



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

FUTURE JOBS IRELAND

Preparing Now for Tomorrow's Economy

Report on the Summit Breakout Sessions



Breakout Session 1 - Clustering

Chaired by Minister Humphreys

Main Discussion Points

1. The development of a national clustering framework was discussed. The framework should include a definition of clustering, a database/directory of clusters, clustering case studies, highlighting the benefits of clustering, development of guidance templates to facilitate cluster initiation, and discuss cluster supports, drawing on international best practice examples. Skills development and access to a talent pool was discussed as an example of a catalyst for formation of clusters. Geography and proximity, sectoral interests, clustering of industry around a university or another entity, and presentation of a challenge were also discussed as drivers of clustering.
2. A possible role for the State in challenge identification to stimulate cluster formation. A range of examples of clusters in Ireland were discussed, many of which are promoted or funded by the State.
3. Cluster management and coordination was discussed in the context of the Catalonia model.

Breakout Session 2 - Clustering

Chaired by Minister Creed

Main Discussion Points

4. Clusters should be cross-sectoral, develop across all sizes of enterprise, and be both vertical and horizontal. It was highlighted that, in general, it was important that clustering activity should have a specific goal and not be just a 'talk shop'. The goal should be something that participants cannot do by themselves.
5. Government's role is to facilitate and resource the drivers of clusters, particularly if targeting SMEs (e.g. the Disruptive Innovation Technology Fund). Government can facilitate interactions between large and small enterprises; this encourages knowledge sharing and stronger relationships between SMEs and MNCs.
6. Highlighting the FDI that we already have and models of clusters that are already well functioning might assist in identifying areas with potential for clusters. It was also mentioned that internationally, Ireland is seen as very small and therefore there may not be a need for extensive regional clustering. Government has a role in promoting clustering in rural areas however, with a focus on local collaboration. For example, the importance of appropriate infrastructure – including remote working hubs – was emphasised.

Breakout Session 3 – New Modes of Working

Chaired by Minister Ring

Main Discussion Points

1. Implementing new modes of working faces several barriers, including the often ad-hoc nature of some working arrangements. Acceptance of remote working is often hindered by a lack of trust on the part of employers. Leadership training in SMEs was cited as a way of overcoming this barrier.
2. A more active role by Government, local authorities, higher education institutes and other local actors could improve the attractiveness of rural Ireland as a place to live and work. However, there are gaps in connectivity and telecommunications that prevent the adoption of new modes of working and more widespread rural development.
3. The public sector should be a leader in adopting new modes of working. Acting as a demonstrator of best practice would encourage businesses to implement new modes of working and reassure them of its practicality. The public sector also has a role in supporting businesses and workers that wish to adopt new modes of working and should provide a more streamlined advisory service for those looking at either new locations or modes of working.

Breakout Session 4 – New Modes of Working

Chaired by Minister Doherty

Main Discussion Points

1. Public policy appears to be created with little cross-over between Departments and other strategies. There is a need for whole-of-Government approaches such as Future Jobs Ireland.
2. The main areas for reform discussed included recruitment practices, management skills, career guidance and adoption of new ways of working. The use of traditional systems such as the Public Appointments Service could be better utilised to increase participation. Flexible and part-time working could be adopted more widely in public sector.
3. Increasing labour force participation in under-represented cohorts such as older workers, people with disabilities and women can address skills and labour shortages. Complications related to an aging workforce were highlighted including changing public perceptions of what constituted an older worker, why they appear less desirable to younger workers, and introducing standard practices early in order to normalise them for workers.

Breakout Session 5 – Transitioning

Chaired by Minister Breen

Main Discussion Points

1. Attendees highlighted that the Government should attempt to de-mystify the potential impacts of a transition to a low-carbon economy for micro-enterprises and SMEs. It was proposed that the methods used to highlight Brexit Impacts could be used to communicate to SMEs the urgency of and challenges for the transition to a green economy.
2. Making sure we have the right skills in our economy will be essential to making the transition to a low carbon economy. Centrally important will be upskilling opportunities for specialist tradespeople, 'second-chance' education for lower skilled workers and management skills for SMEs so that skilled workers can be effectively deployed, and productivity increased.
3. There is a need to for a 'place-based' Just Transition. Opportunities for re-employment, re-skilling or diversification in the sectors should focus on the strengths and opportunities in regions and locations where those most effected by the disruption of environmental and digital transition.

Breakout Session 6 – Transitioning

Chaired by Minister McHugh & Minister Mitchell O'Connor

Main Discussion Points

1. Significant skills gaps exist in the economy – particularly when it comes to what is known as “soft skills” or “social skills”. The four C's – Competency, Creativity, Capacity and Collaboration – need to be at the forefront of all individual learning.
2. There should be a greater emphasis on upskilling, so that the productivity of all firms across the economy improves. Industry should improve its competency for actively retraining workers. Incremental training ensures skills maintain pace with technological change.
3. There are people outside the workforce who wish to return to work, to training, or to education but lack the confidence to do. Our training system and public employment services need to bridge this gap by empowering people with the confidence and skills necessary to return to the labour market.