Executive Summary

This National Skill’s Strategy: Ireland’s Future builds on the progress made under the previous strategy Towards Tomorrow’s Skills 1. Over the next ten years, it will advance towards the ambitious vision that:

Ireland will be renowned at home and abroad as a place where the talent of our people thrives through:

Quality and relevance of our education and training base.

Strength of relationships and transfer of knowledge between employers.

Quality of our workforce.

Effective use of skills to support economic and social prosperity.

Effective use of technology to support talent and skills provision.

After the recent sharp global recession, Ireland’s employment levels have recovered from an unemployment high of 15% at the end of 2011 to less than 9% today. As we move into recovery, skills shortages are now emerging in certain areas and occupations, for instance in advanced manufacturing and Information Communications Technology (ICT). Global trends and drivers of change such as changing consumption patterns and shifting power structures are shaping international markets and emerging enterprise sectors. Technology is one of the key drivers of change and improved digital skills will be vital for Ireland’s future, both in higher-end dedicated ICT jobs and, more widely, as a basic core competence. Other core - or transversal - skills like languages and entrepreneurship will also underpin Ireland’s use of its talent offering as a global differentiator.

Ireland’s young population – with the highest proportion in the EU under 15 – is another strong potential competitive advantage. Of our 3 million people of working age, almost 30% are economically inactive and supporting this section of the population to participate in and contribute to the skills needs of the labour market is one of this Strategy's objectives. Another objective will be to increase the supply of skills by, for example, encouraging Irish migrants to return home: a move that will enrich Ireland both economically and societally, and to support older workers to remain in employment. Increasing people’s lifelong learning, especially of those in employment, is a national performance gap that this Strategy will tackle.

The youthfulness of our population, while a clear potential international advantage, also poses challenges to Ireland’s education and training system. Over the last decade, full-time enrolments have increased by more than 170,000 and they will continue to rise in the coming years. These demographic pressures notwithstanding, important reforms are underway across all elements of the education and training system to improve its cohesiveness and its relevance, and to increase the return on public investment through more systematic evaluation and drive for maximum impact.