



An Roinn Fiontar,  
Trádála agus Fostaíochta  
Department of Enterprise,  
Trade and Employment

# Enterprise Digital Advisory Forum

## 25 September 2024

Room 110, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, 23 Kildare Street

### Attendees

#### EDAF Members

Minister of State for Trade Promotion  
and Digital Transformation, Dara Calleary TD  
Barry O'Brien (IBM)  
Eoin Costello (Digital HQ)  
Mike Conroy (ITAG)  
Stephanie Anderson (Meta)  
David Kilbride (Stripe)  
Patricia Scanlon (Chair of AI Advisory Council)  
Ryan Meade (Google)

#### EDAF Members (Online)

Terri O'Donovan (J&J)  
Erik O'Donovan (IBEC)

#### Guests (In-person)

Alan Smeaton (DCU)  
Stephen Kinsella (UL)

#### Guests (Online)

Martin Thelle (Implement Consulting)

#### Officials (In-person)

Jean Carberry (DETE)  
Wendy Gray (DETE)  
Nóirín Ní Earcáin (DETE)  
Michelle Kiernan (DETE)  
Paul McMorrow (DETE)  
Helena Keleher (DETE)  
Donal Flavin (IDA)  
Ruairí Ó hAilín (EI)  
Gerry O'Grady (EI)  
Dáire Traynor (NSAI)  
Anne Ribault-O'Reilly (DFHERIS)

#### Officials (Online)

Fiona Bourke (D/Taoiseach)  
Donal Travers (IDA Ireland)  
Don O'Connor (DETE)

Linda Kane (DETE)  
Rhodri Lloyd (DETE)  
James Farell (IDA)

## Introduction

Ms Carberry welcomed EDAF members as Minister of State Dara Calleary was delayed.

She provided the members with an update on the following:

- Launch of the Grow Digital Portal and Grow Digital Voucher,
- The department and agencies are raising awareness of these supports aimed at increasing digital intensity scores in the DESI,
- The department is establishing a working group of the four EDIHs, to work with Enterprise Ireland to present the value proposition of the EDIHs and maximise complementarity of the different supports available to businesses, and
- The department has also issued a call for expressions of interest for two further members for the AI Advisory Council.

## Approval of minutes of last meeting of the EDAF

The minutes of the meeting of 30 May were approved. Future minutes will be approved by written procedure following meetings.

## Presentation by Ruairí Ó hAilín, on Enterprise Ireland's new Cyber Security Review and the LEOs' Digital for Business & Grow Digital schemes

Mr Ó hAilín provided an overview of the new Cyber Security Review, an Enterprise Ireland / National Cyber Security Centre scheme aimed at Enterprise Ireland clients to be formally launched in early October for Cyber Awareness Month. The scheme provides for an independent cybersecurity audit, after which the client receives a detailed report and feedback on implementation. Clients pay €3,000 upfront and can claim €2,400 back. In addition, larger financial supports are also available via EI as a follow on, which could be of assistance to those impacted by the NIS2 Directive.

Mr Ó hAilín outlined the package of supports available for digitalisation and greening of businesses in all sectors with up to 50 staff. 'Digital for Business' provides three days' consultancy support to help businesses identify their digital needs and create an action plan for implementation at no cost to the client. Following from this, the 'Grow Digital Voucher' is available to companies, to assist with digital technology adoption. It can be used to cover the costs of subscription software, as well as any necessary configuration and training. Companies are eligible for a 50% grant to cover their costs for the first year, with a maximum spend of €10,000, allowing for a grant of up to €5,000. Businesses can apply for this voucher either for one project or two separate projects.

**Minister of State for Trade Promotion and Digital Transformation, Dara Calleary TD joined the meeting. The following points were raised in discussion with the members:**

- SMEs are frustrated by reporting requirements and high costs.
- The need to bring business on the digital journey through clearly relatable examples of benefits through effective communication – microbusiness often see ‘digitalisation’ as off-putting. Technology adoption is a means of saving time and money and a storytelling approach can be more effective. Examples were shared from members’ experience, including of outreach events.
- IBEC is hosting an event 4 October on NIS 2 with participation by the Department of Communications, NCSC and MTU.
- LEO support is provided through a panel of consultants, with an emphasis on ensuring that all consultants meet high quality standards.

## **Presentation by Dr Anne Ribault-O’Reilly, on the Current and Future Developments in Skills Policy**

Ms Ribault-O’Reilly provided an overview of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Skills’ policies on digital skills, and looked ahead on how to respond to skills demand changes caused by technological shifts including AI.

Several organisations are involved in delivering digital skills education in Ireland, including:

- Education and Training Boards (with almost 200,000 learners)
- Universities, Technical Universities, and Institutes of Technology (serving approximately 250,000 students)
- Non-profit and private providers
- Skillnets, with nearly 100,000 participants
- Research Ireland, mainly PhD training

### Recent developments

- At the end of 2018, Ireland’s 14 Institutes of Technology (IoTs) were restructured into five Technological Universities (TUs) and two IoTs.
- Microcredentials are now offered by the third level sector. With a budget of €12million over 5 years, 80 of approx. total of 400 courses are in the tech space (AI, data, automation) with a high take-up rate. They are bite size and stackable over time, i.e. it is to complete a Masters. Some are eligible for a subsidy of 50% or 80%.
- Greater diversification of learning methods, for example apprenticeships are now available in the technology sector include software solutions architecture, cybersecurity, software development and digital marketing,
- Skillnet Ireland – is an agency used to work with industry to identify skills needs and design programmes with education providers to respond to them. There are four areas of focus, including digital skills. The funding model is 60% state funded, 40% industry funded (via the National Training Fund) and is generally free at the point of delivery.
- 2023 OECD Review of National Skills Strategy included recommendations for changes to the skills infrastructure (demand led, career guidance and pathways, lifelong learning and outside the workplace, strengthen firm performance, joined up skills ecosystem).

The architecture of expert engagement and policy design was presented, with the newly reconfigured National Skills Council providing advice to government. This structure includes input for Regional Skills Partnerships and the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, that feed into future policy development by identifying, interrogating and validate skills needs.

**The following points were raised in discussion with the members:**

- The need for continued focus on innovative delivery of training to assist time-poor learners.
- Positive developments in diversifying learning pathways such as apprenticeships and microcredits. Regarding apprenticeships, the importance of company participation to employ and train apprentices.
- Varying spectrum of skills demands required for AI. 'AI literacy' at lower end, isn't visible in this landscape, and is closely linked to levels of adoption by business.
- Concern at Ireland's performance when it comes to the delivery of very high end top technical talent. Very high-quality PhD output is vital for the digital economy. One factor is that a competitive labour market doesn't incentivise continued study.
- Suggestion to develop pathways to retention in the labour market of foreign students in Ireland in engineering and computer science courses.
- Technical excellence requires a mix of sectoral expertise and technical expertise with the greatest challenge in non-competitive sectors.
- The need to address digital literacy at primary and post-primary level.

**Minister of State for Trade Promotion and Digital Transformation, Dara Calleary TD had to leave the meeting.**

### **Presentation by Martin Thelle, on implement Consulting Group report commissioned by Google on the Economic opportunity of generative AI in Ireland**

Martin Thelle, of Copenhagen-based Implement Consulting Group, and author of the [report](#), which was commissioned by Google, joined online to present its main findings. The report had been launched on 28 May at an event attended by Minister Burke. The report follows on from research undertaken by Implement across the D9<sup>1</sup> grouping of digitally ambitious EU Member States.

The report finds that Generative AI has the potential to significantly enhance human productivity by enabling faster and more efficient task completion and will transform the global economy over the coming decades, with its impact potentially peaking within the next ten years, with certain sectors more greatly impacted than others. The study concludes that for Ireland, widespread adoption of AI could contribute up to 8% of the annual GDP but that, if

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<sup>1</sup> The D9+ region includes Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Ireland, Spain, Luxembourg, Estonia, Portugal, Belgium, the Czech Republic and Poland. Slovenia joined in September 2024.

there is a delay of five years in adopting AI, potential economic gains could drop significantly, from 8% to only 2%.

The study states that Generative AI is expected to augment most jobs in Ireland, enhancing efficiency across various sectors. Therefore, the report proposes that the current focus should be on understanding AI's impact and accelerating its uptake by SMEs to fully leverage its economic potential. It also anticipates that 6% of jobs are expected to be partially or fully displaced, i.e. have over half of their work activities exposed to automation by generative AI.

**The following points were raised in discussion with the members and guests:**

- The methodologies and data sources employed by this study in comparison with approaches taken in comparable studies, including Goldman Sachs, IMF and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and Department of Finance's [joint series of three reports entitles 'AI: Friend or Foe'](#) published in June.
- The importance of AI adoption by enterprises, which currently stands at 8% according to the 2024 DESI, against a target of 75% using one of cloud, data analytics or AI by 2030.
- Not captured in this study, are new jobs that will be created by AI, which focuses on the impact of GenAI on existing roles.
- A need to focus effort on AI (not Generative AI) adoption in sectors of the economy where the EU has comparative advantage, as articulated in the Draghi Report on EU Competitiveness.
- The need to be alert and responsive to a potentially fast changing labour market, in particular though up- and re-skilling.

No update was provided on EU developments due to time constraints.

The next meeting is scheduled for 5 December, 10.00 -12.00.

**Paul McMorrow**

**24 October 2024**