

Minister Harris addresses OECD Skills Summit on need for strong policy responses to COVID-19 pandemic

From [Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science](#)

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Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Simon Harris TD today addressed the OECD's Skills Summit on the need for strong policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ministers from across the OECD shared their countries' experiences and responses to the current crisis, and outlined how important skills development will be for those who lost employment as a result of the pandemic.

Speaking today, Minister Harris said:

"Our experiences of COVID-19 differ but the challenges facing all OECD member states are similar. Jobs as we know them are undergoing a process of change with the skills required for many roles changing significantly. Constant lifelong learning, reskilling/upskilling of the workforce is a requirement of the future as jobs become increasingly digitalised.

"All member states agreed on the absolute necessity to prepare for the future world of work and digitisation. We are all facing the same challenges.

"My department's role is to ensure that the Further and Higher Education sectors underpin and stimulate Ireland's social and economic development and that the opportunities provided by public investment and policy in the sectors are made more widely available to everyone including the most vulnerable in society.

"A number of issues had already been identified as priorities by Ireland's National Skills Council for the further and higher education system and have been accelerated by current circumstances. These include preparing for the future world of work and increased automation, the impact of transition to a low carbon economy, a need for increased digital literacy, a joint approach across the further and higher education system, a focus on Lifelong Learning and a need for speed and agility in responding to the identified needs of industry.

"These priorities are exemplified in particular by the objectives of SOLAS's Skills to Advance, Skills to Compete, the development of a 10 Year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy. In addition, the new Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy and the development of a new Action Plan for Apprenticeship. Through higher-level

education, Springboard+ and the Human Capital Initiative are having a very positive impact in meeting the skills needs of the economy.

"As part of my department's July Stimulus Package, investment in human capital was a priority. That is why funding of €100 million was provided for an additional 35,500 places across the higher and further education sector. The programmes aim to upskill, reskill, retrain and provide experience to individuals to enable them to avail of employment opportunities. The measures also provide enhanced incentives to employers to recruit more apprentices and the young unemployed. But we have much more to do and Budget 2021 gives us an opportunity to do much more."