



UNLEASHING TALENT FOR THE FUTURE

REINVENT – LEAD – SUPPORT

Conference Highlights Report

Wednesday 22nd November 2023.
The College Green Hotel, Dublin.



To grow our economy sustainably and competitively, we need to be skills-first.

Through the collaboration of government, industry and educators, we can co-create an Ireland supportive of life-long learning and future-capable.



OPENING ADDRESS



Orla Callan (Managing Director, Innopharma Education) opened the event, discussing industry skills gaps and how critical the right skills are for business growth. She outlined Innopharma Education's mission: to bridge the technical, digital and transversal skills of learners to assist the high-tech sectors to maintain competitiveness and sustainability. That mission is brought to life every day, for every learner, through the Innopharma Way, our framework underpinning all programme development.

That framework always starts with industry-consultation, to understand current business technology and skills needs. Incorporating that industry-focus with a learner-flexible approach to education delivery, building the learner's career plan and equipping them with transversal skills, is how we've empowered so many graduates to advance their careers, fulfil their potential and change their lives.

In spite of helping nearly 12,000 graduates reskill and upskill over the last decade, our mission is far from complete. Our recent future skills report *Transforming Ireland Through Digital, Green and High Tech Skills Development*, highlights how over 200,000 people will need new skills to sustain Ireland's high-tech industries. Of those, 75,000 need to be reskilled entirely and 125,000 will require upskilling to maintain current roles impacted by automation and digitalisation.

Innopharma Education has delivered proof of concept to address that challenge: creating agile skills pathways, through public-private partnerships, enabling and encouraging life-long learning and attracting international talent.

Unleashing our talent for the future won't happen without these four foundational facets.

We were delighted to welcome Minister Neale Richmond Minister of State for Business, Employment and Retail

The key points of the Minister's address focused on the powerful resource our people are for the Irish economy:

Ireland's greatest resource is our people. Our well educated, agile and productive workforce is one of the key reasons companies have and continue to invest in and do business with Ireland. An additional economic benefit of having a thriving industry of international companies is how attractive it makes Ireland for international expertise to bolster our workforce: last year over 70,000 came to work in Ireland. Therefore, constantly investing in skills and upskilling delivers a very clear economic return by keeping Ireland competitive and giving us the best opportunity to attract future investment and talent.



Panel 1: Reinventing

Panellists:

1. **William Beausang**, Assistant Secretary in the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science with responsibility for Tertiary Education Sector Integration and Skills Policy
2. **Claire McGee**, Head of Education and Innovation Policy with IBEC
3. **David Hegarty**, Partner at Indecon and until recently was Assistant Secretary at the Department, Enterprise, Trade and Employment where he headed up the Department's Enterprise Strategy, Competitiveness and Evaluation Division
4. **Patricia Quane**, Chairperson for Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) for Biopharma Industry



Discussion Highlights

As a relatively smaller economy, Ireland needs to **avoid complacency** in anyway; smaller economies always need to be nimble. **Skills really are the solution to everything.** But let's not say 'future-proof' but 'future-capable': we can't predict the future but need future-fit skills so we are ready for it. As a reference, in Finland, 1% of the country did a course in AI.

The world of work and skills has changed: it used to be that a chemist needed to perform data analysis; now the chemist needs AI skills. The **sustainability challenge is also underpinned by data and technology.** **Skills are more important than college transcripts:** DCU is

giving graduates a personal skills profile as well as a transcript of the knowledge acquired. Skills now required of all roles include data & analytics, automation, resilience, critical thinking, adaptability, transversal skills (not 'soft skills'). Through answering our Slido question after the panel, most of the audience agreed **(88%) that it was very likely their company would experience skills gaps in the future.**

A much broader reach-out from Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science to society to co-design the solution to these skills gaps is needed, including a more **formal**

engagement process between educators and employers to design future-fit courses. From a government perspective, we need better structure and governance of our skills system. We also need to change culture to embed lifelong learning into business and enterprise and link business strategy to their skills development and incentivise upskilling for SMEs.

Panel 2: Leading

Panellists:

1. **Dr Aisling Soden**, Senior Manager; Talent, Transformation and Innovation (TTI) Department, IDA Ireland
2. **Noel Kelly**, Head of Digital Transformation at InnoGlobal
3. **Dr Kevin Marshall**, Head of Learning and Skills, Microsoft Ireland
4. **Daniel Hickey**, Owner and MD AllinAll Ingredients
5. **Paula Kearney**, Site Learning Lead at Takeda



Discussion Highlights

The importance of **embedding talent development into business strategy was discussed as fundamental to planning for and embracing the uncertainty of tomorrow's world of business.**

Before a business can plan for any sustainable and digital transformation, it starts with education and having the right skills to power that transformation. Innovation skills and leadership are core skills required for creating value in business digitalization and sustainability. Both Innoglobal's Digital Maturity & Sustainability Assessment (DMSA) tool and IDA's talent-planning programme offer a framework to businesses who need to strategically transform their workforce.

However, although we know that 88% of organisations expect to experience digital skills gaps in the future, **it pays to be prudent and strategy-aligned when it comes to workforce talent planning.** This is because in the main, organisations are disorganised when it comes to data management: amassing mountains of data which is going largely untapped.

Horizon scanning is needed every year for new skills to be embedded into the workforce and a 3-5 year talent plan. It is never complete: it's an always-on journey.

Effective implementation is perhaps even more critical than planning. A mixed approach of top-down and bottom-up is optimal: the need to upskill and setting the scope of skills required should be company-led aligned to business strategy; while the individual topic of training can be self-directed based on personal interest.

As a baseline company-wide upskilling programme, digital skills and increasing **digital fluency need to be in all personal development plans.** After that, the training and upskilling plan needs to reflect the business 'why', because the real business value for reskilling is for a company to internalise that learning and leverage the new skills of the team.

Some practical examples were shared: in Microsoft, AI is in everyone's personal development plan; with 5-6 mandatory training courses

released monthly; and a quality conversation biannually with the team to discuss their skills' development goals. The Takeda team are required to complete three hours of digital training every year, mandated from the leadership team in Takeda HQ. SMEs like AllinAll Ingredients need to have a learning mindset in their team from recruitment stage to remain nimble, tapping into their supplier's expertise to upskill on key technologies when needed.

Through a Slido question after this panel, we discovered that over a third (36%) of the conference attendees felt their businesses were adequately ready for addressing digital and green skills' gaps. Only 16% believed their companies were very ready, having had a clear and focused reskilling training plan in use for a while. **Another third (32%) felt their companies were only partially prepared, or worse, for the skills gaps of the future.**

Panel 3: Supporting

Panellists:

1. **Sinead Heneghan** - CEO, Learning & Development Institute
2. **Dr Dale Whelehan** - CEO, 4 Day Week Global
3. **Dr Vivienne Patterson** - Head of Skills, Engagement and Statistics at the HEA
4. **Walter Balfe** - Head of Quality Assurance for QQI Awards
5. **Ife Alabi** - Head of Research & Development at Innov8 Labs and 2021 Graduate of MSc in Food Business & Technology



Discussion Highlights

Ife started the discussion by sharing her experience studying for her masters with Innopharma Education while also working and being a mum (and becoming a mum of two while doing the masters!). Her advice to others considering the same path is simple **"You don't have to know anything, you just have to be willing to learn"**. Having Springboard funding and a digital online programme were paramount to her achieving her masters, while balancing other commitments.

Vivienne underlined government supports available for those reskilling or upskilling: grants via Springboard and HCI, Apprenticeships and Skillsnet Ireland offer different pathways to learning. However, she noted that **more and faster access to the funds for such supports is urgently needed.** She also expressed a message to industry which aligned to a key message from the first panel: to get involved with your local/relevant institute to **get value from the national training fund.**

Walter from QQI underlined that online delivery and

stackable qualifications such as micro-credentials are critical to encouraging life-long learning. This is especially needed now to 'top-up' qualifications mid-career, now that a **skills-first approach in HR is more common now because career paths are no longer linear.** Employers and staff need to find ways to adapt to this. Employees often may want to reskill but employers need to give them space and time for it, whatever pathway they choose.

A skills-first HR should identify future skills needed by **creating a skills taxonomy: do a skills audit, uncover hidden skills and identify where the gaps are; allow people to do training in an area of interest, which helps to make work more fulfilling.**

Culturally, how we work best needs to be reviewed in the context of a post-pandemic world: **it's a hybrid world now where flexibility is now a hygiene factor and mental health is now a mandatory business concern.** Coupling those two trends together, Dale discussed the benefits of finding the right motivation to inspire internal

change. Improving workplace efficiency is usually not especially motivating for the employee, if the pay-off of becoming more efficient is to make space for more work. Imagine how much more motivated a team might be if the proposition is: "Become more efficient in order to have the 5th day off". **The 4 day work week supports staff to recover, increase productivity and improve work life balance especially for women,** who often hold more of the homelife workload. However, Sinead queried whether the motivating factor of having **more flexibility over a 5 day week might be preferred by others? If a business is able to flex dependent on the individual, they've more chance of meeting their acquisition and retention goals.**

The conference attendants were asked to describe their organisation's culture for reskilling, training and lifelong learning in one word. Overall, the response was positive with 'supportive' and 'open' being mentioned, but some complained of 'too much push learning'.



KEYNOTE Lars Sudmann

Ex CFO of Proctor & Gamble Belgium,
Leadership & Strategy Consultant



Lars spoke about how crucial the need to innovate is when implementing a strategy, as it is impossible to produce superior performance if you keep doing what you are doing.

His premise was to **try the spaghetti principle for innovation: do something and see what sticks**. Lars then guided the room through a workshop exercise in a personal **rapid strategy creation**. This is a tool which can be applied to skills strategies, helping to link goals with implementation.

- Rapid strategy creation is a 6-step process, in which key questions need to be addressed to formulate it:
1. What is my vision in a tweet?
 2. What are my goals?
 3. Where will my focus be?
 4. And where will I not focus?
 5. Which initiatives will be key?
 6. And on Friday morning, I will do the following:

Lars left us with an inspiring quote from Joseph Campbell
"If the path before you is very clear, you're probably on someone else's path."



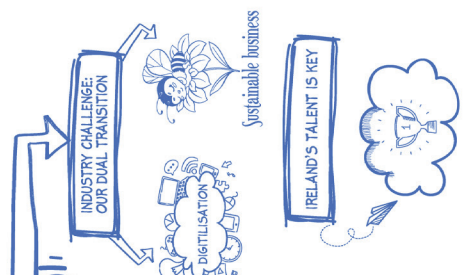
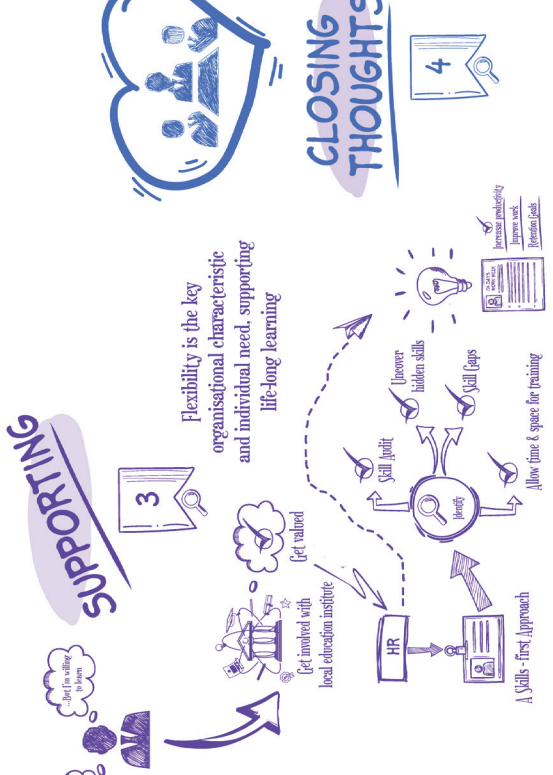
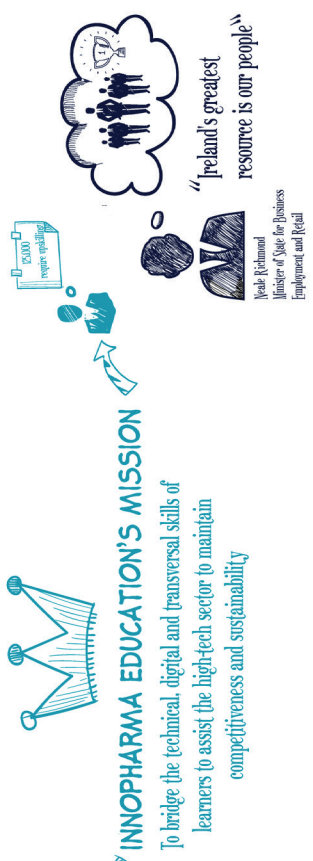
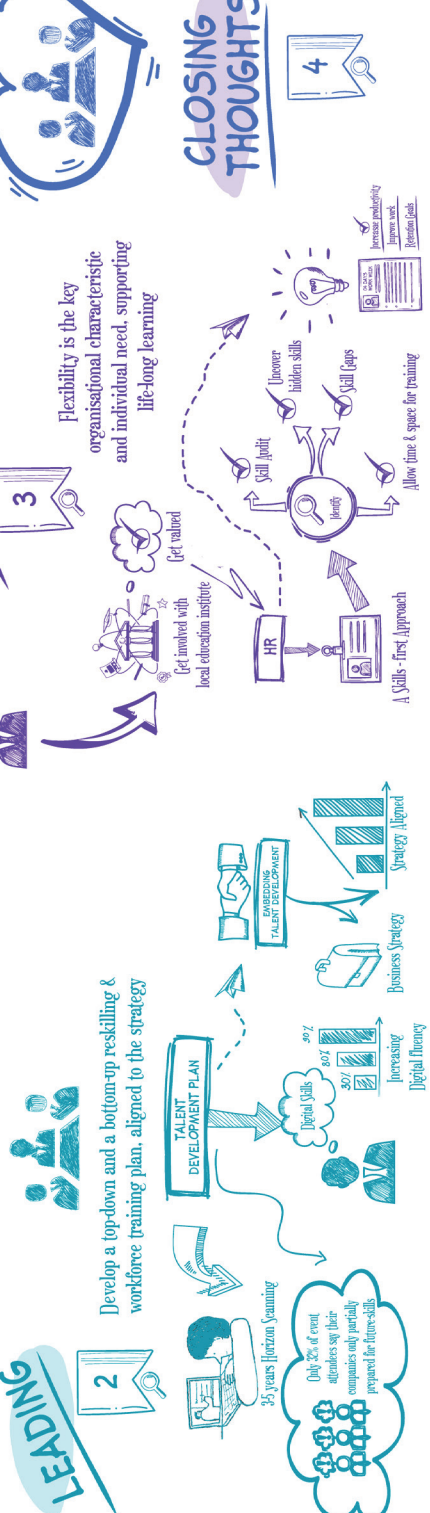
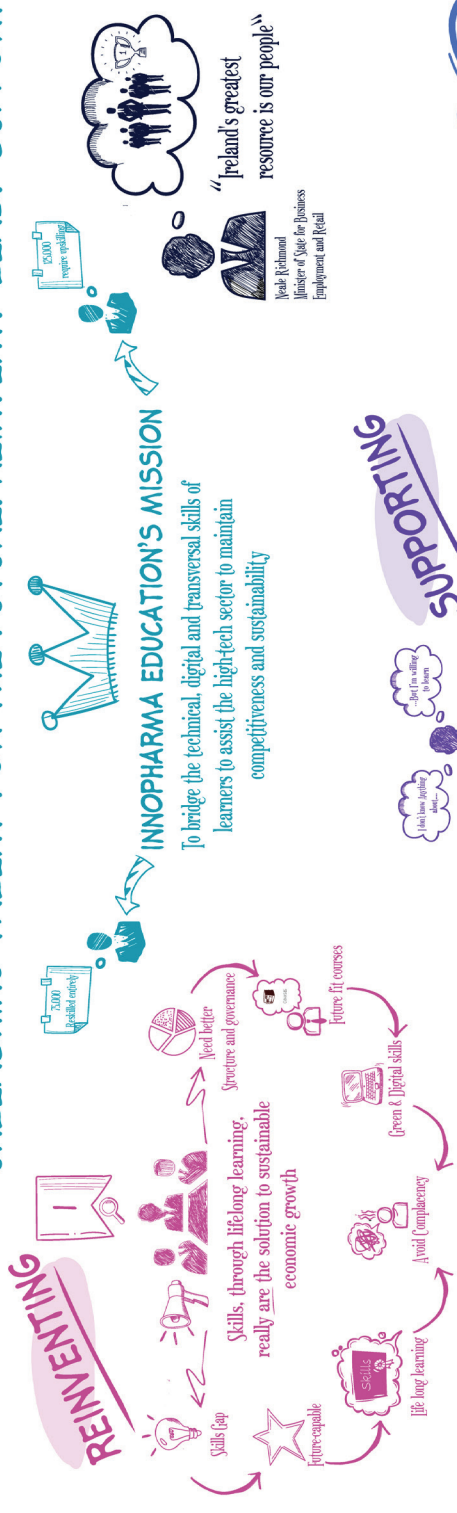
CLOSING THOUGHTS



Innopharma founder and President Emeritus Dr Ian Jones closed the conference by emphasizing **the dual transition required for digital skills and the green economy**. He highlighted the positive impact of Industry 5.0: aligning digital skills with environmental sustainability; emphasizing benefits for individuals, organizations, and economies.

He discussed how **skills are Ireland's 'super-power' but the gap between skills needs and government funding is growing wider....**at a time when we need it most. If we don't increase our investment in funding of skills initiatives, particularly up-skilling and re-skilling of the workforce, **we run the risk of not digitally transforming and greening our island thereby losing our ability to compete for business on the global stage**. This message was loud and clear today throughout every session.

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