



An Roinn Fiontar,
Turasóireachta agus Fostaíochta
Department of Enterprise,
Tourism and Employment

Enterprise Digital Advisory Forum 15 January 2026

Room 110, Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, 23 Kildare Street

Attendees

EDAF Members (In-person)

Martina Fitzgerald (Scale Ireland)
Mike Conroy (ITAG and EDIH Network)
Kieran McCorry (Microsoft Ireland)
Kathryn O'Donovan (Google)
Erik O'Donovan (IBEC)
Victor Timon (Digital Business Ireland)
Orla O'Keeffe (Failte Ireland)
Margot Holland (J&J)
DC Cahalane (Sure Valley Ventures)
Matt Lynch (Meta)

EDAF Members (Online)

Barry O'Brien (IBM)
Eoin Costello (Dargan Institute clg, Dun Laoghaire)
Niamh O'Donnellan (Stripe)
Louise Gaffney (Meta)

Officials

Jean Carberry (DETE)
Wendy Gray (DETE)
Valerie Rousselin (DETE)
Kathrina Flynn (DETE)
Paul McMorrow (DETE)
Michelle Kiernan (DETE)
Michelle Kearney (DETE)
Barbara Wiseman (DETE)
Adrienne Byrne (DETE)
Catherine Howard (IDA)
Alexa Toomey (EI)
Daire Traynor (NSAI)
James Farrell (IDA)
Gerry O'Grady (EI)

Presentations:

Anne Ribault (DFHERIS)
Prof. David Collings (Trinity College Dublin)

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1. Welcome and Introduction

As Minister Smyth was unable to attend, Jean Carberry conveyed the Minister's apologies, offered New Year's greetings, and opened the meeting with a tour de table. She then provided a brief update on the following:

On digital simplification, Jean advised that the Department welcomes the EU's digital simplification proposals, many of which are expected to move forward when Ireland takes over the EU Presidency. Ireland will play a central role in steering the simplification package through the European Parliament, where discussions remain ongoing. While there is some narrative around risks associated with perceptions of deregulation, the Department remains confident that the proposed online safety measures are robust and will be maintained.

The Department is implementing the EU AI Act, including the creation of a new National AI Office – The AI Office of Ireland -which will be established later this year.

Jean highlighted the publication of the Department's Sectoral Capital Plan, which sets out strong competitiveness and innovation ambitions, including €1.33 billion under the Enterprise Innovation and Commercialisation pillar for initiatives such as Technology Centres, the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund, ESA programmes, and Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEI).

Finally, the Charter for Digital Inclusion, launched in 2025 and delivered in partnership with Technology Ireland and IBEC, will continue to be rolled out during 2026.

2. Update on the AI Office of Ireland and the AI and Digital Summit – Michelle Kearney, DETE

A note on the AI Office of Ireland was shared with members ahead of the meeting. Michelle provided a short update. In summary, the AI Office of Ireland is due to be established by 2 August, and a recruitment campaign will start during the year.

The AI and Digital Summit will take place on 14 October 2026 (location TBC). It will be a flagship event for the Department and one of the largest events to take place during Ireland's Presidency of the EU. The theme of the Summit will be "AI to Drive Innovation" (*full title - Enabling AI to Power Innovation Led Growth in Europe*).

The EU Digital Decade Board meeting, hosted by the Department, will take place on 15 October 2026 in Dublin (location TBC).

Also to note, the Informal Telecoms Council will take place in Limerick on the 12 October 2026.

Comments from EDAF Members

- Proposal for EDAF members to input into, and participate at the AI and Digital Summit
- Futura Innovation Conference is taking place in Limerick the week after the AI & Digital Summit.
- Cyber Week will take place the week beginning 5th October.

3. EDAF Subgroup Updates

Group 1: Driving Digitalisation and AI Adoption Communication Campaign – Barbara Wiseman (DETE)

Summary of points

- Focused on driving digitalisation, with a role to design, coordinate, and support communication activities with the EDAF Members.
- The group aims to promote the adoption of digital responsibility among businesses.
- A number of priority tasks are planned for 2026, including the continued rollout and promotion of the Charter for Digital Inclusion.
- An AI for Business initiative is being developed to provide enterprises with a coherent and accessible entry point to AI and digital supports.
- Work is currently underway to develop business personas, reflecting differences across sectors, company scale, and levels of digital maturity.

Group 2: Driving Digitalisation and AI Adoption Attractiveness of Digital Supports – Alexa Toomey (Enterprise Ireland)

Summary of points

- Alexa Toomey has recently taken over as chair of this subgroup.
- The subgroup is focused on identifying clear pathways for businesses, recognising that these vary by sector and are not always obvious to businesses.
- There is a shared view that existing data and insights held by State agencies are valuable but need to be better coordinated and made more accessible to support businesses effectively.

- Collaboration across agencies on data sharing and pathway design was identified as a key priority.
- The development of business pathways is expected to be central to the work of this subgroup and closely linked to the work of other EDAF subgroups.
- The subgroup agreed to link in with other subgroups to ensure alignment.

Group 3: Leveraging EDIHs Mike Conroy (ITAG and EDIH Network)

Summary of points

- Review EDIH performance to maximise impact and value.
- Strengthen alignment with LEOs, Enterprise Ireland, and Fáilte Ireland.
- Deliver a coordinated “one-stop shop / no wrong door” approach.
- Differentiate EDIHs by sector focus, competencies, and reach.
- Tailor engagement by sector, region, and enterprise maturity.
- Strengthen links with AI research, innovation, and ecosystem partners.
- Clarify EDIH scope, pathways, and client referrals.
- Leverage EU funding opportunities and deliver system-wide multiplier impact.

Group 4: Digital Inclusion, Skills, Public Sector Digitalisation & Cybersecurity

Erik O’Donovan (IBEC)

Summary of points

- The subgroup discussed four core themes: digital inclusion, digital skills, public sector digitalisation, and cybersecurity.
- Emphasis on enterprise-led insights to inform digital and skills priorities.
- Progress noted within the skills subgroup, with a continued focus on market-intelligence-led skills planning.
- Engagement underway with DFHERIS and the National Skills Council Skills Observatory, particularly on digital skills.
- Actions progressing on training and funding pathways, including leveraging the National Training Fund and clarifying delivery routes.
- Focus on increasing uptake of the Digital Charter, using existing networks and aligning with related initiatives.
- Group believes digital inclusion objectives can be strengthened through strengthened digital skills agenda.
- Monitoring of the draft National Cybersecurity Strategy and engagement planned post-launch,.
- Public sector digitalisation engagement ongoing with DPER and GovTech.

Group 5: Future Trends Valérie Rousselin Somerville (DETE)

Summary of points

- Subgroup priority towards year-end was to contribute to the Department of Foreign Affairs consultation on stakeholder priorities for the upcoming EU Presidency.
- Agreed approach to submit high-level strategic recommendations.
- Initial high-level lessons and recommendations were shared with EDAF members in December to gather feedback and observations.
- Recommendations were updated and refined based on feedback received from members and are being presented today to seek views, identify any further updates, and confirm whether members are satisfied with the content.
- Subject to plenary agreement, the feedback will be finalised and formally submitted to the Department of Foreign Affairs.

4. Report on Future Proofing talent supply in the Irish Tech start-up and scaling sector- Presentation from *Prof. David Collings, Trinity College Dublin*

- **Report commissioned by Scale Ireland, with Prof Collings appearing before the EDAF in this capacity.**

Key highlights:

- Irish tech start-ups and scaling firms are critical to national growth, with over 4,000 companies created (2015–2025) and ~40,000 employees, half based outside Dublin.
- Ireland performs strongly on digital competitiveness and talent openness, but underperforms on investment in education, R&D, and mid-level/vocational skills.
- The ICT sector is growing rapidly (~183,000 employees in 2024) but is highly reliant on migration (40% non-Irish workforce) and has low female participation (25%).
- Acute and persistent skills shortages exist in software development, AI, cybersecurity, DevOps, and data analytics, alongside growing demand for transversal skills.
- Current skills forecasting models are no longer sufficient; faster-moving, dynamic, and data-driven approaches are needed.
- Upskilling and reskilling are essential, but SMEs and start-ups often lack the capacity and capability to deliver this without targeted supports.
- The third-level education system alone cannot meet demand; expanded and alternative routes into tech roles are required.

- Inward migration remains essential, requiring an efficient work-permit system and action on barriers such as cost of living, taxation, and infrastructure.
- Diversity and inclusion are strategic priorities, with a need for earlier interventions and stronger female and diverse talent pipelines.

5. Update on plans for National Training Fund and the Skills Dimension in the NDAIS – Anne Ribault, Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

Key highlights:

National Training Fund (NTF):

- Funded by a 1% levy on wages; supports training in employment and for employment.
- Spending increased significantly since 2017, with a €1.77bn surplus at end 2024.
- Recent legislative amendment enables skills related capital investment, unlocking €1.7bn (2025–2030) for higher education, further education, apprenticeships, and research skills.

NDAIS – National Digital and AI Strategy:

- Sets out Ireland’s ambition to remain a global digital and AI leader and due for publication in early 2026.
- Digital skills focus across four dimensions:
 - Strengthening specialist technology skills and diversifying the talent pipeline.
 - Supporting business upskilling to enable digital transformation.
 - Embedding digital skills across education and training.
 - Improving digital and AI literacy across society and the workforce.
- Implementation mechanisms:
 - Roadmap for Technology Skills of the Future.
 - Development of a Digital Skills Observatory and an AI Skills Platform.

European context:

- Alignment with EU Union of Skills and Digital Decade targets for 2030.
- Continued access to EU funding streams including Erasmus and competitiveness funds.

Comments from EDAF Members

- A need to direct some of the NTF to support digital and AI skills for business was raised.

6. AOB

EDAF members suggested having a presentation from Skillnet Ireland, and also on GovTech at the next meeting, scheduled for April.

Martina Fitzgerald raised the potential to explore an EIC application support voucher in the context of European Innovation Council funding. DETE to follow up on this.

AI & Digital Programmes Unit

Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment

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