

## SOLAS Opening Statement for 24<sup>th</sup> September 2019

On behalf of SOLAS, the HEA and WorldSkills Ireland, I would like to thank the Joint Committee for the opportunity today to celebrate the excellent performance by a brilliant team of young apprentices, trainees and students at the WorldSkills Competition in Russia in August. I am delighted to be joined today by members of the team; Ray English, Chair of WorldSkills Ireland and his colleagues; and Vivienne Patterson of the HEA.

I know the Committee is keen to hear directly from the team about their experience in Russia, so I will keep this presentation brief. I would like to provide a short overview of the WorldSkills Competition, and explain how SOLAS, the HEA and the Department of Education and Skills and providers support the Irish team.

The WorldSkills Competition, which is held every two years, has a 60-year history and is the biggest vocational education and skills event in the world. The competitors represent the best of their peers in 56 different skills and are selected from skills competitions in over 77 WorldSkills' member countries and regions. The Department of Education and Skills introduced national and international skills competitions to Ireland in 1957 and Ireland has taken part in every competition since. Funding of almost €400k for the WorldSkills team comes through a number of sources – SOLAS, the HEA and ETBI.

WorldSkills Kazan took place from the 22<sup>nd</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> August. It involved 63 countries, more than 1300 competitors, and had over 200,000 visitors. The opening and closing ceremonies which were held in the Kazan Stadium, were attended by over 40,000 people and were broadcast live on Russian TV, to approximately 45m viewers.

The ceremonies were also streamed live on the internet so all countries could be part of these Olympic style spectacular shows. The closing ceremony was addressed live by President Putin.

The World Skills Conference which was run in parallel to the competitions included contributions from people such as Scott Kelly, the NASA astronaut - and our very own Minister for Skills, John Halligan.

The Irish team was made up of 17 young apprentices, trainees and students. They are Cormac Thompson ; Allanagh O'Sullivan ; Ryan Dempsey; Luke O'Keeffe; Jack Lynch; Olivier Bal-Pétre; Hanna Mathe; Glen McNamara; Adam Flynn; Mark Wasson; Megan Yeates; Patrick Twomey; Jack O'Donnell; Ruairí Grealish; Jennifer Mangan; Christopher Kehoe; and Ryan McLoughlin.

They showcased their skills in the areas of Aircraft Maintenance; Beauty Therapy; Building Information Modelling; Bricklaying; Cabinet Making; Cloud Computing; Construction Metal Work; Cookery; Electrical Installation; Freight Forwarding; Industrial Mechanic Millwright; Joinery; Plumbing and Heating; Restaurant Service; Visual Merchandising; and Welding.

The competitors spent several months prior to the competition being trained by experts at TU Dublin, the Institutes of Technology (CIT, LIT, WIT, DKIT, IT Carlow & AIT) and Education and Training Boards (Kerry ETB, Waterford Wexford ETB, Limerick Clare ETB, Donegal ETB, Dublin Dún Laoghaire ETB) and Shannon College of Hotel Management.

The training and hard work paid off. Ireland has a long history of winning medals and Medallions for Excellence and this year was no different. The team won four gold medals, one bronze medal, a Best of Nation medal and seven Medallions for Excellence. Ireland is also now ranked 10<sup>th</sup> in the world for skills (in terms of medal points). I am sure you will hear from the team themselves in more detail about this remarkable achievement.

Ireland has been chosen to host the next WorldSkills General Assembly and Conference which will take place on 5-8 October 2020 in Dublin and plans are progressing to finalise the next Ireland Skills Live event, following the success of this inaugural event in March this year.

I would like to conclude by saying that WorldSkills Competitions are an excellent way to promote Ireland's skills to a global audience. Our brilliant teams benchmark the quality of further education, training and skills against the best in the world. They are also incredible role models here at home for anyone considering their post-secondary education choices.

Thank you