

**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
Karl Byrne, Senior Organiser, Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union
Senior representative, employer
Senior representative, training provider
Senior representative, further education
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 | coordination between employers, providers, government and regional bodies | informing the National Training Fund and wider skills investment
Breda O'Dwyer, Senior Lecturer and Head, Research Team, Munster Technological University
Senior representative, local authority
Senior representative, further education
- 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