Policy Forum for Ireland conference:
Next steps for skills and apprenticeships in Ireland
Timing: Morning, Tuesday, 3rd November 2026
*****Taking place online*****

Agenda subject to change

8.30 Registration

9.00 **Chair's opening remarks**
Tony McCormack TD

9.05 **Assessing priorities for apprenticeships and skills policy**
Ray English, Chair, WorldSkills Ireland
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* | *alignment with objectives of the Tertiary Education Strategy 2026-2031* | *supporting progression and flexible learning pathways* | *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*
Jonathan Brittain, Assistant Professor and Apprenticeship Manager, National College of Ireland
Rory O'Boyle, Head, Professional Practice Course, Law Society of Ireland
Brid O'Connell, CEO, Guaranteed Irish
Questions and comments from the floor

10.20 **Chair's closing remarks**
Tony McCormack TD

10.45 Break

10.55 **Chair's opening remarks**
Maeve O'Connell TD, Leas-Chathaoirleach, Committee on Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

11.00 **Alignment of apprenticeship and skills provision with workforce and sector needs**
David Behan, Training Manager, Kia Ireland

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* | *strengthening the skills intelligence ecosystem and responsiveness to emerging need* | *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* | *coordination between employers, providers, government and regional bodies* | *informing the National Training Fund and wider skills investment*
Dr Breda O Dwyer, Head of Department, Organisation and Professional Development, Munster Technological University
Michael Murphy, Principal, Mayo College of Further Education and Training

11.25 Questions and comments from the floor

11.50 **Improving awareness and guidance on apprenticeship pathways**
Sinead Heneghan, CEO, Learning and Development Institute

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* | *supporting flexible learning pathways and movement across the tertiary education system* | *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
Aoife Prendergast, Careers and Employability Manager, Technological University of the Shannon
Mags Arnold, Apprenticeship Manager, University College Cork
Nicola McSweeney, Director, People, Gas Networks Ireland

12.15 Questions and comments from the floor

12.55 **Chair's and Policy Forum for Ireland closing remarks**
Maeve O'Connell TD, Leas-Chathaoirleach, Committee on Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
Jessica Lear, Policy Forum for Ireland