

NATIONAL SKILLS STRATEGY 2015-2025

This note is written in response to the invitation to contribute to the discussion of a National Skills Strategy to 2025.

The years to 2025 will see the following:

- ❖ Global competition and innovation will intensify;
- ❖ Ireland's regions will compete to create successful enterprise and to attract investment, largely through the comparative skills of its people and their capacity to attract talent;
- ❖ Ireland, with the highest young population in Europe, in percentage terms, will have an opportunity to 2025 of transforming that fact into a major advantage through quality education and future skills planning;
- ❖ Cost and cost effectiveness will be major themes in that expansion of education in Ireland;
- ❖ Advancing technology will continue to replace many low and middle skilled occupations;
- ❖ The trend towards longer working lives will strengthen, making new demands for upskilling capacities and lifelong access to upskilling;
- ❖ New formats and delivery systems will become commonplace.

Ireland has a large progression rate (70%) of immediate school leavers to "full-time" i.e. academic year Higher Education. The CAO system is highly efficient in transferring school leavers to Higher Education institutions. The school leavers admitted are diverse with different aptitudes, abilities and family backgrounds. Many do not complete their courses. It is questionable whether the "full time" formats should have such dominance as school leaver destinations.

- ❖ A National Skills Strategy to 2025 should advocate the widespread introduction of work and study i.e. apprentice formats at a variety of levels (from levels 6 to 11) to address a wide number of higher skill needs. Each Region should promote such formats, bearing in mind the dominant regional sectors of employment.
- ❖ Higher skills benefit the individual, society and economic life. Work and study formats enable economic life to contribute to high skill formation and to influence directly skill formation. Apprentice and trainee formats motivate learning by doing and it can also encourage entrepreneurial capacities. Drop out is reduced.
- ❖ Work and study formats can be cost effective – the learner works and earns; the employer contributes and benefits through relevant skill formation. There is year-long learning.

The "academic year" course format, effectively a 25 week format, does not suit many learners, particularly adult or second chance learners.

- ❖ The Skills Strategy should advocate the provision in certain cases of full year 48 week provision to accelerate the acquisition of qualifications. This should focus on the maximum utilisation of educational assets to support an appropriate balance of learning and work.
- ❖ The Skills Strategy should advocate a national programme of blended learning formats.

