



An Roinn Fiontar,
Trádála agus Fostaíochta
Department of Enterprise,
Trade and Employment

Enterprise Digital Advisory Forum Inaugural Meeting

4 May 2022

Attendance

Chair:	Minister of State for Trade Promotion, Digital and Company Regulation, Robert Troy TD
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment:	Jean Carberry, Ross Church, Gráinne O'Carroll, Marc McEntegart, Matt Lynch, Ciara O'Sullivan
Department of the Taoiseach:	Emily Whelton
Enterprise Ireland:	Ruairi Ó hAilín
Local Enterprise Offices:	Gerry O'Grady
Industrial Development Authority	Donal Travers, Donal Flavin
Forum Members (present):	Allan Beechinor (Altada, Dogpatch Labs), Barry O'Brien (IBM), Edward McDonnell (CeADAR) , Eoin Costello (DigitalHQ), Erik O'Donovan (Ibec), John Clancy (Chatspace), Kathryn O'Donovan (Google), Kieran McCorry (Microsoft Ireland), Lorraine Higgins (Digital Business Ireland), Patricia Scanlon (Soapbox Labs), Tanya Thompson (Sluamor, ISME)
Forum Members (remote):	Aidan Kehoe (Skout/Barracuda) DC Cahalane (Jolt Venture Studios [and others]), Shona D'arcy (Kids Speech Labs), Barry O'Sullivan (Insight Centre for Data Analytics), Terri O'Donovan (Janssen)

Background

The National AI Strategy, AI: Here for Good, calls for the establishment of an Enterprise Digital Advisory Forum (EDAF) to advise and work with Government to drive industry adoption of digital technologies, including AI. This forum is composed of representatives of indigenous enterprise (small, medium and large), multinational corporations and experts with knowledge of AI and digitalisation with regards to adoption by enterprise.

Discussion

Minister Troy introduced the meeting and outlined the objectives of the forum. He then invited all participants to introduce themselves and give a brief overview of their own experience, as well as what they hoped to achieve through their participation in the forum.

Identified issues and opportunities

The following points were raised during discussion of potential barriers to the adoption of digital technologies by businesses in Ireland:

- **Partnerships:**
It was noted that the EDAF brings together representatives from across the full range of the enterprise ecosystem in Ireland. One important role of the forum will be to identify ways that we can create partnerships to further the digital transition agenda.
- **Skills and talent:**
Several participants noted that talent acquisition is a significant issue, noting the rising cost of acquiring relevant talent. Competition between SMEs and MNCs within Ireland, but also internationally, arising from a lack of necessary skills/talent. Not restricted to sought after digital skills, but also to business and management skills. While the market is global, trying to attract talent to Ireland introduces issue of cost of living, housing. MNCs also noted this as an issue affecting retention. Another skills aspect mentioned was the need to upskill and reskill management and staff to enable organisations/individuals to access digital and AI opportunities.
- **Tax/Equity schemes:**
Tied closely with the above, members noted that existing schemes are too complex to access and use – particularly compared to the relatively straightforward schemes for similar in the US.
- **Surveying/Benchmarking/Assessment:**
Over the course of discussions, the need for some kind of broad survey or benchmark of existing levels of digital intensity among businesses in Ireland was raised numerous times by different forum members.
- **Digital awareness/need for cultural change:**
The question was raised of how best to overcome inertia within existing businesses that make limited (if any) use of digital technologies. This is a complex challenge with many factors. One participant noted that many businesses are aware of the benefits but simply don't know where to begin with their digital transition. For many businesses, it

can be difficult to see the “value model” for digitalisation. Fear is also an issue. Fear of job losses was discussed initially, but it was also noted here that many established small businesses may fear change in a broader sense. Not to be underestimated is the fear of seeming stupid. The value of peer to peer networks was noted. Another suggestion was a one pager which captures the steps on a digital journey.

- **Ethics/Regulation:**
The question of how best to ensure that start-ups are equipped to use ethical and safe AI was also raised. The potential value of a “hallmark” for trustworthy AI was noted. Creation of a depository for reliable resources was also suggested.
- **Public procurement:**
Forum members queries whether the degree of businesses’ digitalisation could be considered when assessing tenders submitted as part of public procurement exercises. This is something that will be raised with OGP and OGCIO, who are considering potential solutions under the procurement rules.
- **Cybersecurity:**
Forum members working in security acknowledged that businesses often choose convenience over security. Noted that many could reduce resource cost of cybersecurity (including time) by using third party providers.
- **Audience:**
Important to answer the question of who is our audience? Who is the target for communication around the need for digitalisation? This must include the decision makers.
- **Lack of urgency:**
Repeat question – “How do we make this a burning issue for businesses?”

Terms of Reference

The terms of reference document circulated ahead of the meeting was agreed, with participants proposing adjustment to refocus on “digital technologies, including AI” rather than “AI and other digital technologies.”