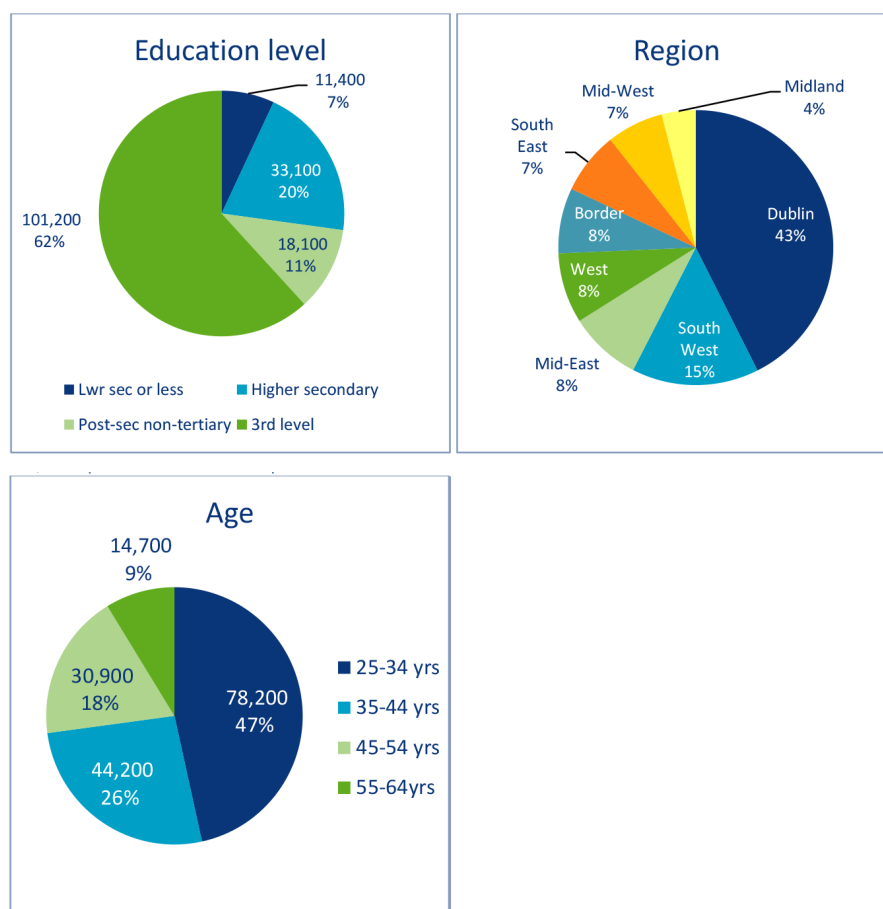
Source: Lifelong Learning Participation among Adults in Ireland, EGFSN, 2016, (p.2).

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99   Lifelong Learning Participation among Adults in Ireland, EGFSN, 2016, p.1.

Significant progress needs to be made to increase engagement in lifelong learning, regionally and nationally, and there is a need in particular to encourage older workers and workers with lower educational attainment. The benefits are obvious. There are very significant discrepancies in Ireland "between the employment and unemployment rates of high, medium and low-skilled workers."[100]Also, as people live longer, "there will be a further need for people to up-skill, re-skill and change their skills to meet new, unforeseen, opportunities."[101]

The private sector will undoubtedly play a key role in encouraging take-up of lifelong learning opportunities, by helping employees to recognise the need for, and value of, training.[102] The education sector can also play an enhanced role, through the systematic adoption of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and through flexible provision. RPL recognises the work experience accumulated by adult learners, facilitating access to HE and FET provision. The National Skills Strategy has highlighted the need for RPL to be "promoted among practitioners and processes further developed at institution / provider level with visibility at national level of RPL policies and practices."[103]

By enhancing the capacity of middle and low-skilled workers, FET can make a particularly important contribution to embedding lifelong learning in Ireland. However, crucially, lower-skilled workers are "the most vulnerable to ongoing changes within the workplace"[104] and they are also "less likely to be offered, to seek, or to avail of training."[105]

Skillnets will continue to play a key role in supporting lower and middle-skilled workers. For example, 60% of workers up-skilled through the Training Networks Programme (TNP) in 2015 had not attained a third level degree. This equates to approximately 24,000 people. 8% of workers trained by TNP networks in 2015, i.e. one in every twelve employed trainees, had attained a qualification no higher than the Junior Certificate (Level 3 on the National Framework of Qualifications).[106]

As noted in Figure 4.6, 62% of lifelong learning participants in Ireland have a third-level qualification. When set against the 60% of workers with no tertiary education who participated in 5,337 TNP training courses in 2015, the evidence suggests that Skillnets is making a discernible impact in attracting people with lower levels of educational attainment into lifelong learning activities.

It is also worth considering how Skillnets training networks make progress at enterprise level in developing a culture of lifelong learning, in particular within SMEs. When asked about the impact of training network membership as part of a recent, independent survey: 83% of companies agreed it encouraged future investment in staff development and training; 75% of employers agreed that it increased their awareness of the importance of training; two-thirds of those surveyed stated that membership increased the number of staff trained in their organisation, allowing some staff to be trained for the first time and; approximately 40% of companies confirmed they had engaged in planned training for the first time as a direct result of network membership.[107]

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[100] Measuring Skills Mismatch, Labour Market Report Unit, European Commission, 2015, p.18.
[101] HEA Forward-Look Forum, "Unbundling" of Higher Education, May 2016, p.1.
[102] Submission to the National Skills Strategy, Small Firms Association, 2015 [Online].
[103] National Skills Strategy 2025, 2016, p.97.
[104] Ibid., p.96.
[105] Further Education and Training Strategy 2014 – 2019, 2014, p.22.
[106] Evaluation of Skillnets Training Networks Programme, Finuas and ManagementWorks in 2015, Indecon, 2016, p.20.
[107] Ibid., p.118.

The evidence suggests that a culture of investment in planned learning and workforce development is engrained in companies that participate in Skillnets training networks. The knock-on effect is to increase the number of lifelong learners trained, including those who have never previously been up-skilled or re-skilled by their employers.

4.10 Relevant and Flexible Provision

A key objective of the *National Skills Strategy 2025* is to ensure that education and training providers place a stronger focus on providing skills development opportunities that are relevant to the needs of learners, society, enterprise and the economy.

The Government recognises that "a new architecture is required in education to drive excellence and best in class potential", such as the creation of technological universities, while also recognising the need to "support an increase in the number of flexible courses and opportunities available."[108]

However, full-time provision continues to dominate the higher education landscape. The Higher Education Authority (HEA) recently noted that "Ireland is an exception in terms of the diversity of its student cohort. Compared with other OECD or EU21 countries, the full-time /part-time split is 85:15. This is markedly different from other countries, such as Scandinavia, where up to 45% participation is part-time."[109]

The HEA has highlighted the need to consider an 'unbundling' of educational provision, so that learners can "tailor their entry, exit, assessment and qualifications,"[110] underpinned by credit-accumulation systems that allow students to "study selected parts of a programme over time, and often in different locations, as a way to undertake their qualification or upgrade skills."[111]

Within HE, there is now a greater focus on competency-based education (CBE), already commonplace within FET, which assesses student learning via demonstrable competencies (skills, knowledge and attitudes) as opposed to the time taken to complete qualifications.[112] Competency-based recruitment, selection and performance management systems are already well-established within enterprise in Ireland, particularly in larger companies. The shift towards CBE is a promising development. It provides a common language for communication between HE, FET and enterprise stakeholders, as these sectors collaborate to further enhance the relevance of future provision.

Responding to the needs of employers and adult learners, a significant proportion of education and training co-ordinated by Skillnets networks is delivered part-time or on a modular basis, offered year-round and scheduled outside of normal working hours (evenings, weekends, etc.) subject to demand. HE institutions accommodate flexible provision in different ways and some are under particular pressure due to funding constraints already noted. However, Skillnets networks collaborate with numerous HE and FET institutions that we find to be responsive and flexible in their approach to delivery.

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[108] Programme for Partnership Government, 2016, p.93.
[109] HEA Forward-Look Forum, "Unbundling" of Higher Education, May 2016, p.9.
[110] Ibid., p.6.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.

5: Workforce Development

5.1 Human Resource Development

"Human Resource Development (HRD) is in essence an activity that enables individuals, groups, and organisations to learn, develop, and change behaviour for the purpose of improving their competence, effectiveness, performance, and growth."[113]

Global labour markets, changing demographics, fast-paced technological advances and accelerating rates of organisational change are just some of the challenges facing HRD practitioners. The Skillnets model however, fits comfortably within this new HRD paradigm, with its focus on collaborative approaches, 'networked' delivery, and informal as well as formal learning.

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[113] Hamlin et al, (2011, p.213),"What is HRD? A definitional review and synthesis of the HRD domain", Journal of European Industrial Training.

5.2 The Changing Workplace

HRD initiatives operate against a backdrop of constant change within the workplace. Less than one in four workers are now employed in conditions corresponding to the standard employment model.[114] There is a much greater incidence of part-time, contract and contingent workers. At enterprise level, there has been a marked shift from job security and lifelong employment to lifelong learning, employability, and talent management.[115] There is now also a deeper appreciation of technology and demographics as the key tension points bearing on the modern organisation.[116]

A 'hollowing out' phenomenon has been observed within advanced and developing economies. Labour markets are recording growth in high-skill and low-skill occupations, while middle-skill occupations are shrinking. Due mainly to automation and technology, many traditional intermediate-level jobs are in decline, which will have obvious implications for employability and mobility.[117]

There is a shift too away from traditional organisational hierarchies towards employee networks of teams, which companies build to work on specific business projects and challenges[118]. These developments lead "to organisations that look like a web: a flat, intricately-woven form that links partners, employees, external contractors, suppliers, and customers in various collaborations."[119] Research shows that SMEs greatly benefit from the linkages and insights gained from participation in such networks.[120]

If organisations will increasingly resemble a web, this suggests that Skillnets training networks will increasingly resemble a 'web of webs', connecting enterprises and strengthening their increasingly intricate stakeholder relationships. Collaborating, receiving and sharing information with others have become essential skills. This also suggests that training networks will need to ensure that provision addresses skills relating to leadership, negotiation, collaboration and working in teams. [121] As enterprises become flatter and career paths become less linear, there is potentially a greater role for Skillnets to play in helping sectors to develop new career paths, while also supporting learners to traverse them.

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[114] ILO, (2015, p.13), "The changing nature of Jobs" [Online].
[115] Mehdiabadi et al., (2016, p.27) "Understanding Talent Development and Implications for Human Resource Development: An Integrative Literature Review", Human Resource Development Review.
[116] Lynda Grattan (2010), "The Future of Work".
[117] McIntosh, S (2013, p.42), "Hollowing out and the future of the Labour Market", Dept. for Business, nnovation and Skills, UK [Online].
[118] Deloitte, Global Human Capital Trends 2016, p.4 [Online].
[119] Cascio (2010), in Cascio, W, (2014, p. 119) 'Investing in HRD in Uncertain Times Now and in the Future', Advances in Developing in Human Resources.
[120] Saunders et al., (2013), "SME innovation and learning: the role of networks and crisis events", European Journal of Training and Development.
[121] Nilsson et al., (2012, p.36),"Employability and talent management: challenges for HRD practices", European Journal of Training and Development.

5.3 Adult Learning

The more we know about how adults learn the better we are able to structure learning and development (L&D) activities that resonate with them.[122] Adult learners have a strong desire to learn through work-related experiences and problem-centred approaches.[123] They tend to choose knowledge that is meaningful to them[124] and relate this to experiences that focus on real-life problems and tasks. In contrast with traditional instructor-centred learning, a significant body of literature points to the preference adult learners have for greater flexibility and much more self-direction/active engagement in learning.

It is now understood that the adult learner needs to be engaged as an active agent in the planning and execution of learning.[125] This trend has implications for the support Skillnets networks give to enterprises that are developing skills diagnostics, because it emphasises the much more collaborative role played by employees. [126] In an independent survey of TNP in-employment trainees undertaken in 2016, 39.7% confirmed that they proposed the TNP training to their employer. In contrast, only 24.3% stated that the training has been identified by their employer as part of a formal needs assessment. In a similar survey, the majority of Finuas trainees (54.2%) confirmed that they proposed the Finuas training to their employer.[127] We are highly likely to see an upward trend in these figures in the coming years.

[122] Merriam, S. (2008, p.93), "Adult Learning Theory for the Twenty-First Century", in New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, Wiley.
[123] Knowles, M. (1990) Adult Learners; the Neglected Species, Kogan Page, London.
[124] Chuang, et al., (2013) "Can Knowledge-Intensive Teamwork Be Managed? Examining the Roles of HRM Systems, Leadership, and Tacit Knowledge", Journal of Management, pp.1–32.
[125] Knowles et al., (2005), in Chen, J. (2014, p.407) Teaching non-traditional adult students: adult learning theories in practice, Teaching in Higher Education.
[126] Garavan et al., (2012, p.8),"Mapping talent development: definition, scope and architecture", European Journal ofTraining and Development.
[127] Evaluation of Skillnets Training Networks Programme, Finuas and ManagementWorks in 2015, Indecon, 2016, pp.120-124.

5.4 Learning and Development

Advances in technology, shifts in demographics, and the constant competitive necessity to upgrade workforce skills are disrupting workplace learning. These forces are pushing companies to develop new ways to place employees in charge of their professional development and to foster a culture of learning throughout the organisation.[128] Learners need access to information when they need it and to undertake learning at their own pace.[129] A focus on 'just in time' training delivery along with an overriding focus on job relevance remain consistent themes in this new L&D landscape. In this model employees are treated like consumers who require continuous learning using multiple delivery platforms, which are tailored to their individual needs, with L&D professionals involved in processes to facilitate this. Research also suggests that in order to meet future business needs, L&D capability will need to be built through a process of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) initiatives.[130] The predicted future of enterprise learning is described in Figure 5.1 overleaf.

Many companies are struggling with the shift to employee-centred, self-directed learning[131] from traditional, instructor-led, classroom training. However, promoting collaborative systems and helping enterprises to construct continuous learning cycles are likely to produce more effective outcomes.[132]

The priorities of L&D professionals employed in Skillnets' network member companies are strongly aligned with network priorities (i.e. that learning must be deeply integrated into the learner's work, creating greater efficiencies and meeting immediate knowledge and skills needs). When planning future provision, research into best practice L&D indicates that Skillnets training networks will need to carefully consider the following factors:

- Alignment to organisational objectives
- Self-paced and learner-focused activity
- Designed to embed learning into workflow
- Granular, bite-sized, chunked learning
- Delivered via a multi-media approach to suit the learner's learning preferences and needs[133]

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[128]   Deloitte, Global Human Capital Trends 2016, p.57 [Online].
[129]   Little, B. (2014) "Best practices to ensure the maximum ROI in learning and development", Industrial and Commercial Training.
[130]   CIPD, (2015, p.23), "L&D: Evolving roles, enhancing skills" [Online].
[131]   Cascio, W. (2014, p.117) 'Investing in HRD in Uncertain Times Now and in the Future', Advances in Developing Human Resources.
[132]   Little, B. (2014, p.401) "Best practices to ensure the maximum ROI in learning and development", Industrial and Commercial Training.
[133]   Ibid., p.403.

Figure 5.1: **Learning, Today and Tomorrow**

Today	Tomorrow
Learning is a **series of corporate programs** built around L&D-designed content and L&D-approved experts.	Learning is an **"environment" and an "experience"**, leveraging experts, content, and materials sourced and recommended by external communities as well as other employees and internal experts (not just L&D).
The learning environment is managed by a **corporate learning management system**– essentially a large catalog filled with courses.	The learning environment feels like a **consumer website** that provides videos, courses, content, and access to experts – as well as recommendation engines that help people find precisely what they need.
L&D, business, and compliance **experts push out training**, identifying required courses to be completed by employees based on roles.	**Employees pull learning**, navigating and accessing opportunities from inside and outside of the company.
The focus is on **internal** training sanctioned by the company.	**External** training is available from any digital content source.
Learning professionals are **generalists** who do everything from design to development, logistics, and measurement.	Learning professionals are **specialists** who are excellent at the component they own.
Training follows a **lecture-based** model guided by an expert.	Training is **experiental**, relying on simulations, case studies, and flipped classrooms.
Employees **learn specific skills** through expert-guided instruction.	Employees **learn how to learn** through facilitation and coaching.
Organisations create detailed, exhaustive, skills-based **competencies** that drive the learning agenda.	Organisations create high-level **frameworks** that outline broad capabilities.
The learning organisation plays a **lead role** in what a person learns and focuses on delivering work experiences, interactions with others, and formal training in the traditional 70-20-10 ratio.	The learning organisation plays a **supporting role** in what a person learns, expanding the 10 to include "inside" and "outside" learning; shifting the 20 to include internal and external networks; and redefining the 70 to include corporate, community, and social experiences.

Source: Deloitte, Global Human Capital Trends 2016, p. 60 [Online].

5.5   The Role of Technology in Learning

The shift towards in-employment, self-directed learning is facilitated by the accelerated development of smart devices. Smart learning is an emerging learning paradigm which enables employee learning to take place anywhere and anytime.[134] Access to resources and tools now call for more employee-driven solutions using mobile performance support, massive open online courses (MOOCs), on-demand micro-learning and online communities.[135]

Figure 5.2: **Technology-enabled Learning Paradigm**
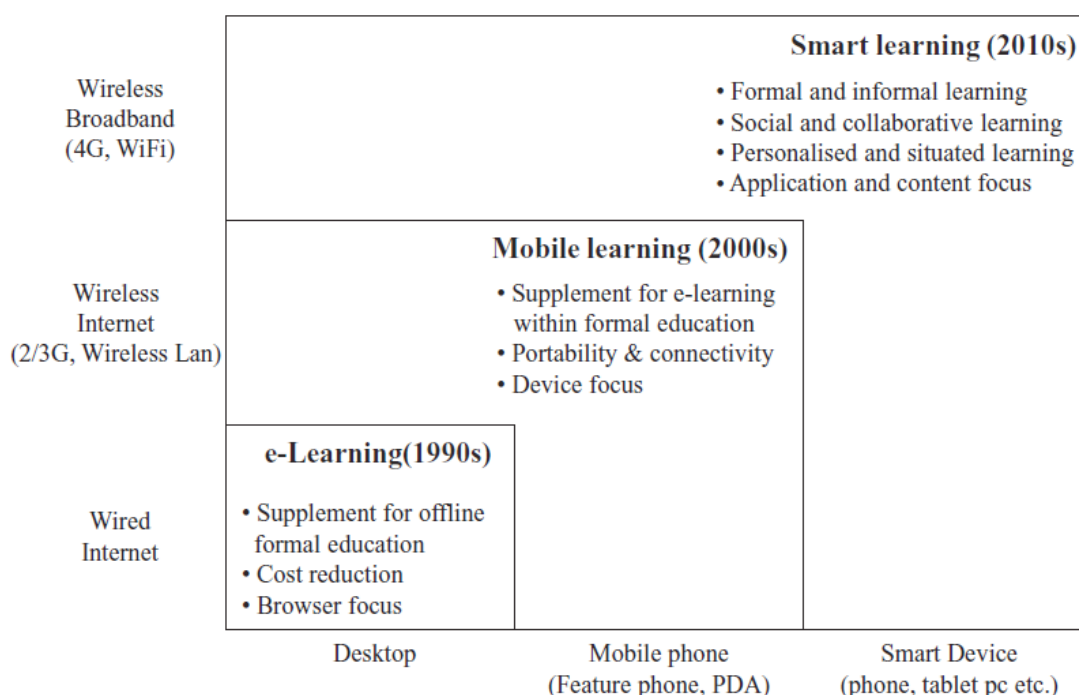
Source: Lee et al., (2014, p.1082), "Smart Learning for Employees and HRD Managers", British Journal of Educational Technology.

In the 'smart workplace' learning is individual and personalised and the employee is able to build learning around practical need at any given time. Employees have always learned from one another, "but technology has made it possible for workers to collaborate in ways that were almost unimaginable a decade ago."[136] The use of social learning tools are forecasted to dramatically increase as workers attempt to counter accelerating levels of skill obsolescence.

While smart learning undoubtedly represents the present for a number of larger companies working with our networks, it represents the future for many network member SMEs. Training networks need to stay informed about smart learning, so that they can help enterprises to access technological resources that enable mobility, interactivity and collaborative learning.[137] At the same time, they must be pragmatic in accepting that the transition for some companies to smart learning will take time.

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[134] Lee et al., (2014, p.1082), "Smart Learning for Employees and HRD Managers", British Journal of Educational Technology.
[135] Deloitte, Global Human Capital Trends 2016, p.62 [Online].
[136] O'Leonard, K. (2013, p.13). The corporate learning factbook. New York, NY: Deloitte Development LLC.
[137] Lee et al., (2014), "Smart Learning for Employees and HRD Managers", British Journal of Educational Technology.

5.6 Work-based and Informal Learning

Work-based learning (WBL) is defined as learning that takes place through some combination of observing, undertaking and reflecting on productive work in real workplaces and encompasses:[138]

- Structured work-based learning schemes: Forms of work-based learning that combine on-the-job and off-the-job components and typically lead to a formal qualification e.g. apprenticeships, traineeships.

- Work placements: Forms of work-based learning that usually complement formal education and training programmes, are shorter and less regulated than formal structured work-based learning schemes e.g. internships.

- Informal and non-formal work-based learning: Forms of work-based learning that do not lead to a qualification and typically lack explicit learning outcomes e.g. learning-by-doing or learning from co-workers.

Skillnets training networks have been centrally involved in work-based learning in Ireland for many years. Work placements are an integral feature of Skillnets' Job-seekers Support Programme (JSSP), which has been in operation since 2010. Networks operating in the retail and animation sectors, among others, are involved in the delivery of structured work-based learning schemes and traineeships.

Skillnets understands the value of programme design that is optimised for the transfer of learning and is highly integrated with work. Convincing enterprises to commit to structured WBL can be challenging. However, from an enterprise perspective, companies tend "to bear net costs at the beginning of work-based learning schemes but reap net benefits at the later stages."[139] In a country with a high level of youth unemployment, WBL offers marginalised young people the opportunity to access employment. WBL is a highly effective form of learning and via our training networks, there is potential for Skillnets to encourage an even greater number of enterprises to implement structured work-based learning schemes.

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138 Kis, V. (2016, p.7), "Work, train, win: Work-based learning design and management for productivity gains", OECD Working Papers, No.135.
139 Ibid., p.9.

5.7 Evaluating L&D Interventions

It is incumbent upon HRD professionals to implement robust evaluation methods, so that enterprises and SMEs in particular can assess the impact of the learning intervention on their business.[140]

Determining the return on investment (ROI) from learning is an increasingly important corporate concern, particularly since lean approaches highlight the need for business initiatives to generate maximum ROI.[141] There has been a traditional focus on learner satisfaction with the learning programme, trainer and venue. More advanced approaches include the development of detailed pre and post-programme assessments to measure effectiveness.[142]

Learning evaluation however, is generally underdeveloped in companies, and is often referred to as an emerging field. For many years, Skillnets' networks have evaluated programme using the 'Kirkpatrick Model', widely used in corporate, government and academic worlds.[143] They have encouraged enterprises with no history in assessing the impact of training to utilise this evaluation framework. There is however scope for Skillnets to develop new methodologies that test if predefined learning outcomes have been achieved and that programmes have resulted in improved job performance and enterprise competitiveness.

[140] McCarthy et al., 2014, 'Uncertainty and Ongoing Economic Turbulence: Implications for HRD', Advances in Developing Human Resources.

[141] Little, B (2014, p.401) "Best practices to ensure the maximum ROI in learning and development", Industrial and Commercial Training.

[142] Deloitte, Global Human Capital Trends 2016, p.29 [Online].

[143] Kirkpatrick et al., (2006), Evaluating Training Programs: The 4 Levels; Berrett-Koehler.

6: Skillnets Strategic Goals 2016-2019 and Enabling Plans

Goal One

We will make training effectiveness, impact and relevance core to Skillnets activities. We will promote continuous improvement in the learning experiences provided to enterprise through our networks, and be a model for training excellence in an enterprise context.

Goal Two

We will play a pivotal role in maintaining a supply of the specific skills and future skills that impact the growth potential of Irish enterprise.

Goal Three

We will drive increased participation of employers in our proposition. In doing so, we will be a key enabler in sustaining national competitiveness through the up-skilling of those in employment.

6.1 Goal One

We will make training effectiveness, impact and relevance core to Skillnets activities. We will promote continuous improvement in the learning experiences provided to enterprise through our networks, and be a model for training excellence in an enterprise context.

Context

The *National Skills Strategy 2025* calls for "the quality of teaching and learning at all stages of education and training to be continually enhanced and evaluated."[144] We recognise the rapid rate of change in labour markets, in competitive conditions, and the impact that technology and demographics are having on the workplace. It is vital that the calibre of training undertaken with enterprise keeps pace with these developments. Good practice in enterprise learning and development is now focused on:

- Diagnostics and definition: Processes that target the specific skills required and the particular 'problem' that training interventions are designed to solve.

- Programme design and delivery that is highly integrated with work and career paths. Design that embraces technology and reflects how adults learn.

- Evaluation methodologies that focus on the impact of training, and what was delivered versus the original learning outcomes defined.

Employees are taking more ownership of their learning. Enabled by technology, learning itself is becoming increasingly asynchronous, individualised, self-paced, granular and deeply embedded within the workflow.

As we have discussed, the key feature of the Skillnets model is our enterprise-led nature, whereby each network is led by a steering group of employer and industry representatives who ensure that effective learning solutions are provided to meet their identified needs. However, to maintain the relevance of programmes, to demonstrate value for money, and to meet the relentless pace of change in the modern workplace Skillnets will sustain a constant and rigorous focus on the effectiveness agenda.

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[144] National Skills Strategy 2025, 2016, p.89.

Goal One Enabling Plans

WE WILL…

- Facilitate programme design that is:
  1. Optimised for maximum transfer of learning.
  2. Flexible, and straightforward for employed learners to access.
  3. Highly integrated with work, and enabling increased mobility and employability for the learner.

- Focus resources on strengthening our existing networks so they remain ideally placed to deliver on the challenging skills demands of businesses in their sectors and regions.

- Support the further development of skills assessment resources to help enterprise to accurately identify and address their skills needs.

- Support the development of strategies and systems that enable enterprises, and SMEs in particular, to nurture and retain talented employees.

- Exploit the great potential that learning technologies offer, specifically in a workplace context.

- Promote greater collaboration across our organisation and leverage the combined strength of our networks. We will encourage delivery of a greater number of networking events across our networks, given their value to enterprises and SMEs in particular as a source of informal learning.

- Establish resource hubs and first class talent programmes for our network manager community to assist in the growth of their human resource development competence.

- Review our key performance indicators and blend them appropriately between training 'efficiency' and training 'effectiveness'.

- Develop evaluation methodologies that test if predefined learning outcomes have been achieved and that programmes have resulted in improved job performance and enterprise competitiveness. We will address unnecessarily bureaucratic processes that impede training effectiveness.

- Where appropriate, we will continue to collaborate with awarding bodies (QQI and industry/professional accreditation bodies) to encourage formal accreditation of programmes.

6.2   Goal Two

We will play a pivotal role in maintaining a supply of the specific skills and future skills that impact the growth potential of Irish enterprise.

Context

The *National Skills Strategy 2025*[145] has outlined some key labour market sectors vital for sustained economic development. As economic and labour market conditions continuously evolve, so too do the demands on human resource capital, a challenge that Skillnets has consistently demonstrated a capacity to meet.   Skillnets has a deep enterprise presence across each of the key labour market sectors in Ireland. This strategically positions Skillnets as a lead agency to deliver the specific skills and new skills these sectors will demand into the future.

This strategy highlights key sectoral and cross-sectoral skills that will be required over the next 10 years. It also highlights the importance of transversal skills, a consistent theme emerging from the consultation process, and the specific skills required to enhance management capacity within Ireland, a national policy imperative.

The ICT, health, life sciences, international financial services, food and beverage, retail, manufacturing, healthcare, agriculture and construction sectors will all require targeted support to address emerging skills gaps and to manage and retain talent. Through our networks, Skillnets is also aware of growing skills requirements within the animation, aviation, aerospace, legal and media sectors.

While understanding the profile of required skills is critically important, so too is the need to increase in-employment engagement in lifelong learning, another consistent theme emerging from the consultation. Skillnets is making a discernible impact in attracting people who may have traditionally shied away from lifelong learning, or were given less opportunity, including lower-skilled workers.

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[145]   National Skills Strategy 2025, 2016, pp. 28-34.

Goal Two Enabling Plans

WE WILL…

- Ensure that our activities are focused on the delivery of skills to the critical labour market sectors and to training that meets defined skills shortages vital for economic growth and competitiveness.

- Increase the resources provided to enterprise for innovative new programme development.

- Promote the value and importance of lifelong learning (both formal and informal learning) to national competitiveness, and continue to provide quality up-skilling and re-skilling opportunities for those in employment. We will promote greater adoption of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

- Ensure the significant provision of programmes that address transversal skills (or generic competencies), which are the cornerstone of career development and enterprise effectiveness.

- Increase our contribution to the development of labour market policy in the area of skills development, based on analysis and research drawn from our broad access to enterprise. We will support the important work of the EGFSN and other agencies involved in skills policy formulation.

- Continue our successful involvement in employment activation initiatives in proportion to employment trends. We will focus our activities specifically in areas that are closely aligned with the Skillnets mandate and where skills deficits have been highlighted.

- Promote the criticality of management development to enterprise and to national competitiveness. We will recruit yet more owner-managers into the Skillnets management development offerings to increase the management capacity of the SME sector, and provide owner-managers with the skills needed to scale their business.

- Continue to align with national policy and deliver on key responsibilities assigned to Skillnets as part of the *National Skills Strategy 2025*, and other relevant strategies such as the *ICT Skills Action Plan 2014–2018* and *IFS2020*.

6.2   Goal Three

We will drive increased participation of employers in our proposition. In doing so, we will be a key enabler in sustaining national competitiveness through the up-skilling of those in employment.

Context

The *National Skills Strategy 2025*[146] stresses the critical role that employers should play in the development of skills for those in employment. Greater participation by employers is needed in order to inform skills requirements and course design; support work placements and career planning; and ensure employers take more responsibility for the career development and up-skilling of their own employees. These requirements are particularly acute for the SME sector.

More and more SMEs are shifting into 'prosper' mode. This represents a strategic opportunity for Skillnets to engage more SMEs in workforce development. It is evident from the consultation process that SMEs are willing to engage and increasingly have the financial scope to invest in workforce development.

Skillnets has a compelling story and we want to tell it. We are proud of our core competence in enterprise-led training and the prized reputation we have established with businesses across Ireland. Time and again the Skillnets model has proven itself to be innovative, resilient and adaptable to the ever changing needs of enterprise.

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[146]   National Skills Strategy 2025, 2016, pp.69.

Goal Three Enabling Plans

WE WILL...

- Deepen our roots with employers by generating focused engagement and promotion around our distinct and unique value proposition. We will restructure the communications and marketing activities of Skillnets so that they are directed at the needs of enterprise.

- Facilitate increased performance and growth in sectors of strategic importance via the Training Networks Programme (TNP) and Finuas. We will continue to fund new training networks that have strong enterprise support and demonstrate compelling training requirements.

- Promote greater engagement with employers and business owners around the management development imperative and encourage further participation in the Skillnets management development offering.

- Re-enforce positive perceptions of entrepreneurship by showcasing owner-managers who have undertaken Skillnets-funded management development training, with a particular focus on under-represented groups in Ireland, such as female and young entrepreneurs.

- Maintain the appropriate balance between low-skilled, middle-skilled and high-skilled programme offerings to support career planning and the development of career pathways to encourage increased employee retention and to maintain the wide appeal of Skillnets to enterprise.

- Support the recently established Regional Skills Fora, which are mandated to provide a systematic way for employers and the education and training system to work together. Through our work with Regional Skills Fora and our other activities in the regions, we will further raise the visibility of Skillnets at a regional level and support regional development overall.

- Coordinate closely with other relevant State agencies with the core objectives of ensuring the skill demands of enterprise are best served and value for public monies.

Skillnets Training Networks 2016

Our 2016 training networks are supporting businesses
in a wide range of sectors and regions across Ireland.

Training Networks Programmme

Network Name	Sector/Region
A	
ACIST Skillnet	Mid-West
Animal Health Ireland Skillnet	Animal health sector
Animation Skillnet	Animation / VFX sectors
Aviation & Aerospace Skillnet	Aviation / Aerospace sectors
B	
BiznetCork Skillnet	South-West
Business Excellence Skillnet	Mid-West
C	
Carlow Kilkenny Skillnet	South-East
CILT Skillnet	Freight / Logistics sectors
CITA Skillnet	Construction / ICT sectors
Construction SME Skillnet	Construction sector
County Tipperary Skillnet	South-East / Mid-West
CPA Ireland Skillnet	Accountancy / Financial sectors
D	
Design, Print & Packaging Skillnet	Design / Print / Packaging sectors
Duhallow Skillnet	South-West
F	
Farm Business Skillnet	Agricultural sector
FDII Skillnet	Food / Drink sectors
First Polymer Training Skillnet	Engineering / Manufacturing sectors
G	
Galway Executive Skillnet	West
Gaming and Leisure Skillnet	Gaming / Leisure / Tourism sectors
Gréasán na Meán Skillnet	Media / Audio-visual sectors
H	
HPSU Skillnet	West
I	
ICOS Skillnet	Agricultural sector
ICT Ireland Skillnet	ICT sector
IMDA Skillnet	Life sciences sector
Innovation and Lean Sigma Skillnet	Mixed sector
Irish Franchising Skillnet	Mixed sector
ISA Software Skillnet	Software / ICT sectors
ISME Skillnet	Mixed sector
I	
it@cork Skillnet	ICT sector
ITAG Skillnet	ICT sector

Network Name	Sector/Region
L	
Law Society Skillnet	Legal sector
Leading Healthcare Providers Skillnet	Healthcare sector
Lean Water & Energy Skillnet	Energy / Engineering sectors
Learning Waves Skillnet	Radio sector
Limerick Chamber Skillnet	Mid-West
M	
Macra na Feirme Young Farmer Skillnet	Agricultural sector
MBE Skillnet	Midlands / Border / East
N	
National Organic Training Skillnet	Agricultural sector
P	
PharmaChem Skillnet	Pharmaceutical sector
Postive2Work Skillnet	Mixed sector
R	
Retail Ireland Skillnet	Retail sector
Role Skillnet	West / North-West
Rural Enterprise Skillnet	Agriculture sector
Rural Food Skillnet	Food sector
S	
Shannon Chamber Skillnet	Mid-West
SIMI Skillnet	Motor industry
Sligo Chamber Skillnet	North-West
South Kerry Skillnet	South-West
South West Gnó Skillnet	South-West
Space Industry Skillnet	Space sector
Sustainability Skillnet	Sustainability / Cleantech sectors
T	
Taste 4 Success Skillnet	Food / Drink sectors
Tech Northwest Skillnet	North-West
Trade Union Skillnet	Mixed sector
Trainers Learning Skillnet	Training sector
U	
ULearning Skillnet	Mixed sector
W	
Waterford Chamber Skillnet	South-East
Wexford Chamber Skillnet	South-East
Wind Skillnet	Wind energy sector
X	
XLVets Skillnet	Veterinary sector

Finuas Networks Programme

Network Name	Sector/Region
Aviation Finance Finuas Network	International Financial Services (IFS) sector
Law Society Finuas Network	International Financial Services (IFS) sector
Summit Finuas Network	International Financial Services (IFS) sector

Glossary of Abbreviations

ALMP	Active Labour Market Policies
APJ	Action Plan for Jobs
CBE	Competency-based Education
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DJEI	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
DSP	Department of Social Protection
EEA	European Economic Area
EGFSN	Expert Group on Future Skills Needs
EI	Enterprise Ireland
ETB	Education and Training Board
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FE	Further Education
FET	Further Education and Training
FinTech	Financial Technology
FSNP	Future Skills Needs Programme (Skillnets)
FNP	Finuas Networks Programme (Skillnets)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEI	Global Entrepreneurship Index
GEM	Global Entrepreneurship Monitor
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institutes

HR	Human Resources
HRD	Human Resources Development
IDA	Industrial Development Authority
IFS	International Financial Services
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ICT	Information Communications Technology
IT	Information Technology
JSSP	Job-seekers Support Programme (Skillnets)
LEOs	Local Enterprise Offices
MOOC	Massive Open Online Course
NCC	National Competitiveness Council
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NTF	National Training Fund
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
R&D	Research & Development
ROI	Return on Investment
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SFA	Small Firms Association
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
SMLRU	Skills and Labour Market Research Unit
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths
TNP	Training Networks Programme (Skillnets)
VLWI	Very Low Work Intensity – Households
WBL	Work-based Learning

NOTES

Skillnets

Enterprise-led learning networks

Skillnets

5th Floor, Q House,
76 Furze Road, Sandyford,
Dublin 18,
D18 E268.

Tel: 01 207 9630
Email: communications@skillnets.com
Web: **www.skillnets.ie**