

**Policy Forum for Ireland conference:
Next steps for skills and apprenticeships in Ireland**

Timing: Morning, Tuesday, 3rd November 2026

*****Taking Place Online*****

Draft agenda subject to change



- 8.30 Registration
- 9.00 **Chair's opening remarks**
Senior Member of the Oireachtas
- 9.05 **Assessing priorities for apprenticeships and skills policy**
Senior commentator
Questions and comments from the floor
- 9.30 **Apprenticeship reform, governance and sustainable delivery**
implementation of the Action Plan on Apprenticeship 2026-2030 | lessons from the 2021-2025 plan and Programme for Government ambitions for apprenticeship growth | priorities arising from SOLAS' Creating Futures 2026-2030 strategy | governance of craft and consortia-led apprenticeships | experience of programme development and approval | clarity, proportionality, cost and pace | resources, employer commitment and provider relationships needed to establish and sustain programmes | alignment with other work-integrated learning routes | curricula modernisation and responsiveness to changing skills needs | maintaining standards, consistent learner experiences and confidence in qualifications | implications of growth for funding, provider capacity and sustainable delivery
Senior representative, employer
Senior representative, training provider
Senior representative, further education
Senior commentator
Questions and comments from the floor
- 10.15 **Quality assurance and assessment governance in craft apprenticeships - priorities and wider implications**
Senior representative, quality assurance
Questions and comments from the floor
- 10.40 **Chair's closing remarks**
Senior Member of the Oireachtas
- 10.45 Break
- 10.55 **Chair's opening remarks**
Senior Member of the Oireachtas
- 11.00 **Alignment of apprenticeship and skills provision with workforce and sector needs**
Senior representative, employer
- 11.10 **Skills intelligence, workforce planning and meeting future skills needs**
role of the National Skills Council and National Skills Roundtable | contributions of the Regional Skills Fora, employers, providers and sectoral bodies | identifying national, regional and sectoral skills requirements | current and emerging workforce needs | translating labour-market evidence and workplace and provider insight into apprenticeship, training programmes and curricula | addressing gaps in the availability, location and timing of provision | implications of AI, automation and technological change | supporting infrastructure delivery, the climate transition, economic development and strategic investment | co-ordination between employers, providers, government and regional bodies | informing the National Training Fund and wider skills investment
Senior representative, local authority
Senior representative, further education
Senior commentator
- 11.25 Questions and comments from the floor
- 11.50 **Improving awareness and guidance on apprenticeship pathways**
Senior representative, careers guidance
- 12.00 **Participation, progression and widening access to apprenticeship opportunities**
learner recruitment and widening access | increasing participation among learners and employers, including underrepresented groups | making apprenticeship workable for smaller employers | costs, administration, supervision and access to support | role and effectiveness of the Apprenticeship Employer Grant, Gender-Based Bursary and other financial measures | apprentice payment structures and affordability | learner support in workplace and off-the-job settings | retention, completion and factors contributing to withdrawal | access to training and assessment as registrations increase | progression into higher-level qualifications, employment and lifelong learning | career development, upskilling and reskilling | apprenticeships as a route to social mobility and wider workforce participation
Erica Meslin, Education Manager, Association for Higher Education Access and Disability
Senior representative, employer
Senior representative, further education
Senior representative, higher education
- 12.20 Questions and comments from the floor
- 12.45 **National priorities for apprenticeship reform, workforce planning and skills provision**
Dr Kevin Marshall, Chair, National Skills Council, Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
Questions and comments from the floor
- 13.10 **Chair's and Policy Forum for Ireland closing remarks**
Senior Member of the Oireachtas
Sean Cudmore, Policy Forum for Ireland