



## **Skillnet Ireland Opening Statement to the Joint Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment in relation to the skills and supports required for businesses to meet their decarbonisation targets.**

Cathaoirleach, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to attend here today and to outline how Skillnet Ireland is supporting businesses in meeting their decarbonisation targets and building the talent needed to address climate action and sustainability challenges.

### **Skillnet Ireland**

Skillnet Ireland is a national agency responsible for spearheading workforce development for the enterprise sector, with a particular focus on SMEs. Established in 1999 and funded through the National Training Fund, Skillnet Ireland is an organisation that is supported by both Government and Industry, responding to policy priorities and skills challenges in a proactive and agile manner. We work with a network of 60 industry partner organisations including bodies such as Chambers of Commerce, CIF, IBEC, ISME, IFA and a host of regional and sectoral industry clusters. Partnering in this manner allows industry to take the lead in identifying the skills issues they face, but also in determining the responses and the types of training programmes that are needed by employers. We also partner with other State agencies and across the tertiary education sector to design and develop programmes that meet new or emerging skill needs.

In 2022, Skillnet Ireland provided training supports to 24,747 businesses and 92,489 trainees, through 74 Skillnet Networks and National Upskilling Schemes. We invested a total of €70.2 million in industry developed skills programmes, of which €26.5 million came from the private sector, where employers co-finance the costs of training with us by combining company contributions with Skillnet Ireland grants. So Skillnet Ireland is a powerful example of the public and private sector taking collective and collaborative action to address the shared issue of skills.

### **Wider Policy Context for Decarbonisation Targets for Business**

As we know, the Climate Action Plan seeks to halve emissions by 2030 and become carbon neutral by 2050. In delivering these ambitious targets, businesses across every region and sector face the challenge of integrating climate change considerations, and long-term sustainability, into their business models and culture. Talent therefore is at the very forefront of the green transition and the collective task for Government, industry and workers is to develop the array of necessary green skills for a low-carbon future.

## **Skillnet Ireland Climate Action & Decarbonisation Initiatives**

Skillnet Ireland has a series of targeted initiatives to support decarbonisation including the Skillnet Climate Ready Academy, Green Tech Skillnet, Sustainable Enterprise Skillnet, Sustainable Finance Skillnet and Sustainable HRM Skillnet, each with specific specialist objectives.

In 2022 over 1,790 businesses and 5,800 employees benefitted from climate and sustainability upskilling programmes delivered by Skillnet Ireland covering areas such as energy management, offshore wind, water stewardship, biodiversity management, sustainable finance and ESG reporting, sustainable food production, sustainable supply chain management, efficiency in building systems, organic farming and the circular economy. These range from specialist upskilling to technical programmes, to NFQ accredited programmes, and management development programmes, all aimed at helping businesses tackle decarbonisation.

### **Skillnet Climate Ready Academy**

In 2021 Skillnet Ireland launched the Climate Ready Academy with Minister Ryan and Minister Harris. This is a national initiative delivered in partnership with industry to equip both SMEs and larger businesses with the skills they need to respond to climate change and to avail of the business opportunities transitioning to a low-carbon economy presents.

In 2022, the Climate Ready Academy partnered with the University of Limerick (UL) to launch the first stackable micro-credential programmes for climate action in Ireland, leading to a full Level 7 award on the National Framework of Qualifications. The four programmes - Energy Leaders, Waste and Circular Economy Leaders, Biodiversity Leaders and Sustainability Leaders enable participants to develop tailored Sustainability Charters and Action Plans for their organisations. In 2022, over 500 businesses and 1,900 workers took part in climate and sustainability upskilling programmes delivered through the Climate Ready Academy.

### **Green Tech Skillnet**

The Green Tech Skillnet, promoted by Wind Energy Ireland, was established in 2014 to support the workforce development needs of businesses within the renewable energy and green technology sectors. Green Tech Skillnet is building the talent pipeline needed for the offshore wind energy opportunity, ranging from technical programmes in solar and wind installation, to energy storage, to planning, and accredited programmes for wind turbine technicians. Since that particular programme was launched in 2021, Green Tech Skillnet has supported over 70 people to become a fully certified wind turbine technicians.

### **Sustainable Enterprise Skillnet**

Sustainable Enterprise Skillnet is an industry-led training network of over 400 of Ireland's largest production and service sites across the manufacturing, biopharma, agri-food, energy, telecommunications and technology sectors. It delivers a range of programmes focused on energy, water and waste management, and lean practices. The internationally recognised Certified Water Steward Training Programme is run in partnership with Irish Water, has trained over 600 employees in 400 firms in the past three years, leading to significant business improvements in water efficiency and decarbonisation and contributing to the business competitiveness of the participating firms.

## **Origin Green Academy**

In 2022, Skillnet Ireland and Bord Bia partnered to launch the Origin Green Academy which is delivered by Sustainable Enterprise Skillnet. The Origin Green Academy will support Irish food, drink, and horticulture businesses to develop emissions reductions skills required to achieve ambitious emissions targets in the sector, to accelerate their sustainability progress, and meet the expectations of both global consumers and legislative requirements such as the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD).

## **Sustainable Finance**

Another priority supported by Skillnet Ireland is Sustainable Finance which will play a key role in delivering on policy objectives under the Climate Action Plan and the EU's international commitments on climate and sustainability. In collaboration with Sustainable Finance Ireland and other partners, Skillnet Ireland part funds the International Sustainable Finance Centre of Excellence which aims to equip the financial services sector with the necessary skills to finance a net-zero future. The Centre is also responsible for delivering upon the Sustainable Finance Roadmap, a commitment under the 'Ireland for Finance Strategy'.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion we are witnessing a significant shift from businesses to adopting decarbonisation measures. Climate action has become a central competitive issue for firms, for reducing energy costs, in renewing supply chains, but also as means of attracting and retaining talent. Yet our research also tells us that businesses need much greater knowledge and supports in order to integrate climate action within their business strategy and their day-to-day operations.

By investing further in workforce development, Ireland can ensure that its workforce is equipped with the leading-edge skills for a low-carbon future, and in doing so, capitalise on the immense economic opportunities that the green transition is presenting.

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