

**From:** Cathal McSweeney <cathal.mcsweeney@skillnetireland.ie>  
**Sent:** Friday 11 June 2021 16:41  
**To:** circulareconomy  
**Subject:** Consultation on the Proposed Publication of the Circular Economy Strategy  
**Attachments:** 20210611 - Skillnet Ireland Circular Economy Strategy Consultation Response.pdf

**CAUTION:** This email originated from outside of the organisation. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Good Afternoon,

Please find attached Skillnet Ireland's submission to the Consultation on the Proposed Publication of the Circular Economy Strategy.

Regards,  
Cathal

**Cathal McSweeney**  
Policy and Research Adviser

T +353 (0)1 291 6620  
E [cathal.mcsweeney@skillnetireland.ie](mailto:cathal.mcsweeney@skillnetireland.ie)



**SKILLNET IRELAND**  
Fifth Floor, Q House, 76 Furze Road,  
Sandyford, Dublin 18, D18 E268, Ireland  
T 353 (0) 1 207 9630 | [skillnetireland.ie](http://skillnetireland.ie)

Skillnet Ireland is funded from the National Training Fund through the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.



An Roinn Breisoideachais agus Ardoideachais,  
Taighde, Nuálaíochta agus Eolaíochta  
Department of Further and Higher Education,  
Research, Innovation and Science



The information transmitted is intended only for the person or entity to which it is addressed and may contain confidential and/or privileged information. Any review, retransmission, dissemination or other use of or taking of any action in reliance upon this information by persons or entities other than the intended recipient is prohibited. If you received this in error please notify us immediately, return it to the address above and delete the material from your computer. It is the policy of Skillnet Ireland to prohibit the sending of offensive material and should you consider that the material contained in this message is offensive you should contact the sender immediately and also email - [info@skillnetireland.ie](mailto:info@skillnetireland.ie)

Skillnet Ireland registered in Ireland No. 298694 Registered office: Fifth Floor, Q House, 76 Furze Road, Sandyford, Dublin 18

# **Skillnet Ireland submission to the Department of Environment, Climate & Communications on Ireland's First Whole of Government Circular Economy Strategy**

June 2021

Skillnet Ireland welcomes the Circular Economy Strategy as the transition to the circular economy presents extensive business innovation and employment opportunities that will be essential to a sustainable post-Covid-19 recovery.

## **Questions for consideration**

- 1. Do you agree with the draft Strategy's proposed key objectives? In your view, are there further or alternative objectives that should be included?**

Skillnet Ireland supports the draft strategy's objectives and ambitious target to significantly improve its circular material use rate (in both absolute terms and in comparison with other EU Member States) by 2030 so that Ireland's national rate is above the EU average by the end of this decade. This shift from linear ('take-make-waste') model of production and consumption and promotion of increased investment in the Circular Economy in Ireland will deliver sustainable, regionally balanced economic growth and employment.

We recommend that a focus on talent development within enterprise and the workforce could be added or further strengthened within the objectives of the draft strategy. Having the right talent and skills is a critical element to enable industry and agriculture to fully operate within the circular economy, maximise business and new employment opportunities. Aligned with this would be a specific focus on developing the digital skills needed to support the use of the future technologies that will be required for the full implementation of the strategy actions.

- 5. What are the most effective awareness raising measures that could be taken under the Strategy?**

Raising awareness of circular economy best practices and innovative business ideas will be key to the success and greater adoption of circular economy transitions across Ireland. Communications campaigns are critical for raising awareness. Skillnet Ireland's deep engagements with SMEs has evidenced that many SMEs are simply not planning sufficiently, investing in the climate or circular economy agenda, or putting enough resources into their teams, which makes them vulnerable to future economic shock. In addition to standard promotion campaigns, we see extensive value of upskilling and workforce development to deliver gains in awareness building, deepening understanding and capacity building to deliver concrete action. Improving management skills is also

a key lever in improving Irish SMEs' productivity performance, their capacity to adopt more sustainable business models, and the adoption of circular economy business processes, practices and technologies.

In 2021, Skillnet Ireland launched a new national initiative to address talent and skills development needs within the green economy called Climate Ready – Talent for the Green Economy. It is designed to accelerate Ireland's capacity to transition to a low carbon economy, which includes the capacity to transition to a circular economy. Climate Ready assists SMEs on their sustainability transformation journey. The initiative is aligned to national strategies and the Skillnet Ireland strategy with dedicated objectives under each of the three pillars: Workforce Design, People Development and Strategic Innovation.



Climate Ready is supported by Chambers Ireland, Wind Energy Ireland, and Sustainable Finance Ireland. The Climate Ready initiative will support over 1,100 companies and 3,000 workers in 2021, expanding year on year. This is being enabled through additional funding made available to Skillnet Ireland by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. At a minimum, Skillnet Ireland will invest €10 million in green skills through Climate Ready over the coming four years.

## Climate Ready Focus Areas



**CLIMATE  
READY**  
Academy



**CLIMATE  
READY**  
Cluster

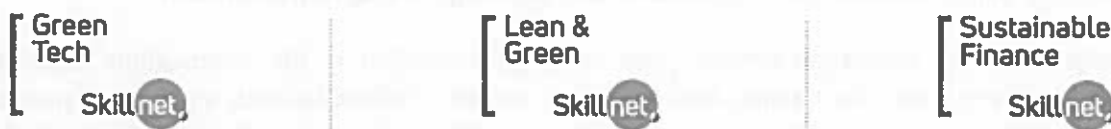


**CLIMATE  
READY**  
Insights

Climate Ready offers leadership and skills support for enterprises who want to develop their operational and strategic sustainability. Knowing where to start on the sustainability journey can be challenging SMEs. Through Climate Ready, Skillnet Ireland has developed learning pathways for businesses to build sustainable operating models and develop the talent they need to enable this shift

to a circular economy. The Skillnet Ireland Climate Ready initiative develops leaders within SMEs to overcome these challenges through targeted upskilling supports. Delivered through virtual and online methods, the new **Waste Leaders programme** designed in partnership with the Sustainable Authority of Ireland offers a specialist and practical programme which facilitates the participant to apply their learning through bespoke energy and waste charters and related action plans to deploy in their business.

Leveraging the expertise of specialist Skillnet Business Networks, the Climate Ready Cluster is designed to transform innovative ideas into practical circular economy upskilling solutions for businesses. The Climate Ready Cluster currently includes:



The Lean and Green Skillnet Water Stewardship Programme with Irish Water is proof of the significant progress being made through collaborative, enterprise-led workforce development projects which will pave the way to a more sustainable and stable future for businesses. Similarly, over the past three years, Green Tech Skillnet have provided essential renewable energy training to more than 3,700 participants over a wide range of professions including turbine technicians, high voltage operators, PV and micro grid installers, policy, finance, planning, energy markets, and management.

A wide range of other Skillnet Business Networks can also deliver programmes to address the circular economy skills agenda including Skillnet Business Networks in agriculture, design, manufacturing, food production, biopharma, construction and other sectors and regions.

The Climate Ready Programme is divided into three areas;

1. **Climate Ready Academy** provides practical and specialised supports for business leaders and their teams in the areas of climate action and sustainability, through a blended approach of workshops and classes, online courses, mentoring, and interactive webinars.
2. **Climate Ready Cluster** consists of a dynamic group of Skillnet Business Networks that specialises in the areas of sustainable finance, renewable energy, green technology, and clean water. Skillnet Business Networks across the economy are engaging with industry and continue to turn ideas into innovative solutions that are positive for both the climate agenda and the business community.
3. **Climate Ready Insights** is a dedicated platform which helps businesses develop their thinking around sustainability practices, climate change, just transition and sustainable development goals. With access to thought-leadership articles, industry-led research reports, and specialised news content relating to the development of Ireland's green economy, Climate Ready Insights aims to inform decision-makers on the newest innovations in climate action.

The National Economic Recovery Plan recognises the importance of focussing on the areas of talent development, innovation and specialist upskilling to ensuring that Irish enterprise has the expertise, and business models necessary for the current and future low carbon and circular economy challenges. Skills development across sectors will also be necessary to support the transition to a

circular economy, presenting new employment opportunities in a post-Covid recovery context. Ensuring that business have the appropriate talent and skill to respond to these challenges will be vital. While the requirement for skills will grow in some new sectors other, in other areas workers will lose their jobs or their roles will change. Working in partnership with industry to determine the potential impact of this transition on business sectors and developing relevant and practical upskilling programmes which meet new skills demands of businesses is at the core of Skillnet Ireland's 2021-2025 statement of strategy.

**6. Are you satisfied with the proposed stakeholder engagement arrangements in the draft Strategy? Which additional stakeholders (if any), not already part of the Waste Action Group, do you think should be included in the Strategy's implementation?**

Skillnet Ireland can be leveraged further given its unique position at the intersection between government, enterprise and the training and education system. Skillnet Ireland, leading a dynamic public-private collaboration with 70 enterprise bodies and other enterprise-led initiatives, is ideally positioned to drive complex and highly impactful upskilling collaborations that support sustainable economic development. With a track record in the delivery of advanced green upskilling programmes in the areas of waste management, renewable energy, water stewardship, sustainable finance, design thinking, logistics and technology, Skillnet Ireland can also help deliver the talent and strategic digital capacity to prepare business for the circular economy and just transition planning. As demonstrated, Skillnet Ireland would bring a unique added value if included as part of the proposed working group on the circular economy and listed as one of the business support agencies within the final Annex Two.

**12. Which sectors do you think can make the biggest contribution to making Ireland's economy more circular?**

While some sectors will make a more substantial contribution to making Ireland's economy more circular, the circular economy will impact on enterprises across the economy, from micro-enterprises to SMEs to large multinational firms. For all companies, they need the skills and talent to focus on redesigning their business practices and in some cases business model in terms of the waste management, product design, manufacturing processes and materials, supply chain and transport logistics, water and energy management and in adopting new technologies. All of these areas require the management expertise and specialist skills and knowledge. Each sector will have common and bespoke skills needs and this development needs to be enterprise-led to ensure buy-in and high participation levels.

**14. Any other comments?**

Skillnet Ireland supports the policy areas listed for future development in the draft Strategy.

To accelerate our transition to a circular economy on a national scale, sufficient investment in talent development must be made to underpin the delivery of this strategy. Lifelong learning has never been more relevant and will be a driving force in our recovery from this period of significant disruption that will require all of us to adapt and learn new skills. Talent is at the forefront of Ireland's capacity to deliver upon these ambitious targets and is vital for our international competitiveness and national productivity.

Ireland needs to further build on the specialist expertise, broader upskilling and awareness building through innovative learning solutions. It is imperative to build on productive collaborations between business and the training and education system to reinforce the competitive strength we draw from the talent in our workforce. The business community must be assisted to adapt production, waste systems and supply chains to enable a sustainable transition to the circular economy.

In light of the challenges ahead, Skillnet Ireland recommends a continued focus on developing the skills of Irish businesses, those in employment and across wider society to deliver the objectives of this strategy and meet Ireland's ambitious circular economy targets.

**For further information please see**

[www.skillnetireland.ie](http://www.skillnetireland.ie)

[www.climateready.ie](http://www.climateready.ie)

<https://www.skillnetireland.ie/publication/statement-of-strategy-2021-2025/>

Contact: [policy@skillnetireland.ie](mailto:policy@skillnetireland.ie)

## **About Skillnet Ireland**

Skillnet Ireland is a business support agency of the Government of Ireland, with a mandate to advance the competitiveness, productivity, and innovation of Irish businesses through enterprise-led workforce development. Skillnet Ireland partners with 60 industry bodies and enterprise clusters, supporting over 18,000 businesses and 70,000 trainees annually, through its 73 Skillnet Business Networks across most sectors and all regions in Ireland. As Ireland's business support agency dedicated to workforce development, we put enterprise in control of the process. We partner with industry bodies that are either sectoral or geographically based and foster a networked and partnership-based approach that leverages Ireland's open culture of collaboration. Skillnet Ireland operates on a joint investment basis where Government grants are combined with contributions from enterprise, thus reducing costs and other barriers for businesses. Through our partnerships with key industry representative groups, we drive excellence in learning for the workplace of today and the future.

Skillnet Ireland has received international recognition as a best practice model from the EU, the OECD, the ILO, amongst others. Skillnet Ireland is funded through the National Training Fund through the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.