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# Workforce of the future report

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# Gaeltacht Minister Dara Calleary TD: Towards a bilingual public service



Credit: Fianna Fáil

Top-tier provision of bilingual public services and employers for those with Irish or those wishing to improve their Irish language skills – that is the vision for the public sector in the coming period, writes Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, Dara Calleary TD.

Central to the Government's efforts in the move towards a bilingual public service is the full and successful implementation of the Official Languages Act. This work is critical in terms of embedding and normalising the Irish language as an integral part of the provision of public services in this country and enabling speakers of the language to use it in their dealings with the State.

In support of this work, the Government has set an ambitious recruitment target that 20 per cent of recruits to public bodies will have Irish by the end of 2030. Through working towards this goal, public bodies will ensure that they are adequately staffed to provide full and high quality bilingual services – particularly in the context of customer services and vulnerable services for the Gaeltacht and in general.

Of course this not a solitary goal, operating in a vacuum. It is part of the wider ecosystem being developed under the language legislation. The publication of the National Plan for Irish Language Public Services in October 2024 – the first national Government strategy in the history of the State for the provision of Irish-language public services – was a significant step forward in this regard. Extensive research was undertaken in preparation of this Plan, with the invaluable results set out therein.

The National Plan focuses on five major strategic themes in the following areas:

1. broad initiatives and structural strengthening;
2. provision of public services through Irish;
3. technology;
4. training, recruitment and language competence; and
5. data collection.

These areas are in line with other government reform strategies such as *Better Public Services* and the *Civil Service Renewal Strategy*.

The National Plan will be supported by two three-year action plans, which will set out the specific actions to be undertaken to achieve the high-level strategic objectives under these themes. The first action plan will cover the period 2025-2027 and is to be submitted to Government for approval in the short period ahead.

In parallel with this work, dates will also be set shortly by which public offices in the Gaeltacht will operate through Irish and by which Gaeltacht public services will be provided through Irish. In

*“Government has set an ambitious recruitment target that 20 per cent of recruits to public bodies will have Irish by the end of 2030.”*

**Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, Dara Calleary TD**

In addition, the first round of consultations on the language standards is to be undertaken with public bodies and the public in the coming period. The system of language standards is based on the successful Welsh system and is to replace the system of language schemes here.

In support of all of this, work is underway under the *Digital Plan for the Irish Language* to ensure that the Irish language is front and centre of technological developments – particularly AI and the Government’s other targets under the *Harness of Digitisation: Digital Framework for Ireland* of moving applicable services online.

In the context of the 20 per cent recruitment target, the National Plan places emphasis on language upskilling of existing staff of public bodies – as well as recruiting people with Irish from outside. In line with this, the results of the survey carried out as part of the research for the Plan, in which approximately 35,000 public sector employees participated, showed particular positivity towards the language for example:

- 50 per cent would be interested in increasing their competency in Irish; and
- 23 per cent would be interested in working through Irish if given further training/supports (in addition to 5 per cent who are already working through Irish or would be ready to work through Irish immediately).

If you take into account that those who indicated that they did not know/had not thought about it, to these two questions could also perhaps be influenced (32 per cent and 27 per cent respectively), these are extremely positive figures.

In addition, the research showed that 11 per cent of the survey participants had a competent level of spoken Irish (level B2-C2 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and 13 per cent of them had the imminent potential to be

competent (level B1). In contrast, only 3 per cent always or often use it as part of their official work. Another 10 per cent stated they used it now and again.

Given that the research also shows that it is not currently the norm for public bodies to keep a record of the number of staff they have with Irish and/or the number of staff who have undertaken an Irish language training course – it would seem that there is potential here for increased skills matching and a number of quick wins that public bodies can start capitalising on towards achieving the 20 per cent recruitment target, for example:

- utilising workforce planning as a core tool to identify specific roles that would require bilingual employees. Customer services and vulnerable services in the Gaeltacht and in general would be priorities in this regard as well as supportive corporate roles;
- providing Irish language training courses for current staff on a proactive basis, to keep a record of those undertaking the courses, and to promote the Irish Language Network for the Public Sector;
- proactively recruit people with Irish and gather information through the recruitment process on candidates’ wishes to work bilingually; their current level of Irish; and their wish to improve their Irish language skills, if necessary; and
- examine the current various career pathways to entering the public body and develop them to include Irish language aspects if needed. The development of apprenticeships through which language skills can be developed is seen as particularly important in this regard, in line with commitments given in the Public Service Apprenticeship Plan 2023, along with internships and periods of work experience.<sup>1</sup>

1. For more information on this transformative work, please contact the Department by emailing [ATO@tcagsm.gov.ie](mailto:ATO@tcagsm.gov.ie) and register for our quarterly newsletter



## An tAire Gaeltachta Dara Calleary TD: I dtreo seirbhís phoiblí dhátheangach

Soláthraí den scoth de sheirbhísí poiblí dátheangacha mar aon le fostóirí den scoth dóibh siúd le Gaeilge, nó ar mian leo cur lena scileanna Gaeilge – sin í an fhís don earnáil phoiblí sa tréimhse amach romhainn, sríobhann an tAire Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail agus Gaeltachta, Dara Calleary TD.

Ag croílár iarrachtaí an Rialtais sa bhogadh i dtreo seirbhís phoiblí dhátheangach, tá feidhmiú iomlán agus rathúil Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla. Tá an obair seo criticiúil ó thaobh an Ghaeilge a neadú isteach agus a normalú mar chuid lárnach de sholáthar seirbhísí poiblí na tíre seo, agus a chumasú do lucht labhartha na teanga í a úsáid ina bplé leis an Stát.

Mar thaca don obair seo, leag an Rialtas síos sprioc uailmhianach earcaíochta, go mbeidh Gaeilge ag 20 faoin gcéad d'earcaigh chuig comhlachtaí poiblí faoi dheireadh 2030.

De réir mar atá comhlachtaí poiblí ag obair i dtreo na sprice seo, cinnteoidh siad go mbeidh líon-dóthanach foirne acu chun seirbhísí dátheangacha iomlánacha agus ar ard-chaighdeán a chur ar fáil – go háirithe i gcomhthéacs seirbhísí custaiméara agus leochaileacha don Ghaeltacht agus go ginearálta.

Ní sprioc aonarach, i bhfolús í seo dar ndóigh. Tá sí mar chuid d'éiceachóras níos leithne atá á thógáil faoin reachtaíocht teanga. Céim shuntasach chun cinn sa mhéid seo a bhí i bhfoilsíú an Phlean Náisiúnta um Sheirbhísí

Poiblí Gaeilge i mí Dheireadh Fómhair 2024 – an chéad straitéis náisiúnta rialtais i stair an Stáit do sholáthar seirbhísí poiblí Gaeilge. Tugadh faoi thaighde cuimsitheach i leith ullmhú an Phlean seo agus déantar torthaí luachmhara an taighde seo a leagann amach ann.

Díríonn an Plean Náisiúnta ar chúig mhórhéama straitéiseacha sna réimsí seo a leanas:

1. tionscnaimh leathana agus neartú struchtúir reatha;
2. soláthar seirbhísí poiblí trí Ghaeilge;

3. teicneolaíocht;
4. oiliúint, earcaíocht, agus inniúlacht teanga; agus
5. bailiú sonraí.

Réimsí atá ag teacht le straitéisí athchóirithe eile de chuid an Rialtais ar nós Seirbhísí Poiblí Níos Fearr agus Straitéis Athnuachana na Státseirbhíse.

Beidh dhá Phlean Gníomhaíochta trí bliana ag tacú leis an bPlean Náisiúnta, a leagfaidh amach na gníomhaíochtaí sonracha chun cuspóirí straitéiseacha ardleibhéil na dtéamaí seo a bhaint amach. Clúdóidh an chéad phlean gníomhaíochta an tréimhse 2025-2027 agus cuirfear é faoi bhráid an Rialtais lena cheadú sa tréimhse ghearr amach romhainn.

Go comhthreomhar leis an obair seo, beidh dátaí á socrú go luath chomh maith faoina mbeidh oifigí poiblí Gaeltachta ag feidhmiú trí Ghaeilge agus faoina gcuirfear seirbhísí poiblí Gaeltachta ar fáil trí Ghaeilge. Beifear ag tabhairt faoin gcéad bhabhta comhairliúcháin ar na caighdeáin teanga le comhlachtaí poiblí agus leis an bpobal chomh maith sa tréimhse ghearr amach romhainn. Tá córas na gcaighdeán teanga bunaithe ar chóras rathúil na Breataine Bige agus le teacht in áit chóras na scéimeanna teanga anseo.

I dtaca leis seo go léir, tá obair ar bun faoin bPlean Digiteach don Ghaeilge chun a chinntiú go bhfuil an Ghaeilge i lár an aonaigh ó thaobh forbairtí teicneolaíochta – go háirithe IS (AI) agus spriocanna eile an Rialtais ó thaobh seirbhísí ábhartha a bhogadh ar líne faoi Leas a Bhaint as Digitíú: Creat Digiteach na hÉireann.

I gcomhthéacs na sprice earcaíochta 20 faoin gcéad, leagtar béim sa Phlean Náisiúnta ar uasoiliúint teanga a chur ar fhoireann reatha de chuid comhlachtaí poiblí – anuas ar daoine le Gaeilge a earcú ón taobh amuigh. Ag teacht leis seo, léirigh torthaí an tsuirbhé a rinneadh mar chuid den taighde don Phlean, inar ghlac c. 35,000 fostaí den earnáil phoiblí páirt, báúlacht ar leith i dtreo na teanga, mar shampla dúirt:

- 50 faoin gcéad go mbeadh suim acu cur lena n-inniúlacht sa Ghaeilge; agus

## “Rialtas síos sprioc uaimhianach earcaíochta, go mbeidh Gaeilge ag 20 faoin gcéad d’earcaigh chuig comhlachtaí poiblí faoi dheireadh 2030.”

### An tAire Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail agus Gaeltachta, Dara Calleary TD

- 23 faoin gcéad go mbeadh suim acu dul ag obair trí Ghaeilge le breis oiliúna/tacaíochtaí (anuas ar 5 faoin gcéad atá ag obair trí Ghaeilge cheana féin nó a bheadh réidh le dul ag obair trí Ghaeilge láithreach).

Má thógann tú san áireamh go bhféadfaí dul i bhfeidhm chomh maith ar na daoine a chur in iúl nach raibh a fhios acu/nár smaoinigh air, don dá cheist thuasluaite (32 faoin gcéad agus 27 gcéad faoi seach), is figiúirí thar a bheith dearfacha iad sin.

Anuas air sin, léirigh an taighde go raibh leibhéal cumasach Gaeilge labhartha, leibhéal B2-C2 ar an CEFR, ag 11 faoin gcéad de rannpháirtithe an tsuirbhé agus poitéinseal a bheith cumasach gan mhoill, leibhéal B1, ag 13 faoin gcéad acu. I gcodarsnacht leis seo, níor úsáid ach 3 faoin gcéad í mar chuid dá gcuid oibre oifigiúil i gcónaí ná go minic. Bhí 10 faoin gcéad eile a d’úsáid í anois agus arís.

Ag tógáil san áireamh gur léirigh an taighde chomh maith nach gnáth-nós é ag comhlachtaí poiblí faoi láthair taifead a choinneáil ar an líon foirne atá acu le Gaeilge agus/nó líon foirne a thug faoi chúrsa oiliúna Gaeilge – feictear go bhféadfaí tuilleadh béime a chur ar meaitseáil scileanna agus go bhfuil cúpla deis anseo do chomhlachtaí poiblí céimeanna praiticiúla a thógáil gan mhoill i dtreo na sprice earcaíochta 20 faoin gcéad, m.sh.:

- an phleanáil don fhórsa saothair a úsáid mar chroí-uirlis chun ról ar leith a mbeadh fostaithe

dátheangacha de dhíth a aithint. Is iad seirbhísí custaiméara agus leochaileacha sa Ghaeltacht agus go ginearálta na tosaíochtaí aitheanta sa mhéid seo mar aon le ról chorparáideacha tacaíochta;

- cúrsaí oiliúna Gaeilge a chur ar fáil don fhoireann reatha ar bhonn réamhghníomhach, taifead a choinneáil díobh siúd a thugann faoi na cúrsaí, agus Gréasán Gaeilge na hEarnála Poiblí a chur chun cinn ina measc;
- earcú réamhghníomhach a dhéanamh ar dhaoine le Gaeilge agus eolas a bhailiú tríd an bpróiseas earcaíochta maidir le mian iarrthóirí oibriú go dátheangach, a leibhéal reatha Gaeilge, agus a mian cur lena scileanna Gaeilge, más gá; agus
- féachaint ar chonairí gairme éagsúla reatha isteach ag an gcomhlacht poiblí agus forbairt a dhéanamh orthu le gnéithe Gaeilge a chuimsiú iontu más gá. Feictear go mbeidh tábhacht ar leith ag baint le forbairt printíseachtaí trína bhféadfaí scileanna teanga a fhorbairt sa mhéid seo, ag teacht le gealltanais ina leith seo i bPlean Printíseachta na Seirbhíse Poiblí 2023, mar aon le hintéirneachtaí agus tréimhsí taithí oibre.<sup>1</sup>

1. Chun tuilleadh eolais a fháil ar an obair bhunathraithe seo, déan teagmháil leis an Roinn le do thoil trí ríomhphost a sheoladh chuig [ATO@tcagsm.gov.ie](mailto:ATO@tcagsm.gov.ie) agus cláraigh dár nuachtlitrí ráithiúil

# The future of work: Adapting to thrive in a changing landscape

workforce of the future report



The workplace is undergoing a fundamental shift. Technology, evolving expectations of workers and employers, as well as new business priorities are shaking up the traditional workplace, write EY's Judith Crawford and Hannah de Burgh Whyte.

Typical models of work, career progression, employee engagement and office life are being challenged. At the centre of this shift is a critical question: how can the public sector not only adapt, but gain a competitive advantage in this new world of work?

The EY 2024 Work Reimagined Survey, based on insights from 17,350 employees and 1,595 employers across 23 countries and 27 industries, highlights a clear trend: "traditional models of career, reward, and workplace structure are being redefined." Employees today prioritise flexibility, meaningful rewards, and continuous development opportunities. Organisations that are not adapting at the same speed risk losing their competitive edge and attractiveness as employers of choice. While certainly a challenge, it does present an opportunity for the public sector. By rethinking workforce strategies, organisations can build talent advantage (their ability to attract, engage, and retain top talent) by focusing on three core areas:

- investing in agile skills development by ensuring staff are equipped for an AI-driven future;

- provision of holistic benefits and career development opportunities beyond the remuneration offering; and
- redefining workplace culture by embracing flexibility and hybrid models.

Key disruptors shaping the future of work, according to the EY survey include Generative AI (GenAI) adoption, which has surged from 22 per cent to 75 per cent in just one year. Flexible work remains a priority, prompting the public sector to reconsider the employee value proposition, staff engagement approaches, leader and line manager capability to manage performance appropriately and office space strategies.

## How can the public sector build talent advantage?

1. Embracing AI and agile skills development

Advertorial

One of the most striking findings from the EY survey is the rapid acceleration of AI adoption. Over the past year, GenAI usage has risen significantly, with usage highest in the technology sector (90 per cent) and lowest in government and public services (60 per cent) across the globe. This disparity underscores the need for a structured approach to AI integration, ensuring that employees across all sectors have the skills and confidence to work effectively alongside emerging technologies.

The current Programme for Government points to ambitions to ensure Ireland is a leader in the Digital Economy and AI. Realisation of this vision will require public sector organisations to focus on investment in continuous learning for staff at all levels. A programme of digital maturity building will help to ensure staff can appropriately use AI technologies, manage and govern data, and apply data and technology to user design. Integration of AI into learning and development interventions via AI-powered learning platforms can personalise career development and improving learner journeys and change adoption. Focusing on digital transformation will certainly improve service delivery and efficiency but this is dependent upon upskilling the workforce to the level of digital maturity needed to fully embrace it and to harness its full potential.

## 2. Expanding rewards: A holistic approach to employee value

While competitive pay remains a key component of the employee value proposition, current and potential new staff want more than just financial compensation. They value well-being, career growth, and work-life balance. This is where the public sector can differentiate itself. To boost retention and engagement, organisations should consider greater prioritisation of well-being through flexible schedules, mental health supports, wellness programmes and personalised benefits tailored to meet diverse employee needs, including professional development and work arrangements. The provision of clear career pathways has been proven to support retention - while this may be a challenge for the 'generalist' civil servant, there are opportunities across specialist functions to provide these pathways and entice staff to stay and build their career within the public sector.



**Judith Crawford** is a Partner in EY's People Consulting team and leads services to the Government and Public Sector.



**Hannah de Burgh Whyte** is a People Consulting Director with EY and focuses on supporting client in the Government and Public Sector.

## 3. Rethinking workplace culture in a hybrid world

The traditional office-based work model can no longer be the default. Employees increasingly expect flexibility, autonomy, and a sense of purpose, making it essential for organisations to rethink how they cultivate workplace culture. To build an effective, untethered workplace culture, public sector organisations should focus on supporting leaders to manage hybrid teams – success in a flexible workplace depends on trust, clear objectives, and engagement rather than monitoring hours worked. Organisation should invest in digital collaboration tools that support seamless communication and productivity, and reconfigure office spaces to including collaboration hubs, not just provide space to sit at a desk. The focus here is on creating a modern, agile work environment, supported by policies that allow flexible and remote working arrangements.

The EY 2024 Work Reimagined Survey reinforces a simple truth: the world of work is evolving, and organisations must evolve with it. To remain competitive and future-proof their workforce, public sector organisations should prioritise:

- investment in AI and skills development across the workforce;
- adoption of flexible, hybrid-friendly work models;
- broadening employee rewards and well-being programmes: and
- refining retention strategies to reduce attrition.

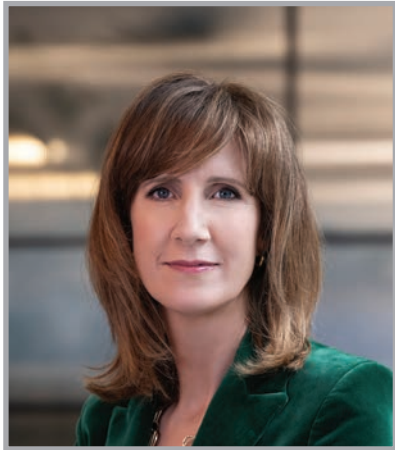
Public sector organisations that embrace these changes will not only thrive in the new world of work but will also play a pivotal role in shaping Ireland's future economy and deliver on the commitments in the new Programme for Government.

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**Shape the future with confidence**

# Chartered director programme elevates Ireland's C-suite



Caroline Spillane, Chief Executive Officer, Institute of Directors Ireland.



Eileen Gleeson, Programme Director, Chartered Director Programme in Ireland, Institute of Directors Ireland.

IoD Ireland's gold-standard director programme equips leaders for today's governance challenges.

Strong, empowered leadership is an essential component during times of great economic change, and for both national and multinational businesses operating in Ireland, the need for knowledgeable and effective leaders is more urgent than ever.

"Effective leadership is at the heart of every successful organisation," says Caroline Spillane, chief executive officer of the Institute of Directors (IoD) Ireland. "The role of a director or senior executive is ever-evolving, requiring a blend of strategic vision, strong governance, and technical expertise."

IoD Ireland is forging a path towards leadership excellence through its Chartered Director Programme. This is the gold standard in director education, and is delivered by one of Ireland's most respected authorities on governance and leadership.

Spillane adds: "Its blend of practical application, expert teaching and professional recognition makes the

Chartered Director Programme a must-have for directors and business leaders who are committed to governance excellence and are ambitious for their businesses."

## Programme structure and USP

The Chartered Director Programme offers an innovative blend of peer-to-peer learning, academic education and real-world insights with participants from diverse industries and experiences. It is led by a faculty of governance specialists and chartered directors.

Programme Director Eileen Gleeson reflects that one of the distinguishing features of this course is its focus on small in-person class sizes, which fosters a collaborative learning environment where participants can engage deeply with the material and with one another.

"The breadth and scope of participants is impressive – spanning SMEs, large

corporations, multinationals, NGOs, charities and state bodies," she said. "These varied sectors bring different perspectives and experiences, enriching the learning experience and creating networks that last a lifetime. The programme is suitable for those in leadership positions within their organisations as well as those who are in non-executive roles or are transitioning into a non-executive career.

"Upon completing the programme, participants join an alumni community that continues to provide professional development opportunities and networking long after the programme ends. Their IoD membership and alumni community ensure they are supported throughout the rest of their executive and non-executive careers."

## Real-world impact

The true value of the Chartered Director Programme lies in the experiences and successes of those who have completed it. For Margot Slattery, global head of diversity and inclusion at ISS A/S, the programme offered both structure and support, making it manageable alongside a full-time role. She found it to be a transformative experience, leaving her "much better prepared for the future".

Fiona Flannery, an independent non-executive director and financial services expert, emphasises its practicality, noting that while it sharpened her technical skills, it also equipped her with a "great toolkit to encourage meaningful boardroom debate and challenge." The programme reinforced the importance of fiduciary duties, instilling a deep sense of responsibility in her board engagements.

## A must have for directors and business leaders

For Peter Oakes, fintech leader and INED, the benefits extended beyond education thanks to its invaluable networking opportunities. The Institute of Directors, he says, offered "high-quality

events and access to a peer network that is incredibly useful for staying at the forefront of governance trends”.

Derek Kehoe, chief executive and head of country at BNP Paribas Ireland, experienced the programme as a pivotal confidence booster early in his board career. Shortly after stepping into the role of chief executive and joining multiple boards, he found that becoming a chartered director “gave [him] huge confidence at the board table”, particularly as a chairman.

### Comprehensive syllabus

The Chartered Director Programme covers a broad range of competencies essential for effective directorship and leadership. Subjects include the role of the director and the board from an Irish and international perspective; the principles and practices that ensure ethical and effective leadership; strategic development – learning to guide organisations through both internal and external challenges; financial oversight and decision making; and leadership in

management and boards – cultivating leadership skills for managing teams and steering boards towards success.

Upon successful completion of the programme, the participant is awarded a certificate and diploma in Company Direction, and then may be eligible to pursue the prestigious Chartered Director accreditation.

As the only organisation in Ireland to offer full Chartered Director designation, IoD Ireland is uniquely positioned to help shape the future of corporate governance and leadership.

“The IoD Chartered Director Programme was a very professional, enriching and personally rewarding experience,” says Luke Hanlon, managing director of Supervalu and Centra. “The material covered was excellent, spanning leadership, governance, strategy and company finance. The programme was curated and organised in a really accessible way, which I found particularly helpful as I am in a full-time executive role.”

Spillane concludes that, “by participating in the Chartered Director Programme, directors and senior executives can position themselves at the forefront of leadership excellence. Equipped with the skills, knowledge and network necessary for guiding their organisations toward sustainable success, graduates of the programme are ready to take on today’s governance challenges.

“IoD Ireland remains committed to shaping the future of leadership in Ireland, empowering its vision of making the country an exemplar in corporate governance.”

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*The IoD Chartered Director Programme. Enrolling now for September 2025. Learn more: [www.iodireland.ie](http://www.iodireland.ie)*

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ESG  
Forum



## Sustainable development education and ESG

Patrick Paul Walsh, Vice President of Education and Director of the SDG Academy, UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), tells *eolas Magazine* about the imperative of sustainable development education in ESG professional training.

Walsh articulated the case for the integration of sustainable development education into professional training frameworks, particularly as they pertain to the evolving demands of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) compliance. His remarks underscore the need to equip the current and future workforce with the requisite knowledge and skills to navigate global sustainability challenges, which are increasingly shaping regulatory and corporate landscapes.

Walsh emphasises that the transition towards sustainable economic models cannot be achieved without a corresponding shift in workforce education. “Irrespective of prior academic or professional qualifications,” he observes, adding: “There exists a pervasive gap in understanding how economic activities intersect with ecological and social systems.” This gap, he argues, is particularly evident in

the corporate sector, where ESG reporting and compliance have introduced new layers of complexity.

The SDG Academy, under Walsh’s leadership, has sought to address this gap through the provision of open-access educational resources. “While the availability of free online courses represents a significant step forward, the real challenge lies in embedding these materials into formal professional development pathways, ensuring that they are not merely consumed but actively applied within organisational contexts,” he says.

### Workforce development

Since its inception, the SDG Academy has disseminated knowledge through a suite of online courses, many of which have been widely adopted by academic institutions,

governmental bodies, and multinational corporations. Walsh highlights the scale of this reach: “To date, our courses have been certified by over one million learners, a figure that, while substantial, does not fully capture the broader, informal utilisation of these resources across sectors.”

Of particular relevance to the workforce of the future is the Academy’s focus on interdisciplinary learning. Courses such as the SDG Academy’s Planetary Boundaries and The Age of Sustainable Development are designed to provide professionals with a holistic understanding of sustainability, transcending traditional disciplinary silos.

“The feedback from corporate learners,” Walsh remarks, “indicates that this broader perspective is invaluable when navigating ESG frameworks, as it enables professionals to contextualise their roles within larger systemic challenges.”

### Mission 4.7

Central to Walsh’s argument is the principle articulated in Sustainable Development Goal Target 4.7, which advocates for sustainable development education as a lifelong endeavour. “The prevailing assumption that sustainability education should be confined to primary or secondary schooling is fundamentally misplaced,” he asserts. “Given the urgency of the climate crisis and the rapid evolution of regulatory requirements, it is incumbent upon us to ensure that continuous learning opportunities are accessible to all segments of the workforce.”

This perspective has been reinforced by recent international policy developments, including the midterm review of the SDGs, co-facilitated by Ireland and Qatar, which explicitly endorsed lifelong learning as a cornerstone of sustainable development. “The recognition of this continuum at the highest levels of global governance underscores the necessity of aligning professional training with the broader objectives of the 2030 agenda,” Walsh notes.

### Challenges and opportunities for SMEs

Walsh asserts that there is a disproportionate burden that ESG compliance places on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which often lack the resources to navigate these requirements independently. “The prevailing model is one in which larger corporations impose ESG standards upon their supply chains, effectively externalising the costs of compliance onto SMEs,” he observes. This dynamic, he argues, is unsustainable and necessitates a more equitable approach to workforce upskilling.

To this end, Walsh advocates for a coordinated industrial policy framework, wherein regulators, educational institutions, and industry stakeholders collaborate to standardise and subsidise ESG training. “The historical precedent for such an approach exists,” he notes, referencing Ireland’s experience with structural economic reforms in the late 20th century. “When the State assumes responsibility for workforce development, the transition towards sustainable practices becomes significantly more manageable for smaller enterprises.”

### Insurance and financial services

Walsh states that the insurance sector is a catalyst for ESG integration. “The increasing frequency of climate-related disruptions has rendered many assets uninsurable,” he says. “This presents both a risk and an opportunity for the financial services industry to reorient itself towards sustainability.”

Walsh highlights ongoing collaborations with reinsurance firms and academic institutions to develop training programmes that frame ESG through the lens of actuarial science. “By quantifying sustainability risks in financial terms,” he explains, “we can create a more robust incentive structure for ESG compliance, one that resonates with both corporate decision-makers and policymakers.”

Concluding, Walsh reiterates the necessity of systemic reform in workforce education. “The challenges we face are not merely technical but structural,” he says. “Without a concerted effort to democratise access to sustainability education, the transition to a sustainable economy will remain uneven and incomplete.”

# Cyber resilience in the future of work

The rapid adoption of AI, combined with heightened geopolitical instability and an expanding digital attack surface, has led to a surge in cybersecurity threats. Like many countries, Ireland faces a significant shortage of cybersecurity professionals, putting businesses at risk and leading to missed career opportunities in a fast-growing industry with 0 per cent unemployment and salaries, on average, 19 per cent higher than the national average.

The World Economic Forum's (WEF) *Future of Jobs 2025* report highlights that Ireland faces a 76 per cent transformation barrier due to skill gaps in the labour market, significantly higher than the global average of 63 per cent. Skill gaps are the biggest barrier to business transformation, with 63 per cent of employers identifying them as a major challenge over the 2025-2030 period. To address this, 85 per cent of employers plan to prioritise upskilling

their workforce, with 70 per cent expecting to hire staff with new skills.

## How Cyber Skills is closing the gap

Cyber Skills is tackling this challenge by offering practical, industry-focused education that ensures professionals are workplace-ready. Funded by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) Human Capital Initiative (HCI) Pillar 3, Cyber

Skills is a collaboration between Munster Technological University (MTU), Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin), and the University of Limerick (UL). It provides online, flexible, university-accredited micro-credentials and job role-specific pathways to help professionals upskill and reskill in cybersecurity. Learners can benefit from the HEA HCI Pillar 3 Micro-Credentials Learner Fee Subsidy, which provides an 80 per cent reduction on course fees, making cybersecurity education more accessible.

To meet specific workforce demands, Cyber Skills has developed targeted programmes in partnership with industry and government agencies. One example is a programme designed with two regional councils to support information security roles in small IT departments, such as those found in regional county councils and small businesses. This initiative equips learners with both technical skills, such as vulnerability analysis, and managerial skills, including AI for cyber resilience and cyber policy and process management. With direct relevance for

SMEs and all 31 local authorities, this programme strengthens organisations' ability to handle evolving cybersecurity challenges.

Cyber Skills Project Manager Jacqueline Kehoe highlights the growing industry shift: "By working closely with partners such as Dell, Mastercard, and government agencies, Cyber Skills ensures that its programmes align with industry needs. More companies now view cybersecurity as a core business strategy rather than a niche IT concern. This shift underscores the importance of developing a cybersecurity workforce capable of protecting Ireland's businesses and public services."

### Cybersecurity careers: Technical and non-technical pathways

Cybersecurity is no longer just about prevention; it is about resilience and recovery. As businesses strive to protect their digital assets, the demand for skilled professionals is growing across multiple domains.

For technically skilled professionals, career paths include:

- IT networking and engineering
- Cloud security
- Secure software development
- Chief Information Security Officer (CISO) roles

For those cross disciplinary roles, opportunities exist in:

- Risk management
- Legal and compliance
- Incident response management
- Cybersecurity communication and education

"The NIST NICE framework defines 52 cybersecurity roles, and that is probably not even all of them," Kehoe adds.

### Hands-on cybersecurity training: The Cyber Range

A critical component of Cyber Skills' approach is its investment in a national Cyber-Range infrastructure made possible by initial funding from the HEA. The Cyber Range provides a safe, cloud-based environment where learners can gain practical experience in cyberattack and defence scenarios.

Key features:

- **Real-world training:** Students take on both attacker and defender roles to understand security vulnerabilities.

- **Customisable exercises:** Instructors tailor training modules to specific skills and industry challenges.
- **Live progress tracking:** Educators monitor student performance in real time, offering feedback and guidance.

This hands-on experience ensures that graduates are workplace-ready, equipped with the skills to handle real-world cybersecurity threats.

### The future of cybersecurity education in Ireland

With regulations such as NIS2 and DORA coming into effect, businesses must act now to remain compliant and secure. Cyber Skills offers industry-driven education to equip professionals with expertise in security threats, risk assessment, and data protection.

For those new to cybersecurity, the Higher Diploma (HDip) in Cybersecurity Operations, offered through Springboard, provides an ideal entry point. Designed for individuals without a technical background, it covers network security, threat detection, and compliance—helping professionals transition into the cybersecurity workforce.

Killian O'Leary, a tech recruiter and coach at The Berkley Group, shares his experience as a student of Cyber Skills' Certificate in Digital Operational Resilience at MTU: "With a full-time job and two kids, professional development can sometimes take a back seat. Self-discipline and time management are key. The Cyber Security Risk Frameworks course, excellently delivered by Gillian O'Carroll through Cyber Skills, has been hugely worthwhile. It aligns perfectly with my passion for cyber and learning and provides invaluable insights into resilience, risk management, and the evolving DORA regulations."

### Technology and human skills: A balanced approach

The *Future of Jobs 2025* report highlights that the fastest-growing skills include Big Data, AI, networks, cybersecurity, and technology literacy.

However, creative thinking, resilience, flexibility, agility, curiosity, and lifelong learning are also expected to be highly valuable over the 2025-2030 period.

With skill gaps being a major challenge for businesses, effective reskilling and upskilling initiatives are essential for talent retention and attraction. Cyber Skills addresses this demand by providing micro-credentials—small, accredited courses designed to meet the needs of learners, enterprises, and organisations. These courses upskill and reskill SMEs, ICT professionals, public sector organisations, and individuals, equipping them to navigate an evolving digital landscape. With the HEA HCI Pillar 3 Micro-Credentials Learner Fee Subsidy, a micro-credential that was €800 is now €160.

Killian O'Leary reinforces the importance of acting now: "The demand for cybersecurity professionals is growing fast. Now is the time to gain the skills that employers are looking for."

### Securing Ireland's digital future

Cyber threats are constantly evolving, and cybersecurity education must adapt accordingly. Cyber Skills continues to expand its offerings to include AI security, cloud security, and threat intelligence, ensuring professionals are prepared for future cybersecurity challenges.

As the digital economy grows, so too does the need for a highly skilled cybersecurity workforce. While Ireland faces significant skill gaps, initiatives like Cyber Skills are bridging the divide through flexible, industry-focused education. By investing in skills today, Ireland is positioning itself as a global leader in cybersecurity, ensuring its workforce is prepared to tackle the challenges of the future.

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# Towards a National Better Work Strategy

Four proposed actions to improve job quality in Ireland through the 'better work' agenda are outlined in a report published in July 2024 by the National Economic and Social Council's (NESC) titled *Towards a National Better Work Strategy*.

Better work is a concept of job quality based on material measures like wages, and non-material measures like autonomy. The report claims implementing better work leads to improved productivity, more robust recruitment and retention, and enhanced service and product quality.

The report also illustrates the benefits it can have for wider society, stating it improves living standards, creates more sustainable jobs, reduces poverty and inequality, improves the economy, and supports social cohesion.

The proposed actions outlined in the report are:

- to establish sectoral taskforces to build productivity and resilience in sectors with capacity to support better work;
- to collaborate with social partners on the delivery of a national strategy for better work;
- to conduct research to provide evidence in support of better work; and
- to promote workplace innovation to improve skills, thus increasing productivity.

## Challenges and reforms

Informing the proposed strategy, the report traces challenges facing businesses arising from labour market reforms already introduced or in progress. Such reforms include the replacement of the national minimum wage with the statutory living wage by 2026, statutory sick pay, and enhanced parental leave.

Analysis of reforms by the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) found they “will lead to benefits that accrue to both the individual employee and to broader society”. However, it notes that it will also lead to additional costs for businesses, stating there must be a “trade-off” between low-income employees who will benefit from reforms, and low-margin businesses that will be worst impacted by them. Some firms will not be able to absorb costs, leading to reduced working hours or job losses for workers, and higher prices for consumers.

The report asserts that a strategy can mitigate the impact of these reforms on businesses, while realising their potential to improve employee wellbeing and increase productivity.

On increasing productivity, the report outlines how it is enhanced by increasing wages and vice versa. As identified by the European Commission, “a significant productivity gap” has opened up between large and small enterprises in Ireland, reducing the capacity small enterprises have to increase wages. This poses a significant problem for the labour market as 69.2 per cent of workers in Ireland are employed by smaller firms.

To address this, the NESC states that increased productivity can be achieved through enhanced employee engagement enabled by human resource management. This includes tailored sectoral programmes to “foster and deepen the quality of employee engagement”.

## Policy

NESC traces gaps in data regarding the monitoring of job quality and fair work, suggesting that a national better work survey be conducted to address this, potentially on an all-island basis. A research programme, containing the views of employees, is pinned as vital in informing policy action to support better work.

Policy and institutional arrangements must be installed to support the implementation of the proposed strategy, the report notes. It points to the success of Scotland and Wales in implementing the Fair Work agenda, facilitated by the establishment of dedicated policy units. The report recommends adopting a similar approach to deliver the strategy for better work, noting that policy must balance the impacts of associated costs arising from better work, and its impact on the quality of public services.

NESC cautions that policy must be drafted in an inclusive manner to improve the engagement of minority groups with the labour market, whom the report asserts face barriers to employment.

Building on the notion of a sectoral approach, the Strategy recommends the establishment of sectoral task forces to support the better work agenda. Pointing to the success of sectoral forums for the ‘Fair Work’ agenda in Scotland and Wales, the report states that this can “highlight the sector-specific issues and challenges of better work”. Adopting this approach can enhance productivity, increase investment, and enhance skills development, according to the report.

Skills development is pinned as a key priority in the strategy so workers can meet changing skills demands “generated by globalisation, demographic change, and the green and digital transitions”. A 2023 OECD study, *Skills Strategy Ireland*, cited in the report, notes that skills development has been “a consistent public policy priority” in Ireland, but asserts that many workers do not have the necessary skills to succeed in the labour market of the future. To address this, the OECD recommends that Ireland “reinvigorate its strategic focus on workplace innovation”, a suggestion endorsed by NESC.

In July 2024, the Department of the Taoiseach welcomed the publication of the report, asserting that its recommendations are “fully aligned with the Programme for Government 2020 and the White Paper on Enterprise 2022-2030”. However, as of May 2025, the recommendations have not yet been implemented.



# Unique skills strategy increases Fingal's economic attractiveness



The Fingal Skills Strategy has strong support from a variety of key stakeholders.

With its strategic location, strong population growth, and diverse economic base, Fingal is a key driver of the Irish economy with a highly skilled and experienced workforce that supports both local and multinational companies.

In 2024, Fingal County Council adopted *Future Fingal: An Economic Development Strategy* which looks to develop the Fingal economy out to 2040. It highlighted the need for skills development to meet the challenges facing the Fingal economy. Having already launched, in 2019, the first cross-sector skills strategy developed at a local level in Ireland, Fingal already had a range of recommendations and actions in place to grow the skills of the workforce in Fingal, benefitting both citizens and employers.

Through the Skills Strategy Implementation Group, which was set up in 2021, Fingal County Council worked with local stakeholders to identify key sectors and potential skill

shortages that may emerge in Fingal before seeking opportunities to address these skills shortages by working in partnerships with industry and the education sector.

The key sectors identified in Fingal are:

- construction;
- green skills;
- services/hospitality;
- transport and logistics;
- pharma; and
- agri food.

In February 2025, the second iteration of the Fingal Skills Strategy was launched at an event in Baldoyle

Training Centre which was attended by Councillors, MEPs, Oireachtas members and representatives from private business as well as the education and training sector.

The new strategy, which is called *Future Fingal: Fingal Skills Strategy 2024-2029*, is more focused than the first strategy as it looks to directly address workforce needs, enhance business opportunities, and strengthen Fingal's position as a leading economic hub according to John Quinlivan, Director of Economic Enterprise and Cultural Development with Fingal County Council.

"By identifying key sectoral needs and forecasting existing and future skills gaps, the Fingal Skills Strategy seeks to ensure that businesses, particularly SMEs, have access to a highly skilled workforce. The Strategy also encourages innovation, support for entrepreneurship, and adaptability, by focusing on the importance of transversal skills, supporting lifelong learning, and identifying the skills needed to keep pace with evolving digital and green economy trends," says Quinlivan.

The latest iteration of the Fingal Skills Strategy builds on the successes of the original by incorporating European good practices from participation in the Interreg SKYLA Project which address local challenges and the evolving skills needs of the county. It also seeks to address global challenges, harness technological advancements, and tackle skills shortages, ensuring the county remains competitive and prepared for the future.

A key focus is how Fingal can enable the transition to a green economy. The strategy recognises that key sectors must adapt to new sustainability regulations, climate targets, and consumer demands for eco-friendly practices. To support this shift, the

Strategy's stakeholders are keen to integrate green skills into Further Education and Higher Education training programmes, apprenticeships, and progress industry collaborations to ensure employers and employees are prepared for a low-carbon future.

The Mayor of Fingal, Councillor Brian McDonagh, who launched the new strategy, added that residents of Fingal will benefit from meaningful and future-ready employment opportunities closer to home.

"The strategy sets out an ambitious vision for the future of skills development in Fingal, empowering our citizens to reach their full potential and contribute to our vibrant and dynamic county. It also looks at ways to support labour market participation by removing barriers, such as childcare and transport, to provide a more inclusive work environment in Fingal. We want to continue to work in partnership with our Skills Strategy stakeholders to ensure that we have the right people for the right jobs in Fingal."

The *Fingal Skills Strategy 2024-2029* was developed by Fingal County Council in collaboration with the Skills Strategy Implementation Group (SSIG) which includes business and industrial stakeholders as well as education and training providers such as Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB), City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB), Dublin City University (DCU), Technological University Dublin (TUD), Fingal Skillnet, Dublin Regional Skills Forum (DRSF), and the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) in SOLAS.

According to the Chief Executive of Fingal County Council, AnnMarie Farrelly, having the right partners is the key to ensuring a successful implementation of the strategy.

"Fingal has supported the development of a strong collaborative working relationship between industry and academia to address the existing and future skills needs in the county and ensure that Fingal is a prime location to invest and grow a business in with a strong pipeline of talent," says Farrelly.

That commitment was evident in the successes delivered in the first Skills Strategy which saw groups being set up to review the skills requirements in each of the prioritised sectors. In transport and logistics, for example, a need was identified for customs agents to deal with the extra paperwork created by



Mayor of Fingal, Councillor Brian McDonagh, with one of the key stakeholders in the Fingal Skills Strategy, Aidan Owens of Baldoye Training Centre, who is also co-chair of the Skills Strategy Implementation Group.

Brexit and the result was the successful roll out of suitable courses by the Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education Training Board.

The first strategy also paved the way for the *Xplore Your Future TY Expo* which is an annual interactive event designed to help Transition Year students explore different career possibilities which they may not have considered before and meet and talk with young people already on these career paths for inspiration.

The development of the Fingal Skills Strategy has included consultations with stakeholders such as employers, education and training providers, and trade unions to identify skills gaps and forecast future needs. The Council hopes that participation in the Interreg Project SKYLA will raise awareness of available skills supports and provision; promote in-work progression through

life-long learning, upskilling and reskilling; and unlocking a wider talent pool by improving labour market participation.

By broadening the skills base and promoting flexible learning options, the Strategy aims to equip the local population with the necessary skills to pursue rewarding careers and contribute to the long-term success of the Fingal economy.

For more information on the *Fingal Skills Strategy 2024-2029* go to:  
Web: [www.fingal.ie/fingal-skills-strategy](http://www.fingal.ie/fingal-skills-strategy)

Or contact Alison Foster, Fingal County Council, Economic, Enterprise, Tourism and Cultural Department.

Email: [alison.foster@fingal.ie](mailto:alison.foster@fingal.ie)  
Tel: 01-8905000



## ESG Forum 2025

Speakers: Nessa Whelan, UN Global Compact; Susan Rossney, Chartered Accountants Ireland; Kevin O'Sullivan, *The Irish Times*; Mona Costelloe, Byrne Wallace Shields LLP; and Niamh Duddy, Chartered Governance Institute UK and Ireland.

Environment Ireland's 2025 ESG Forum took place in the Talbot Hotel, Stillorgan, Dublin in February, bringing together key stakeholders to focus on the current challenges facing organisations and their ESG strategies.

The top line up of expert speakers, both local and visiting included Nessa Whelan, Country Manager for Ireland, UN Global Company; Robert Adamczyk, Board Member, Responsible Business Forum Poland; Lisa-Nicole Dunne, Managing Director and Founder, Mantra Strategy; Meaghan Carmody, Senior Sustainability Adviser, Business in the Community; and Johan Fridh, Principal, Sustainability Consulting, AFRY Management Consulting.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the 2025 ESG Forum sponsors, Byrne Wallace Shields LLP and nucleo, as well as speakers, exhibitors and delegates who joined us in the Talbot Hotel, Stillorgan, Dublin and made the conference a huge success.



Lisa-Nicole Dunne, Mantra Strategy with Karen Outram, Byrne Wallace Shields LLP.



Simona Herbj with Thomas McGrath, Méadbh Clake, Robert Brown and Henry Daly from sponsoring organisation nucleo.



Patrick Paul Walsh, UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN).



Ankush Shirsath, Enterprise Ireland asks the panel a question.



Gillian O'Connor, University College Dublin with speaker Kathleen O'Regan, Enterprise Ireland.



# First post-Covid decline in remote working

The number of people who usually work from home decreased by approximately 4,100 in the 12 months to Q4 2024, according to the Labour Force Survey by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) published in February 2025.

Demonstrating a pivot away from the full-time work from home model, the number of people who do not work from home increased by 29,200 although the number of hybrid workers has increased by 83,100. However, the number of days this cohort works from home is not included in the data.

Of those surveyed, 19 per cent said they usually work from home, down from 20 per cent in Q4 2023. Data also shows that 16 per cent said they sometimes work from home, up from 14 per cent in 2023.

The trend marks a departure to attitudes to the remote work both during and immediately after the Covid-19 pandemic, with the previous Fianna Fáil-Fine Gael-Green Party coalition having viewed the expansion of working from home as an economic and environmental opportunity.

Writing in *eolas Magazine* in October 2022, former Taoiseach Leo Varadkar

said that the pandemic “changed the world of work forever”. “Millions of people and businesses around the world moved overnight from the office to home working. This shift might have taken decades if it had been planned”.

Varadkar, who was also Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment between 2020 and 2022, introduced a remote work strategy in 2021, which outlines a goal of 20 per cent of public sector workers being fully remote. This was backed up by the introduction of legislation which gives workers a right to request remote work.

Former Green Party leader Eamon Ryan told *eolas Magazine* in August 2022: “If we can reverse volume of travel, and adopt remote working patterns in a way that works for everyone, then we can make transport more sustainable.”

The ending of lockdown restrictions was met with a number of prominent billionaires calling for an end to remote

work. James Gorman, the former CEO of Morgan Stanley, called for an end of the practice in 2022, stating: “If you can go into a restaurant in New York City, you can come into the office.”

This was backed up by Tesla and X (Twitter) CEO Elon Musk, who says: “Remote work is no longer acceptable... If you want to pretend to work, go somewhere else.” Musk subsequently threatened noncompliant employees with termination.

CSO Statistician with the Labour Market Division Colin Hanley says: “When it comes to remote working, almost 540,000 worked more than half their week at home in Q4 2024. This is the lowest reported figure since the onset of the pandemic and equates to an almost 20 per cent decline in people mainly working from home compared with Q4 2020. This was driven by a 5.3 per cent drop in males usually working from home.”



As organisations look to the future, embracing inclusion is not just a social responsibility; it is a strategic advantage that drives innovation, performance, and long-term success.

Maeve Monaghan, CEO of NOW Group, an award-winning social enterprise dedicated to supporting individuals with neurodivergence and autism into employment, highlights the importance of fostering inclusive environments as they expand their work across the island of Ireland. Monaghan also explains how the social enterprise that was founded in Belfast is expanding its services across the island of Ireland.

True accessibility goes beyond physical spaces; it is about creating a culture where individuals feel safe, valued and empowered to contribute. While inclusion is gaining traction among HR teams, it must also be a priority at the highest levels of leadership, across boardrooms and the C-suite.

### An untapped talent pool in a competitive market

Ireland faces significant challenges when it comes to the employment of individuals with disabilities. Only 32.6 per cent of people with disabilities in Ireland are employed, compared to the EU average of 51.3 per cent. This results in an employment gap of 38.6 per cent between individuals with and without disabilities – significantly higher than the EU average of 24.4 per cent. These figures underscore the urgent need for proactive workplace inclusion initiatives.

However, inclusion should not be seen merely as an act of levelling up – it is a smart business decision, especially in the era of skills shortages and workforce challenges. Companies that successfully embed inclusive practices gain a

competitive edge, fostering innovation, enhancing employee engagement and improving overall performance.

To address this challenge, the Government has introduced progressive targets to increase the employment of people with disabilities in the public sector. The statutory employment target, previously set at 3 per cent, increased to 4.5 per cent in 2024 and as of January 2025 is 6 per cent – a doubling of the 3 per cent target set out in the Disability Act 2005.

Achieving these targets across the public sector, and to increase the employment of individuals with disabilities in private organisations, requires fresh thinking and collaboration, and that's where we at the NOW Group can play a vital role, connecting the dots and delivering solutions that benefit all.

Working across Ireland, the NOW Group has already demonstrated the success of such initiatives in Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland alone, we have supported 973 people into paid employment over the past five years.

We now have an ambitious plan to support 700 people with disabilities into paid jobs across Ireland within the next three years.

With near-full employment in Ireland, businesses are struggling to fill positions – yet there is an untapped talent pool that, when given the right support, can thrive and bring real value to the workplace. NOW Group pride themselves on achieving a 93 per cent retention rate after six months for participants placed into jobs.

### NOW Group's initiatives: JAM card and employment services

At the NOW Group, we have been at the forefront of inclusion through innovative tools and programmes including:

- **JAM Card:** The JAM Card (just a minute) is a discreet tool that allows individuals with learning difficulties, autism, or communication barriers to indicate that they need a moment of patience in social or business interactions. Available as both a physical card and a digital app, the JAM Card is widely recognised, with over 3,000 businesses and 182,500 users globally. In Ireland, organisations such as the National Transport Authority, the Department of Justice, and the Office of Public Works have implemented JAM Card training, ensuring staff are equipped to offer accessible and inclusive service.
- **Employment Services in Ireland:** We have launched dedicated Employment Services in Dublin and Galway, with further rollouts planned for Monaghan, Cavan, Louth, and Meath later this year. These services provide training programmes across key industries such as tourism, hospitality, ICT, data analytics, and cyber security, equipping individuals with the skills they need to secure meaningful employment. A recent milestone saw 34 neurodiverse and autistic participants graduate from NOW Group's training academies in Dublin, reflecting the organisation's commitment to fostering inclusive employment opportunities. In 2025, our graduation numbers will have increased even further, which is reflective of our team's progress in helping people to gain qualifications and engage with progressive employers who do not just talk about being 'inclusive' but who actually fully embrace inclusivity within the workplace.



In 2024, when welcoming the Department of Justice's decision to become JAM Card Friendly, former Minister for Justice, Helen McEntee TD said: "I am delighted to support the rollout of the JAM card initiative across the Department of Justice. Removing barriers to equality is not always about building ramps or moving walls, sometimes it is just about showing that we understand the needs of the person in front of us."

### The business case for inclusion

Embracing inclusion delivers tangible benefits for businesses:

- **Enhanced reputation:** Companies known for inclusive practices attract a broader customer base and foster brand loyalty.
- **Diverse perspectives:** An inclusive workforce brings varied viewpoints, driving innovation and problem-solving.
- **Employee retention:** Inclusive workplaces experience higher employee satisfaction, leading to improved retention and reduced turnover.

In 2025, businesses have the opportunity to make meaningful change in workplace inclusion. By recognising and celebrating the abilities of all individuals, we can build a stronger, more diverse and more innovative workforce for the future.

Not sure where to start? We can help. We are open to partnering with forward-thinking businesses and organisations that embrace all abilities, across every industry, including **hospitality, catering, manufacturing, professional services, and digital.**

To learn more about partnering with NOW Group and to make a lasting impact in your business, visit [www.nowgroup.org](http://www.nowgroup.org)

To learn more on how NOW Group can help your business, visit



[www.nowgroup.org](http://www.nowgroup.org)





## The Draghi Report: Integrating future growth models with a workforce of the future

Recommendations on how sectors can adapt to changing workforce models were presented to the European Commission in a report coordinated by former President of the European Central Bank and Italian Prime Minister, Mario Draghi.

Central to this is the call to close the skills gap. The 2024 report advocates for a stronger link between education providers and industry needs, encouraging a shift toward modular, flexible learning pathways. It is claimed this would allow workers to retrain or upskill across their careers, with a particular focus on digital literacy, technical professions, and emerging

green skills. It urges member states to make strategic use of EU funding to scale vocational training and support institutions offering high-impact qualifications in fields critical to the twin transitions.

The report also recognises demographic and regional imbalances as key structural risks. It proposes targeted investment in underperforming



regions to support local talent pipelines and retain younger workers, thereby reducing economic disparities within the bloc. Increasing mobility within the EU of students, trainees, and skilled professionals is highlighted as a way to match labour supply and demand more efficiently.

In terms of institutional reform, the Draghi report stresses the need to modernise public administration. This includes digitalising services, streamlining permitting processes, and strengthening cross-border collaboration on workforce planning. More agile governance, it argues, is essential to deploying training, investment, and innovation at the pace the moment demands.

On social policy, the report states that there is an explicit call to ensure that the transformation of labour markets remains fair and inclusive. The report supports active labour market policies such as wage subsidies, mobility grants, and employment services targeted at those most exposed to technological and industrial disruption.

The report also recommends embedding workforce strategy into the EU's broader

competitiveness agenda. In this framing, skills policy is not a social add-on, but a core component of industrial policy which is crucial to resilience, productivity, and sovereignty.

Speaking before the European Parliament in late 2024 after the report was published, Draghi said: "This report has come out at a difficult time for our continent. On many key questions, we are divided about what to do. There is discontent in large parts of Europe about the direction in which we are heading. And there is considerable unease about the future. My role, as set out by the European Commission, is to present you with a diagnosis of where Europe stands and to offer you recommendations on how to move forward.

"It is for you, our elected representatives, to turn this agenda into actions. We will only overcome division in Europe if the will to change receives broad democratic backing. The choices we face are too important to be settled by technocratic solutions. Our elected institutions must be at [the] centre of the debate on Europe's future – and on the actions that will shape it."

# Leading the way: Why employers must champion workplace inclusivity



Richa Tyagi, Louise Murray, Tomas Sercovich, Sinead Patton (Veolia), Harry Goddard (Deloitte), Linda O'Sullivan.

For the past 25 years, Business in the Community Ireland (BITCI) has been committed to creating a fairer, more inclusive society. Ireland has made significant progress in advancing social equality; strengthening equality laws, promoting gender balance, and legalising same-sex marriage. The 2025 Progress Index now ranks Ireland ninth out of 170 countries for social progress.

Despite these achievements, Ireland is facing a range of complex social issues, from housing shortages and rising health inequalities to the cost-of-living crisis and increased migration. These pressures are contributing to growing divisions in society, with migrant and LGBTQ+ communities experiencing a

surge in organised attacks and threats. Verbal harassment, physical violence, and online abuse are becoming more common, creating fear and insecurity.

Large workplaces are a reflection of society, meaning the same tensions seen in communities can also surface in work environments. If left unaddressed, this

can lead to conflict, disengagement, and reduced productivity. That is why strong DE&I (diversity, equity, and inclusion) policies are critical. Businesses that foster inclusivity and belonging not only protect employees but also create a positive work culture where everyone feels valued and supported.

Employment is the single most powerful factor in breaking the cycle of poverty and enabling full participation in society. Yet, despite near full employment in Ireland, major gaps persist. Ireland has the largest employment participation gap for people with disabilities in the EU, and unemployment in the Traveller community is at a staggering 80 per cent. Additionally, despite having higher employment rates and educational qualifications, migrants are still more likely to face lower incomes and a greater risk of poverty.

To support businesses to proactively address these issues, BITCI launched Elevate: The Inclusive Workplace Pledge. This initiative aims to ensure Ireland's workforce truly reflects the diversity of its society. Signing the pledge is more than a symbolic gesture - it's an act of leadership, demonstrating a company's commitment to addressing systemic inequalities and fostering social cohesion.

In a world when DE&I efforts are facing global resistance, BITCI continues to see strong commitment from businesses in Ireland. Over 60 companies, representing more than 150,000 employees, have provided DE&I data to inform the 2025 Elevate Annual Report, set to be published in May. Early findings indicate positive trends, such as:

- More companies profiling workforce diversity.
- Increasing formalisation of universal inclusion policies.
- A greater number of employers paying a living wage.
- A rise in targeted outreach programmes to underrepresented groups.

By focusing on these actions, businesses can help close employment gaps and improve opportunities for diverse jobseekers who are distanced from the workforce.

## Why employers are stepping up

Leading employers understand that inclusivity is not just a moral responsibility; it is a business necessity. Research indicates that 73 per cent of people have left a job due to poor cultural fit. A diverse workforce attracts and retains top talent, and employees are more likely to stay in organisations where they feel respected and included.

*“DE&I is more than a trend; it is a long-term commitment to building better workplaces and a better society.”*

In today's competitive job market, businesses that prioritise DE&I reduce turnover, lower recruitment costs, and improve overall employee engagement.

DE&I is also key to maintaining a strong brand reputation. Consumers, investors, and business partners increasingly expect companies to take a stand on social issues. Organisations that actively promote inclusion build trust, strengthen customer loyalty, and avoid reputational risks linked to workplace discrimination or inequality.

## The benefits of the elevate pledge

Elevate was designed to help employers create truly inclusive workplaces by providing a framework for accountability. It encourages businesses to ask important questions:

- Are we fully reflective of the society we serve?
- Where are the gaps in our workforce?
- What barriers might be preventing diverse talent from joining and staying with our company?

A key element of the Pledge is workforce diversity profiling. Without accurate data, companies cannot identify which groups are underrepresented or what challenges exist in hiring, retention, and career progression. For example, diversity profiling can reveal a lack of women in leadership roles, low representation of ethnic minorities, or an absence of employees with disabilities.

By analysing workforce data, employers can set meaningful, achievable targets for improvement, rather than relying on assumptions or generic DE&I strategies.

## Addressing challenges and moving forward

Despite its importance, DE&I efforts are not without criticism. Some employees and stakeholders may see these initiatives as tokenistic or driven by PR

rather than genuine commitment. Others argue that policies such as diversity quotas could lead to resentment or perceptions of unfairness. Additionally, businesses may face opposition from social or political groups that challenge DE&I efforts, creating potential reputational risks.

To navigate these challenges, companies must ensure their DE&I initiatives are authentic, transparent, and data-driven. This means:

- Moving beyond symbolic gestures to measurable, impactful actions.
- Holding leadership accountable for diversity and inclusion goals.
- Embedding a DE&I lens into business strategy and operations.
- Implementing bias training and equitable hiring practices.
- Clearly communicating the business case for DE&I to employees and stakeholders.

By taking these steps, companies can reinforce that DE&I benefits everyone and contributes to a stronger, more cohesive workplace.

## Join the movement: Sign the elevate pledge

DE&I is more than a trend; it is a long-term commitment to building better workplaces and a better society. By signing up to Elevate: The Inclusive Workplace Pledge, your company demonstrates leadership in fostering a culture where every employee feels valued, respected, and empowered to thrive.

A more inclusive workplace drives innovation, strengthens teams, and enhances your company's reputation.

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*Join the Elevate Community of over 60 leading employers and help create lasting change for a fairer more inclusive Ireland. Visit [www.bitc.ie](http://www.bitc.ie)*

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# How Trump's DEI rollback could affect the Irish workplace

In January 2025, the new administration in the United States fulfilled a key campaign pledge to roll back legislation around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). *eolas Magazine* examines the potential ramifications of this decision for Irish workplaces.

In January 2025, US President Donald Trump signed an executive order dismantling what his administration describes as 'unlawful' diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programmes across the federal government. This directive eliminates the use of DEI factors in federal hiring, promotions, and procurement decisions, reinstating a strict merit-based system. It also revokes longstanding affirmative action requirements for federal contractors and directs agencies to crack down on DEI practices in the private sector. The administration justifies these actions by arguing that DEI initiatives promote division and resentment, undermine individual achievement, and violate civil rights protections by introducing preferential treatment based on race, sex, or other identity factors.

In this context, a number of global companies – some of which are officially headquartered in Ireland – have revised their DEI policies.

Google, which has a substantial presence in Dublin, has eliminated its diversity hiring targets and is reassessing its DEI programmes to align with new federal guidelines. Additionally, some cultural observances have been removed from its calendar products.



Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, has scaled back its DEI efforts by disbanding its dedicated DEI team, discontinuing inclusive hiring practices, and ending goals related to sourcing from diverse-owned suppliers.

Amazon has reduced its DEI initiatives, removing references to diversity and inclusion from public documents and internal policies. The company cites the need to comply with recent executive orders as a reason for these changes.

Accenture, headquartered in Dublin, has decided to eliminate its global diversity and inclusion goals, aligning with broader corporate trends influenced by the evolving political and regulatory landscape in the United States.

Mastercard, which has a significant presence in Dublin, is among the US companies operating in Ireland. While specific adjustments to its DEI policies in response to US federal changes have not been detailed, the company is part of the broader corporate landscape affected by these policy shifts.

### Legislation and enforcement in Ireland

In Ireland, the foundation for DEI is established through the Employment Equality Acts from 1998 to 2015 and the Equal Status Acts from 2000 to 2018. These laws prohibit discrimination in employment and in accessing

goods and services on nine protected grounds, including gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and membership of the Traveller community. They address both direct and indirect discrimination, as well as harassment and victimisation. Employers and service providers are legally obliged to ensure fair treatment and may be held accountable through legal mechanisms.

Enforcement is supported by bodies like the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC), which hears discrimination complaints, and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), which promotes equality and ensures public bodies fulfil their obligations under the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.

Under these frameworks, Ireland has made measurable strides in representation and inclusion. For example, women now hold 24.6 per cent of board positions and 19 per cent of CEO roles in Irish businesses, according to the CSO's 2023 Gender Balance in Business Survey – an increase from previous years. Employers are also expected to provide reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities, unless it places a disproportionate burden on the organisation.

# What we want from work



Leadership and culture are not quite eating compensation and benefits for breakfast but it is getting closer to parity when it comes to what people want from a modern organisation, and therein lies the opportunity for public sector leaders, writes Bary Winkless, Head of Cpl's Future of Work Institute.

The perennial question 'what do we want from work?' always sparks at least a glimmer of interest in most of us. Work, after all, is a very personal business. Our most recent research programme centred on the Changing Expectations of Work and Life (surveying more than 1600 respondents across sectors) attempts to shine a brighter light on that very question. And before you ask, yes compensation and benefits are at the top of the 'what we want from work' tree but there is lot of evidence from our research to suggest that many of us are moving to a 'more than just money' stance when it comes to work.

That is good news for public sector leaders seeking to create destination organisations that enable people, and indeed, themselves to be at their best. But the strategy has to be purposeful, connected, designed, and human centred.

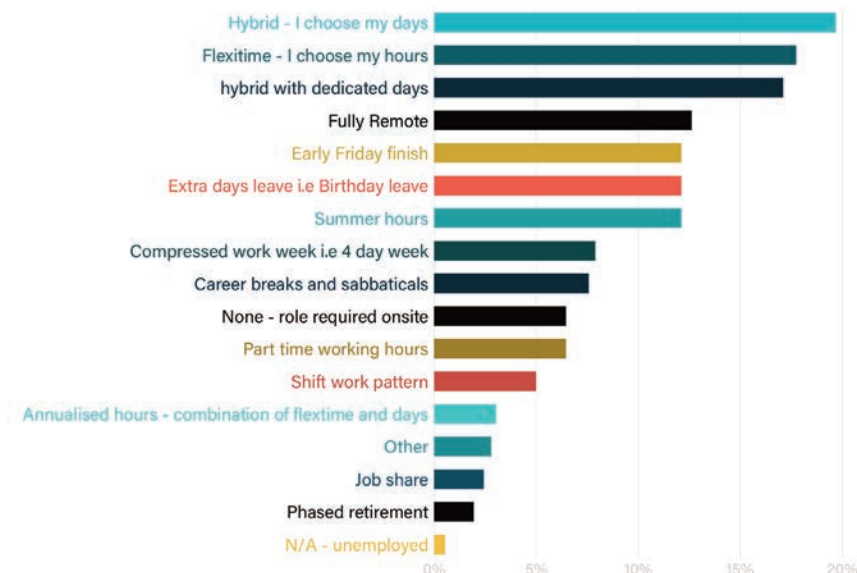
## The big four

When we asked participants to prioritise between the four most important reasons for choosing and staying with an employer across compensation and benefits (which included flexible working), leadership and culture, employee experience, organisation structure and dynamics (which included elements like business stability and reputation) – compensation and benefits at 35 per cent came out on top, followed by leadership and culture (24 per cent)

employee experience (21 per cent) narrowly ahead of organisation structure and dynamics (20 per cent).

At first glance probably no surprises, but when we delved a little deeper and looked at first and second priorities combined, compensation and benefits, still on top came out at 62 per cent but followed not too far behind by leadership and culture at 54 per cent. It is not quite 'leadership and culture eating compensation and benefits for breakfast' but it is interesting to see a growing parity between these two





areas.

### Compensation and benefits still number one with flexibility the big benefit

Remuneration as expected was highlighted as the most important factor (32 per cent) but it was closely followed by flexible working arrangements (26 per cent). We purposely included flexible working arrangements in the compensation and benefit element as from previous studies employees are now seeking these types of arrangements as a critical factor in their overall package. More than 70 per cent of employees are now availing of more than one form of flexible working arrangement.

### Leadership and culture

Within the leadership and culture element of the study, the importance of culture, values and ethics was highlighted and came out top at 27 per cent, followed by work environment (25 per cent) and leadership behaviours (24 per cent). Work environment, which was included in this element as it can have a major impact on the culture of an organisation, is becoming more important due to normalised hybrid working practices. People expect when they do ‘make the effort to come in’ to have a welcoming, collaborative and inviting space.

It is an often-used quote that people do not leave companies they leave leaders – and this is borne out by the study. Leadership behaviours are a major attraction, retention, but also unfortunately, an attrition driver. There is a big opportunity here for public sector employers to double down on these areas and perhaps reassess and redesign what they are currently doing.

### Employee experience: Seeking balance and meaning

Far and away the most important factor within the employee experience element of the study was work/life balance (40 per cent) followed by meaningful and stimulating work (21 per cent). Some recent studies from other sources have highlighted that in some cases work/life balance is becoming even more important than compensation; but I am not so sure. However, taken alongside the relative importance of flexible working, from our research it is safe to say that any meaningful talent strategy needs to have flexibility and work

life balance at its centre to be successful, coupled with a focus on involving employees in varied work and projects.

### Organisation stability and growth

The most important factor in this element was organisation stability and growth (34 per cent) followed by organisation structure (22 per cent) and mission and purpose (17 per cent). Interestingly, CSR and sustainability was cited as the least important factor at 5 per cent. So perhaps there is work to do by organisations in re-igniting the needs for net benefit organisations with a focus on positive community and environmental impact. It is probably no surprise that employees seek organisations that are growing and stable.

### Conclusion

When trying to create a destination organisation, we can often focus on the wrong things. From our research, if public sector leaders double down on areas like flexibility, leadership behaviours and development, culture and meaningful work success will follow. Simply put, forget the fancy stuff; focus on firing up the fundamentals.

For a deeper dive into our research which also covers ‘gender and generations’ see our contact details below to arrange a 1.5 hour research workshop.





An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
Bia agus Mara  
Department of Agriculture,  
Food and the Marine

# Creating a bilingual public sector workforce

One-fifth of public sector recruits will be required to be competent in Irish by the end of 2030, under the Official Languages Act 2003 and the Amendment Act 2021.

In October 2024, the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media published the National Plan for Irish Language Public Service 2024–2030, outlining how recruitment and technology will be essential in achieving a bilingual public sector workforce by 2030.

The Plan outlines measures to take to achieve the objective that by the end of 2030, 20 per cent of new recruits, both internal and external, be competent in Irish as set out in the Official Languages Act 2003, and the Amendment Act 2021. Both Acts stipulate that Ireland must achieve a fully bilingual public sector by 2030 to align with article eight of the Constitution which dictates that Irish is the first language of the State.

Measures to reach the 20 per cent target will be rolled out in a pair of three-year action plans during the six-

year period of the National Plan. As noted in the report, the 20 per cent target applies to external and internal recruitment in public bodies. According to a survey outlined in the report, 73.7 per cent of public sector works were unaware of the 20 per cent target.

Approximately 380,000 staff currently work in the public sector, with the HSE being the largest employer with 160,000. At present, 14.2 per cent of HSE staff are non-Irish and the Plan estimates that this figure will increase due to the shortage of healthcare workers in the State, and internationally. This is identified as a challenge for the 20 per cent target.

Surveys of public sector workers conducted during the Plan's preparation found:

- 11.45 per cent were competent in spoken in Irish;
- 12.92 per cent had the potential to be competent;
- 75.62 per cent were not competent;
- 16 per cent have undertaken an Irish language training course;
- 84 per cent have not undertaken a course;
- 66 per cent would like to undertake a course;
- 18.1 per cent would not like to undertake a course;
- 31.54 per cent said they have not thought about taking a course or do not know if they would like to do so; and
- 73 per cent of public bodies claim they provide Irish language training supports but only 3 per cent attend them.

*“Today’s announcement is about all of the innovative work that is underway to normalise the language in every field.”*



**Minister of State Thomas Byrne TD**

To improve the Irish-speaking competency of public service workers the committee recommended that public bodies:

- provide core services to Irish speakers through service hub pilots;
- establish a Shared Translation Service;
- examine methods to draw on the Official Languages Office mechanism;
- identify strategies to improve staff’s Irish competency;
- encourage staff to take Irish language courses;
- examine the feasibility of expanding Irish language programmes through the Advanced Irish Language Skills Initiative; and
- encourage the use of Irish in public bodies.

The Plan also outlines the replacement of the Language Scheme System recommended by an Coimisinéir Teanga in its 2017 assessment of the 2003 Act. It found there was a lack of standardisation in the scheme and outlined three measures to address this:

- a new recruitment policy to ensure a minimum required level of staff with Irish language competency;
- common standards of services in Irish would not be based on the system of language schemes; and
- ensure public sector workers serving Gaeltacht communities are fluent in Irish.

These recommendations formed the basis of the Language Standards which will replace Language Schemes in accordance with the 2021 Amendment Act.

## Digital

Developing Irish in technology is identified as key due to aims set out in *Harnessing Digital: The Digital Ireland Framework*, published in 2022. An advisory committee on the Irish language in the digital sphere was also appointed to keep the Department updated on digital developments relating to the language and the Irish-

speaking community. The committee outlined various actions to be taken in this regard:

- embed Irish in technology used in public services at the outset of its development – especially regarding AI;
- examine the provision of websites, systems, and other interactive services in Irish and English; and
- establish technical work group or groups to establish the provision of higher quality Irish language services.

“Our national language is one of the most precious treasures of Irish culture and heritage and is an expression of our unique identity as a nation. We can now focus on merging that heritage with today’s digital society,” the Plan states.

Embedding Irish in AI systems is identified as vital to providing bilingual public services. This sentiment is shared through the EU, as illustrated by the Alliance for Language Technologies (ALT-EDIC) which the Department participates in. The Alliance was established “to address the shortage of material on European languages for the purpose of training AI applications”, and preserve European languages in the digital age.

Alongside the launch of the Plan, the Department announced that a tender process had begun for the development of a new Irish-connected AI tool called Ard-Intleacht na Gaeilge. The tool aims to provide real-time speech processing to aid in the delivery of public services to Irish speaking communities, and is due to be built by 2026.

At the time of the launch, then-Minister of State for the Department Thomas Byrne TD said: “Today’s announcement is about all of the innovative work that is underway to normalise the language in every field, and I congratulate all of the different stakeholders involved in promoting these various projects – I applaud the work and the opportunities being seized.”



## Harnessing the power of theatre for your organisation

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The Abbey Theatre has been offering Theatre Skills for Business workshops for 10 years. These workshops and individual coaching sessions are based on what the Abbey knows best – performance and communicating a message.

Our clients tell us they want to be more confident speakers; they want to have more presence, to make an impact, command the room, to sound authentic and to influence their teams. We give them the tools to do just that.

## The power of theatre

Many of the skills and techniques that are foundational to an actor's craft can be hugely beneficial to people working outside of theatre. Actors are used to working with discipline, articulacy, and ambition. They train their voices and bodies so that they can speak with greater ease and clarity. They learn how to adjust their style of delivery to fill both large theatres and small studios, to deliver both simple and complex messages with energy and authenticity, to lift the words off the page and breathe life into them.

## Our approach

We coach our business clients using the same theatre techniques. We can work with you on how you stand, how you take space, how you breathe and speak as you tell your stories. We will also help you clarify your objectives and to refine your message to become more concise and impactful. We think speaking is active and when you speak you are always playing an action. Actions are what we do to someone else to get what we need or want. You may want to praise, calm, enlighten, challenge, encourage, warn, or galvanise your listeners. The list of possible actions to play is endless. Being 'in action' makes you a more engaging speaker because you are speaking to rather than at your audience.

## Our specialist teachers

Andrea Ainsworth is the voice director at the Abbey theatre and the core of her work is preparing the actors for performance on the stages. Andrea coaches actors, at all stages of their professional careers, on voice and on text. Using skills from the theatre, Andrea specialises in helping business clients find a more dynamic speaking style, to prepare them for presentations. Phil Kingston, the Community and Education Manager, was an actor for many years and is also a skilled writer and storyteller. He specialises in team building, networking and storytelling workshops. Gillian McCarthy is an actress and theatre facilitator with over 20 years' experience. As a theatre facilitator and teacher, she worked with organisations such as Deloitte, Glandore, Smurfit Business School, and the HSE.

## Range of options

Theatre Skills for Business offers a variety of different supports, depending on your needs.

Aimed at those who want to improve their professional

communication skills, *Presenting with Impact* explores how to use drama techniques to find a style that suits you and allows you to get your message across to colleagues, clients and groups. *Women Take Centre Stage* is specifically tailored to work with women on their personal communication style, with the goal of building confidence and developing a stronger personal brand. We can also develop specific activities for larger groups or organisations.

## Participant testimonials

"It has been a pleasure to work with The Abbey as part of our Early Careers Leadership Programmes. It was great fun designing the sessions to ensure the participants had the opportunity to learn new skills through the lens of theatre coaching. These skills are the soft skills that they can bring into their careers as the leaders of the future."

*University Engagement and Alumni Lead,  
Deloitte*

## Interested?

We have a range of full day workshops designed for smaller groups, which can be booked as an individual or for an organisation. We also offer a range of one to one and bespoke options, depending on your individual needs. Our workshops take place in the National Theatre in the heart of Dublin, in our Abbey and Peacock auditoriums.



To find out about Abbey Theatre Skills For Business, please scan here:

*To learn more about our Theatre skills for business workshops or have an initial chat about your specific needs:*

*e: [joanne.pollard@abbeytheatre.ie](mailto:joanne.pollard@abbeytheatre.ie)  
w: [abbeytheatre.ie](http://abbeytheatre.ie)*



**ABBAY  
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NA MAINISTREACH**



# Skilling future workforces

*Research Perspectives on the Future of Work*, produced in 2025 for the EU’s Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, calls for a new era of investment in upskilling and reskilling as the foundation of a just labour market transformation.

Amid rapid technological change and environmental imperatives, the European Commission’s latest report on the future of work states that Europe’s success in navigating the twin green and digital transitions hinges on its ability to equip its workforce with the right skills fairly, inclusively, and at scale.

With significant gaps already visible in sectors ranging from clean energy to artificial intelligence, the report underscores that current training systems are “not keeping pace with the rapidly evolving demands of the economy”.

Published in late March 2025, the report draws on input from EU member states, academia, industry, and civil society. It identifies four central research streams: the green transition and working life, digitalisation, support for vulnerable groups, and reform of public administration. Across all these themes, the challenge of skills development emerges as both a cross-cutting issue and a critical enabler of change.

One of the report’s most compelling findings is the disproportionate impact of the transitions on groups already at risk such as workers in carbon-intensive regions, those with disabilities, informal caregivers,

and older employees. “These communities are most likely to be excluded from reskilling opportunities, further entrenching inequalities unless targeted action is taken,” the report says.

In response to this challenge, the report advocates for a culture shift in how training is delivered. It promotes employer-supported, flexible learning paths integrated into work routines, and stronger collaboration between governments, industry, and education providers. Public administration is also called to modernise, with digital skills and talent attraction seen as priorities.

The report asserts that the digital transition brings added urgency. “From the rise of AI to the platform economy, the labour market is undergoing seismic shifts. Without human-centric innovation and robust regulatory frameworks, digitalisation risks exacerbating precarious employment and social fragmentation.”

To ensure a just transition, the report concludes that Europe “must embed inclusivity and foresight into its research, innovation, and employment strategies”. In this vision, skills are “the currency of equity, resilience, and shared prosperity”.

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