

The Training  
Networks  
Programme  
2005 - 2010

Boosting  
Skills and  
Productivity

 Skillnets  
Networked Learning



“Networking has had a major impact. Our managers have the opportunity to share best practice, and that helps us in terms of competitiveness.”

Derek Orford, Technical Director -  
Heineken Ireland (Brewing Skillnet)

“Skillnets is the most practical and down to earth training I have ever experienced. It is real empowerment and delegation in action.”

Paddy Walsh, Director - Walsh Family Foods  
(Consumer Food Skillnet)

“Analog Devices have been able to avail of many top tutors worldwide in the sector through the MIDAS Skillnet.”

Eileen Liston, Training Manager -  
Analog Devices (Midas Skillnet)

“No other programme has had such an impact on the shop floor. This is the single most important initiative that has been introduced into training and development in the retail sector.”

Irene Canavan, Group Human Resources Director - Arnotts  
(IBEC Retail Skillnet)

“There has been a very positive impact and the added value is that staff feel they are being given more by their employer in addition to their wages.”

Trevor O’Clochartaigh, Managing Director -  
Sin Sin Productions  
(Gréasán na Méain Skillnet)

“The Network gives great support - we might think we have a problem specific to ourselves, but on airing the problem in the Network, we find that somebody else will have the same problem. It can be discussed and ideas and solutions aired.”

Ger Horan, Managing Director - Montip Engineering  
(South East Micro Skillnet)

# Message from the Chairman

The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment has granted a further five year mandate to Skillnets to provide increased funding and support for enterprises to meet their training needs in the period 2005-2010.

This has been made possible due to the excellent achievements of 90 Training Networks already supported by Skillnets from 1999-2004. These networks have created and delivered training programmes and other learning activities across a broad range of industry and service sectors nationwide. Since 1999, they have helped 5,000 Irish enterprises and allowed over 30,000 staff to improve and meet their skills needs.

Skillnets is an enterprise-led body, which receives funds from the National Training Fund to support companies and their people. Training Networks allow enterprises to decide what training they need, as well as how, where and when it should be delivered, thus allowing staff to take part in relevant, flexible, and cost effective learning. Our role is to provide funding, advice and support to underpin the competitiveness of firms, as well as increase the long term career opportunities and employability of employees.

This booklet is designed to provide you with all the information you need to become a part of the dynamic and successful network of enterprises which Skillnets supports. In the next five years, Irish business will face many challenges as it continues to grow and adapt to change. Human resources are a vital component in that process and will prove decisive in helping us to sustain a competitive edge. Skillnets will play its part in promoting not just more training, but excellence in learning at all levels.

We invite you to join with us in boosting competitiveness, adaptability and employability through knowledge and skills.



Domhnall MacDomhnaill  
Chairman  
Skillnets Ltd.

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## Section 1 - Introduction to Skillnets

### 1.1 The Skillnets Story

#### Skillnets' Role & Origins

Skillnets' role is to act as an enterprise-led support body dedicated to the promotion and facilitation of enterprise training and other learning activities, as a key element in sustaining national competitiveness. Its mission is to provide companies and their people with new, relevant and flexible methods of upskilling staff and enhancing business performance.

The genesis of Skillnets is to be found in the 1997 White Paper on Human Resource Development which stated the Government's view that: 'the primary responsibility for human resource development rests with the private sector itself... the first approach of the state must be to facilitate the actions of business enterprises and of individuals to engage in human resource processes... The state is prepared to back its support with adequate finance where the business sector takes a lead and responsibility.'

#### Skillnets Stakeholders

The establishment of Skillnets in 1999 provided new leadership by industry - both employers and employees - to an initiative which is funded by the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment from the resources of the National Training Fund. This marked a new departure within the context of state funded support for human resource development. An industry board was appointed which brought together leading enterprise bodies to provide the new strategy and management of this initiative. They include the Irish Business and Employers Confederation; the Chambers of Commerce of Ireland, the Construction Industry Federation, the Small Firms Association and employee/trade union representatives from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

#### Skillnets' Strategy

Skillnets' strategy is to support companies from all sectors in the economy to engage in training, but does so exclusively through networks of companies under the Training Networks Programme. The network approach allows companies to achieve economies of scale, increased efficiency, lower costs and training that is more relevant to individual sectors or types of companies.

**Skillnets funding is aimed at training people in employment and supports the training of existing employees in established companies that are part of Training Networks.**

All training and development activities can be supported and enterprises are given the ownership of all training strategies and plans to ensure that all activities are specifically meet enterprise needs.

#### Skillnets 1999-2004

Since 1999, Skillnets has funded over 90 Training Networks and supported over 5,000 companies to meet their training needs. 30,000 staff and managers have participated in raising their skills levels and 30 different industry sectors have been involved.

Recognising that the enterprise-led approach has made a positive contribution to raising the profile of enterprise training in Ireland, the Government has now granted a new five year mandate to Skillnets for 2005-2010. Up to €55 million will be made available from the National Training Fund. This provides significant new support and funding to industry to boost the skills levels across companies and their employees. This opportunity for developing human potential can underpin the competitiveness of firms as well as increase the long term career opportunities and employability of employees.

### Features of the Skillnets approach to Enterprise Training and Development

- > The **enterprise-led approach** allows companies to address those skills that are relevant to their specific challenges
- > **All companies** are eligible for Skillnets support
- > Companies can **increase their training capacity** by joining a Training Network
- > Groups of companies working together can achieve **greater buying power** and influence
- > Companies can design and **develop the training methods**, approaches and timing for training that suits their specific situation
- > Employees have a **greater range of training** available to them if their firm is part of a Training Network
- > Collaborative or group approaches allow companies to **work together rather than in isolation**
- > Decision makers have new **opportunities for exchange and information** on developing skills
- > **Sectors can take the lead** in deciding what training their sector needs
- > Regional groups can develop **local solutions** to training needs
- > SME's have training that is **suited to small business**
- > Companies have an opportunity to learn in many ways and are **not confined to formal training** programmes
- > Companies can **access funding quickly** and flexibly to support their skills development plans
- > Company networks can appoint experts to **help them develop and deliver training** such as project managers, industry experts, training consultants
- > Sectors can develop **new sectoral programmes**, standards and certification
- > Skillnets provides **opportunities for partnerships** between employees and employers to work together to develop training strategies

### 1.2 Why Train?

Regardless of company size or industry sector, the right training can have a positive effect on business performance, a measurable impact on the bottom line and greatly increase opportunities for staff. Trained staff are more productive, allowing firms to expand market share, quality and reputation. New skills can help manage and facilitate new strategies, technology, operations and work practices.

Regular training and learning opportunities are an investment in people, allow staff to prosper and develop their careers while giving firms a highly able and motivated workforce.

Staying competitive in a global marketplace requires businesses to continually change their work practices and human resource strategies. Training can be used to manage and facilitate the implementation of new technology, new products, new markets and new ways of working to stay ahead of the competition.

**For employers** - training can boost the bottom line through:

- > Higher management effectiveness and better strategic planning
- > Increased staff morale and satisfaction
- > Improved customer service and sales
- > Reduced waste and maintenance costs of machinery and equipment
- > Lower workplace accidents and insurance premiums
- > Lower recruitment costs though enhanced career progression

When companies invest in staff training they are sending their staff a message that:

- > They have confidence in them to do the job
- > The business values them and wants to maximise the full potential of all its people
- > The business is committed to supporting future employability and progression
- > The business is enabling its employees to fully engage in the development of the enterprise.

Research shows that employees' motivation is greatly enhanced and all staff respond positively to learning opportunities in terms of improved performance. Companies which provide excellent training and development opportunities attract and retain staff and experience lower levels of absenteeism.

**For employees** - new skills, information and competence can increase opportunities by:

- > providing new relevant work qualifications
- > allowing employees to maximize their performance
- > opening up career progression and development paths
- > acquiring the key skills for tomorrow's technology.

Trained and motivated staff are a sustainable competitive advantage.

High skills levels provide businesses with a competitive edge through improved performance, quality and higher output.

Research shows that companies which invest in continuous upgrading of the skills of managers and staff are more successful in developing new markets, new products and new services.

The most successful companies have high levels of participation in training and development for all employee groups, and increase their flexibility and adaptability to changes in markets, consumer trends and new technologies.

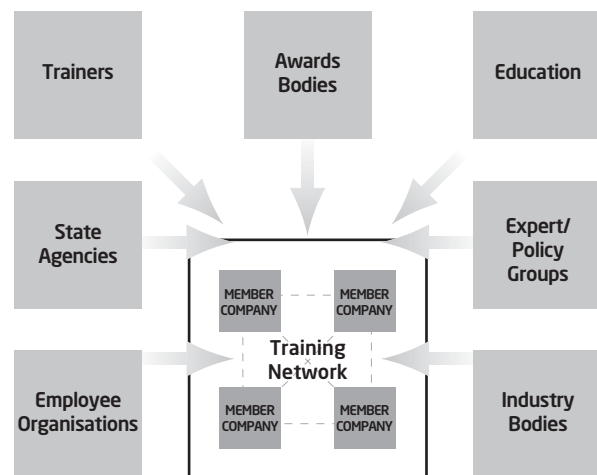
## Section 2 - Training Networks

### 2.1 What is a Training Network?

A Network is a group of enterprises that decide to cooperate in order to undertake a project over a sustained period, that individual members of the group would be unable to undertake on their own. Skillnets Training Networks are comprised of groups of enterprises that come together to achieve a common purpose or address a shared issue of importance to the development of skills and their long-term competitiveness.

In each Network, companies jointly address their training needs, collaborate with other enterprises, and engage experts, trainers, certifying bodies, industry bodies and others to work with them to achieve their goals.

Figure 1: A Skillnet Training Network



### 2.2 Who can form a Network?

Any group of enterprises or any enterprise-led association can form a training network, provided that they have a strategic and long-term common interest to pursue in relation to the development of human resources.

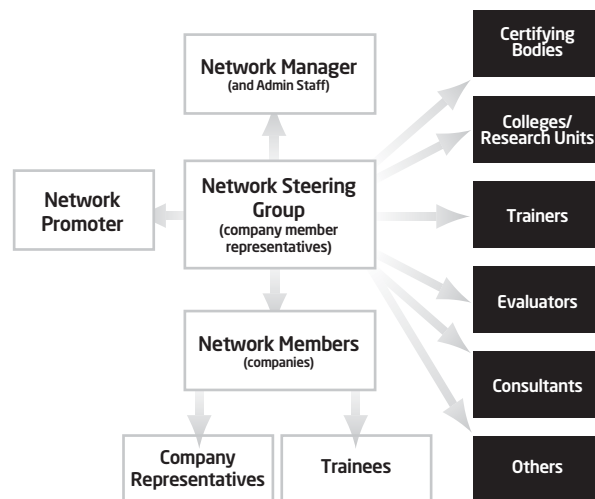
Each Training Network is made up of a group of companies which have shared training needs. This may mean that the companies in the network may be in the same sector, the same region, or the same supply chain. They may also have common needs because they are primarily small businesses who want to

develop training solutions that are relevant to companies with a small number of employees. In other cases a number of companies may have identified a skill gap which the group of companies want to address together. Whatever the common interest of the network, Skillnets can support customised and specific solutions for the enterprises.

### 2.3 Network Features

Figure 1 shows a typical Skillnets network - the core of which is the company members. In most of the networks, a network manager is the key co-ordinator, providing the professional and developmental input. Others who provide services to the network include trainers, business advisors and academics.

Figure 2: A Typical Network Structure



#### Network Promoters

Each network has a network promoter who manages the activities of the network and receive the funds from Skillnets on behalf of the network group.

Often network promoters are industry and enterprise organisations. In many cases industry associations and federations and chambers of commerce (i.e. employer organisations) act as network promoters on behalf of their member companies. In other cases trade unions (employee organisations) have taken leadership of the process, working with company management to facilitate a network.

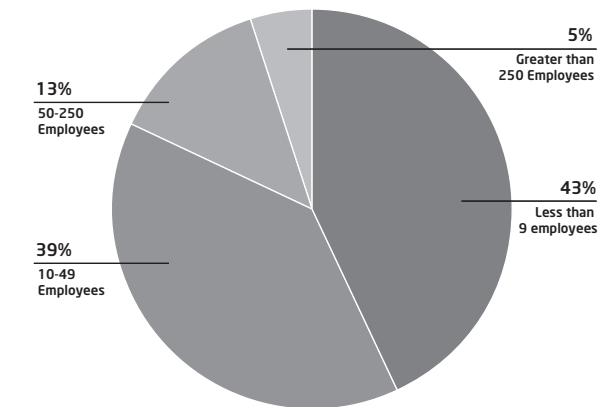
Individual companies can also act as promoters on behalf of the network members. Alternatively, network members can create companies (of which the network members are subscribers) in order to assume joint responsibility for the process.

In the Skillnets experience, often support agencies, advisors, trainers, or consultants have initiated the process and brought companies together to submit an application to Skillnets. Subsequently, in the operational phase of the project, the direct, legal and strategic ownership of the network is handed over to the enterprises themselves.

#### Network Companies

Network member companies span the full range of industry sectors and can be enterprises of any size. However, Skillnets places a specific priority on small companies which face particular challenges in accessing training due to their small scale and restricted resources. 83% of all companies participating in the previous Skillnet networks have employed less than 50 staff. However most networks formed to date have included a range of large, medium and small-scale companies.

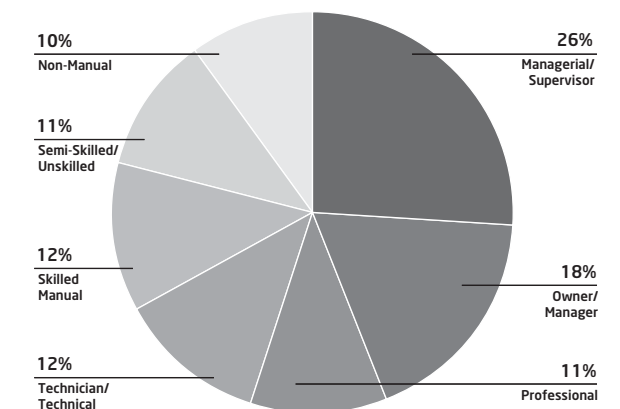
Figure 3: Size of Companies in Skillnet Networks 2004



#### Network Trainees

Enterprises can include any employee groups in network activities. Many networks have supported the development of management and supervisory skills; others have adopted support strategies for owner managers, and the development of marketing, sales, production and technical staff skills are common features of network plans.

Figure 4: Types of Employees in Skillnet Networks 2004



#### Network Structure

In each training network, enterprises form steering or management groups to oversee and direct the process. These groups, comprised of a representative group of enterprises in the network, meet on a regular basis to take management decisions on behalf of the network.

This process operates in different ways depending on the nature, size, membership profile and location of the network e.g. training needs analysis may be carried out by questionnaire, by a consultant being employed to talk to individual members and draw together feedback, by groups of companies meeting to discuss and debate needs, or by semi-structured seminars to identify individual and group needs.

## 2.4 Network Activities

The exact activities of the network are decided by the member companies. However, in general, the networks carry out the following tasks:

- > **Analyse** the training and development needs of member companies, identifying skills requirements and priorities for action.
- > **Identify** solutions and delivery mechanisms to meet those needs.
- > **Develop** network structures and processes to establish the operation of the network as a basis for specified training activity.
- > **Organise** the delivery and implementation of training measures.
- > **Promote** collaboration and co-operative activity, sharing of knowledge and the exchange of best practice.
- > **Monitor** and measure results, providing performance indicators and quality standards for training activity engaged in by firms.
- > **Provide** feedback to Skillnets on the progress, outcomes and impact of network training activities and processes.

Companies across 90 previous Training Networks found that training in the Network context was:

- > **More cost efficient** as they have better buying power, as well as Skillnets funding
- > **More relevant** as the companies can commission training that is suited exactly to member needs
- > **More flexible** as training is delivered at times that suit the company
- > **More accessible** as training is provided locally either near the company or at company sites
- > **More informed** as companies learn from and support one another in the process
- > **Better facilitated** as companies have full time management staff to organise Network training and other activities on their behalf
- > **More useful** to the companies as the training that is developed is directly aligned to the companies' needs and strategies
- > **More suited to enterprise needs** as companies themselves decide all aspects of the Networks strategy, plans and activities.
- > **More beneficial** as companies in the Network receive new information, share ideas, develop new relationships with their peers in other companies and tap into a wide range of business opportunities that arise from being part of an inter-firm Network.

## 2.5 Skillnet Networks

Skillnets has completed two Training Network Programmes to date. The first programme which ran from 1999-2001 involved the establishment of 57 networks with 2,300 companies and 12,800 employees. In the second programme (2002-2005), 56 are operating with 2,700 companies and 18,000 employees participating. Many networks from the first programme continued for a further 2 years, while a significant number of new networks were also formed.

A complete list of networks supported by Skillnets from 1999-2005 is provided in Figures 5 & 6.

**Figure 5: Skillnets Networks 1999-2002**

Further information about the networks listed below can be found at [www.skillnets.com](http://www.skillnets.com)

Network Name	Sector	Region
Bakers & Confectioners (FCBA) Skillnet	Food & Beverages	National
Build Services Skillnet	Building Services	South East
Carlow Kilkenny Skillnet	Mixed Sector	Carlow, Kilkenny
Ceramics Skillnet	Ceramics	National
Chamber Skillnet	Mixed Sector	National
Chambers Research Skillnet	Mixed Sector	National
Change Management Skillnet	Mixed Sector	National
CIF CON_ECT Skillnet	Construction	National
Clé Book Publishers Skillnet	Publishing	National
Clothing & Textiles (ICATA) Skillnet	Textile & Clothing	National
Coach Tourism Skillnet	Transport	National
Construction IT (CIF) Skillnet	Construction	National
Consumer Food Skillnet	Food & Beverages	National
Co-operative Societies (ICOS) Skillnet	Food & Beverages	National
Córas Gnó Skillnet	Mixed Sector	Donegal
County Waterford Micro Skillnet	Mixed Sector	Waterford
Craft Brewers Skillnet	Brewing	National
Craft Butchers Skillnet	Butchers	National
CREST Retail Skillnet	Wholesale & Retail	National
EB-ETI Skillnet	Mixed Sector	National
E-Business (FEII) Skillnet	Communications & Informatics	National
Engineering Design Skillnet	Engineering	Eastern
English Language Teachers (MEI/RELSA) Skillnet	Mixed Sector	National
Enterprise Partnership (SIPTU College) Skillnet	Mixed Sector	National
Fashion Industry Skillnet	Clothing	National
Fast Growth SME Skillnet	Mixed Sector	National
First Polymer Training Skillnet	Plastics	National
Food & Drink Federation Skillnet	Food & Beverage	National
Hotel Management Skillnet	Hotels & Tourism	National
IBEC Retail Skillnet	Wholesale & Retail	North West

**Figure 5: Skillnets Networks 1999-2002 (cont'd)**

Further information about the networks listed below can be found at [www.skillnets.com](http://www.skillnets.com)

Network Name	Sector	Region
International Freight (IIFA) Skillnet	Transport	Leinster
IT Industry HR Skillnet	IT	National
it@cork Skillnet	IT	Cork
Leinster Engineering & Technical (TEEU) Skillnet	Mixed	Leinster
Leisure & Amenity (ILAM) Skillnet	Leisure	National
Leitrim Good Food Skillnet	Food & Beverage	Leitrim
Medical Devices (IMDA) Skillnet	Medical Precision & Optical Equipment	National
MIDAS - Micro Electronic Design Skillnet	Micro Electronic Design	National
MUSTEL - Call Centre Skillnet	Call Centres	Cork
National Partnership Training Skillnet	Mixed Sector	National
New Product Introduction Research Skillnet	Food & Beverage	Cork
New Product Introduction Skillnet	Food & Beverage	Cork
North Mayo Skillnet	Manufacturing	Mayo
Pharmachem (IPCMF) Skillnet	Pharmaceutical & Chemical	National
Plato Skillnet	Small Business	National
Printers (IBEC) Skillnet	Printing	Cork
Refrigeration Technology Skillnet	Refrigeration	National
Restaurants Association Skillnet	Hotels & Restaurant	National
Security Employers Skillnet	Security	National
SLM Food & Beverage Skillnet	Food & Beverage	East & South
Small Business (SFA) Skillnet	Small Business	National
South East HR (IBEC) Skillnet	Mixed	South East
South East Micro Skillnet	Small Business	South East
South East Technology Training (SETTS) Skillnet	Mixed Sector	South East
South Kerry Food Producers Skillnet	Food & Beverage	Kerry
Supply Network Shannon (SNS) Skillnet	Manufacturing	Limerick
Wicklow & District Chamber Skillnet	Mixed Sector	Wicklow
Women in Business Skillnet	Mixed Sector	National

**Figure 6: Skillnets Networks 2002-2005**

Further details on each Skillnet can be obtained from specific network websites or the central Skillnets site at [www.skillnets.com](http://www.skillnets.com)

Network Name	Sector	Region	Website
Arrow Skillnet	Mixed	National	<a href="http://www.chambersireland.ie">www.chambersireland.ie</a>
Associated Food Producers (AFPS) Skillnet	Food & Beverage	National	<a href="http://www.craftbutchers.ie">www.craftbutchers.ie</a>
Bakers & Confectioners (FCBA) Skillnet	Food & Beverage	National	<a href="http://www.fcbaskillnet.ie">www.fcbaskillnet.ie</a>
BizWest Skillnet	Mixed Sector	West	<a href="http://www.bizwest.ie">www.bizwest.ie</a>
Border, Midlands, East (BME) Skillnet	Mixed Sector	Border, Midlands, East	<a href="http://www.bmetraining.com">www.bmetraining.com</a>
Brewing Skillnet	Brewing	National	
Carlow Kilkenny Training Skillnet	Mixed Sector	Carlow, Kilkenny	<a href="http://www.cktraining.ie">www.cktraining.ie</a>
CAT Net Skillnet	Construction	National	<a href="http://www.catnet.cif.ie">www.catnet.cif.ie</a>
Ceramnet Skillnet	Ceramics	National	<a href="http://www.ceramnet-ireland.com">www.ceramnet-ireland.com</a>
CIF West Skillnet	Construction	West	<a href="http://www.cifwestskillnet.ie">www.cifwestskillnet.ie</a>
Consumer Food SME Skillnet	Food & Beverage	National	
Craft Butchers Skillnet	Butchers	National	<a href="http://www.acbiskillnet.org">www.acbiskillnet.org</a>
CREST Skillnet	Retail	National	<a href="http://www.crestireland.com">www.crestireland.com</a>
Designers Training Skillnet	Design	National	<a href="http://www.designireland.ie">www.designireland.ie</a>
Digital Forum Skillnet	Digital Media	Dublin	<a href="http://www.digitalmediaforum.net">www.digitalmediaforum.net</a>
Enterprise Partnership (SIPTU College) Skillnet	Mixed Sector	National	
FICTA Skillnet	Services	National	
First Polymer Training Skillnet	Plastics	National	<a href="http://www.firstpolymer.com">www.firstpolymer.com</a>
Fresh Produce Skillnet	Food Production	Dublin & Mid East	
Galway Executive Skillnet	Small Business	Galway	<a href="http://www.galwayexecutiveskillnet.com">www.galwayexecutiveskillnet.com</a>
Gréasán na Méain Skillnet	Media	Connacht Gaeltacht	
Hospitality Management Skillnet	Hotels	National	<a href="http://www.ihci.ie">www.ihci.ie</a>
Hotbed Skillnet	Small Business	National	<a href="http://www.hotbedskillnet.com">www.hotbedskillnet.com</a>
HPI Skillnet	Mixed Sector	Dublin & Mid East	
IASC Skillnet	Seafood	National	<a href="http://www.iasc.ie">www.iasc.ie</a>
IBEC Retail Skillnet	Retail	National	
IIFA Skillnet	Agriculture	National	<a href="http://www.ifaskillnet.ie">www.ifaskillnet.ie</a>
IIFANet Skillnet	Transport/Logistics	Dublin & Mid East	<a href="http://www.iifa.ie">www.iifa.ie</a>
Irish Fashion Industry Federation (IFIF) Skillnet	Clothing	Dublin	
Institute of Packaging (IOP) Skillnet	Packaging	National	
Irish Software Association (ISA) Skillnet	Software	National	<a href="http://www.isaskillnet.net">www.isaskillnet.net</a>
ISME Owner Manager Skillnet	Small Business	National	<a href="http://www.isme.ie">www.isme.ie</a>
ITAG Skillnet	Technology	Galway	<a href="http://www.itag.ie">www.itag.ie</a>
Learning Waves Skillnet	Radio	National	<a href="http://www.learningwaves.ie">www.learningwaves.ie</a>

**Figure 6: Skillnets Networks 2002-2005 (cont'd)**

Further details on each Skillnet can be obtained from specific network websites or the central Skillnets site at [www.skillnets.com](http://www.skillnets.com)

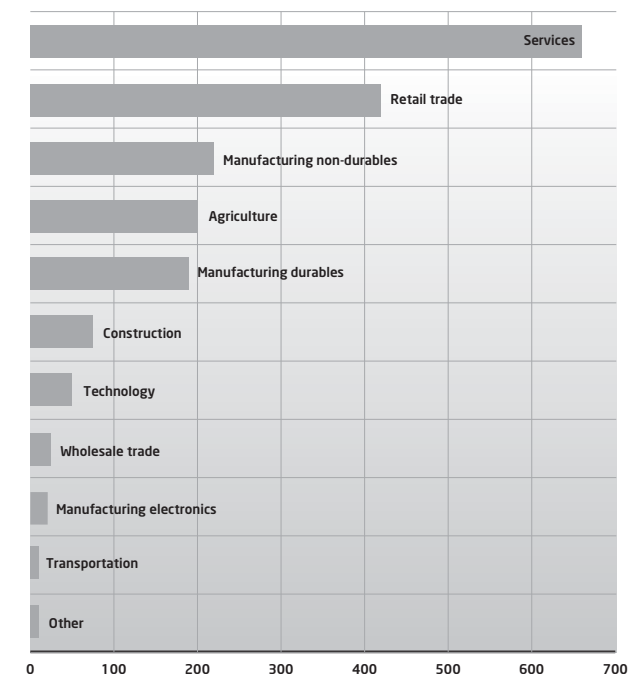
Network Name	Sector	Region	Website
Leisure & Amenity Skillnet	Leisure Sector	National	<a href="http://www.ilamireland.ie">www.ilamireland.ie</a>
Mallow Chamber Skillnet	Mixed Sector	South West	
Medical Devices (IMDA) Skillnet	Medical Devices	National	<a href="http://www.ibec.ie/imda">www.ibec.ie/imda</a>
MIDAS Skillnet	Micro-electronic Design	National	<a href="http://www.midasureland.com">www.midasureland.com</a>
National Engineering Training Skillnet (NETS)	Engineering	National	<a href="http://www.lets-skillnet.com">www.lets-skillnet.com</a>
National Partnership Training Skillnet	Mixed Sector	National	<a href="http://www.npts.info">www.npts.info</a>
North Mayo Skillnet	Mixed Sector	Mayo	<a href="http://www.northmayo.ie">www.northmayo.ie</a>
North West Regional Food Skillnet	Food & Beverage	North West	
Northside Business Skillnet	Mixed Sector	Dublin	<a href="http://www.nbsl.ie">www.nbsl.ie</a>
Plato Ireland Skillnet	Mixed Sector	National	<a href="http://www.plato.ie">www.plato.ie</a>
Refrigeration Technology Skillnet	Refrigeration	National	<a href="http://www.refrigerationskillnet.ie">www.refrigerationskillnet.ie</a>
Renewable Energy Skillnet	Construction	West	<a href="http://www.renewableenergy.ie">www.renewableenergy.ie</a>
SLM Food & Beverage Skillnet	Food & Beverage	National	<a href="http://www.slmskillnet.com">www.slmskillnet.com</a>
South East Micro Skillnet	Small Business	South East	
Southern Corridor Skillnet	Mixed Sector	South	<a href="http://www.southerncorridor.ie">www.southerncorridor.ie</a>
SRMD Skillnet	Mixed Sector	South West	<a href="http://www.corkchamber.ie">www.corkchamber.ie</a>
TsunaMat Skillnet	Mixed Sector	Mid West	<a href="http://www.tsunamat.com">www.tsunamat.com</a>
Waterford Chamber Skillnet	Mixed Sector	Waterford	<a href="http://www.waterfordchamber.ie">www.waterfordchamber.ie</a>
Western Credit Union Skillnet	Credit Unions	West	
Western Organic Network (WON) Skillnet	Agriculture	West	<a href="http://www.westernorganicnetwork.com">www.westernorganicnetwork.com</a>
Westmeath Manufacturing Skillnet	Manufacturing	Westmeath	

## 2.6 Network Types

### Networks for Sectors

A special feature of Skillnets has been the predominance of the sectoral approach to the formation and development of Training Networks. This was not a requirement imposed by Skillnets, but a trend that emerged from the companies themselves. Working together to meet common training needs with other firms from within the same sector makes good sense for a variety of reasons, but it has not always been easy for Irish companies to collaborate along these lines.

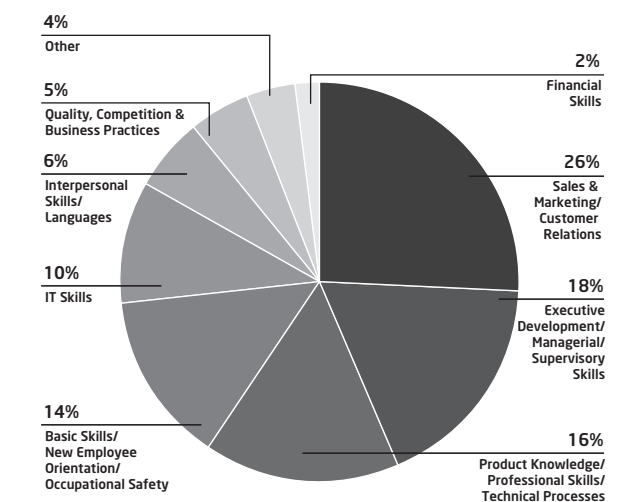
It is often assumed that firms are reluctant to work with their close competitors for fear of losing competitive advantage through sharing sensitive information and knowledge, and some companies are also concerned at the prospect of "staff poaching". However for the last 5 years sectoral networks have become the most popular form of networks chosen by enterprises. This positive experience of companies in the sector-based Skillnets so far augurs well for greater sector-based collaboration among firms across a wide range of functions in the future.

**Figure 7: Sectors of Companies in Skillnet Networks 2004**

### Networks for Small Business

83% of the participating companies in the Training Networks Programme are either small (less than 50) or micro (less than 10) enterprises. For many of these firms their involvement in Skillnets is their first significant involvement in training, and often it is their first time to be involved in making real and informed decisions about what training to provide. Training Networks can assist small firms to access training more easily, more quickly and more cost effectively.

This experience is helping to de-mystify training for small companies by developing practical tools to analyse and meet training needs, quickly, locally and effectively. An interesting feature is the collaboration in most networks between large and small firms and the active partnership between owner-managers and employees within the companies.

**Figure 8: Types of Training in Skillnet Networks 2004**

### Networks for Regions

The Skillnets concept of formalised networking is built on a strategy of achieving objectives through broad based alliances. Therefore the collaboration at network level is not only between network members but also between networks and other bodies who can add value, expertise or services to the network.

Creatively forging alliances is a feature of almost every Skillnet and this allows the networks to play an important role in expanding and focusing resources on skills development at regional level. Skillnets networks maximise the use of resources in a region, by creating a single point of contact for participating companies with potential training providers.

Because of the substantial numbers in the combined workforce, the network can attract high quality trainers from outside the region to bid for work and form a critical mass to enable training to be delivered where the firms are located. This gives firms in the network a position of strength in terms of purchasing power.

## Section 3 - Training Networks Programme 2005-2010

### 3.1 Programme Aim

The aim of the Training Networks Programme is to promote and support the development of Training Networks as a strategic response to existing and emerging competitive challenges facing enterprises, particularly SME's. Through the development of Training Networks, Skillnets aims to increase participation in enterprise training by firms to improve competitiveness and provide improved access for workers to skills development.

**The Skillnets vision is to improve learning activity in industry leading to enhanced skills, employability and competitiveness.**

The principles behind the programme include an enterprise-led, networked and partnership approach to the provision of enterprise training and expansion and development of that approach by supporting innovation and enhanced workplace learning.

The Training Networks Programme is focused on improving the level and quality of training and development activities in enterprises which already invest in training. It also aims to increase the level of training in enterprises and sectors where little training has taken place to date.

### 3.2 Programme Objectives

The objectives of the programme are as follows:

- > To mobilise groups of enterprises to develop **strategic answers** to their joint training needs through the establishment of Training Networks.
- > To promote the **active participation** in training and development by enterprises, especially small and medium-sized enterprises and those which have been less active in the area of training.
- > To facilitate an **enterprise-led option** to training and development at the level of the firm.
- > To address the **reluctance of individual enterprises to invest** in human resource development and training.

- > To encourage Irish enterprises to emulate the **best training practice** of competitor countries and to draw on the **experience of enterprises** - both Irish and foreign owned - which already have such practices in place.
- > To support the development of **flexible and effective methods** of delivering high quality and customised training solutions to firms and their staff.
- > To facilitate **new and innovative methods** of in-company training, enterprise training quality assurance, accreditation of new and prior learning, and strategic approaches to training and development.
- > To support **value-added** training initiatives which impact of the performance and competitiveness of companies and the adaptability and long term employability for people.
- > To address **gaps in current provision** and enable enterprises to **expand and access training options**, rather than duplicate existing activity.
- > To work with employer bodies and trade unions, training and education providers, awards bodies, support agencies, and policy groups to consider and address the **development of in-company training** in Ireland.

### 3.3 Strategic Framework 2005-2010

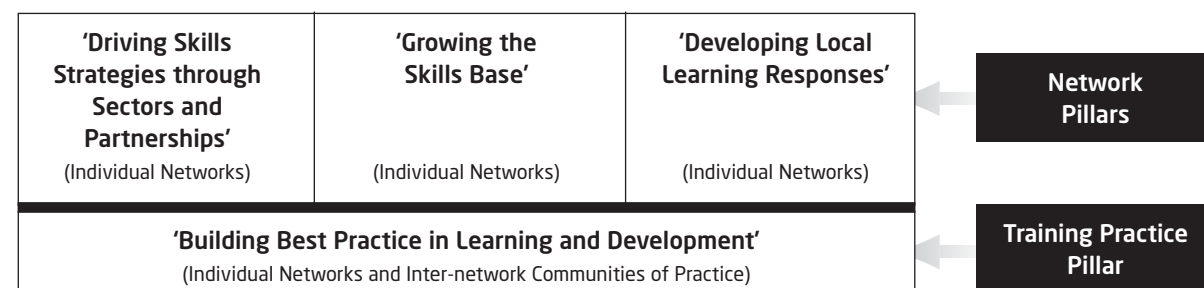
The Training Networks Programme approach 2005 - 2010 will continue the overall direction which has been successfully adopted by Skillnets since 1999. In the next 5 years this will be developed within a 4 pillar framework. This includes three network pillars which span the different types of networks that enterprises can establish. Underpinning all network types is a pillar which allows all networks to improve training processes and practice.

In implementing the new strategic framework, the allocation of funding under the Training Networks Programme 2005-2010 will:

- > Involve a **broadly based approach** and support the uptake of training in a range of sectors from those with high growth potential, to workers in vulnerable sectors.
- > Continue to place a special emphasis on the needs of **small and medium-sized companies**.

- > Seek to involve a **wide range of employees** including those which have had less access to training in the past.
- > Continue to **expand existing networks** as well as **support the development of new Training Networks**.
- > Support companies from **all regions** in Ireland, including those regions where there is a lower amount of local training provision.
- > Continue to **meet gaps in current provision** to ensure that insofar as possible all employee groups and firms can access training relevant to their specific needs.
- > Encourage the shared **participation of employers and employees** in approaches to skills development

Figure 9: Skillnets Strategic Framework



### 3.4 Programme Funding

Funding for Skillnets from the National Training Fund will be €8 million in 2006 and €10 million per annum thereafter. This will be made available to enterprise groups on the basis of competitive calls for proposals.

Applications will be invited in each of the three years 2005, 2006 and 2007, and funding commitments for up to 2 years will be made to approved Training Networks. All learning, skills development and networking activities are eligible for support under the Training Networks Programme.

### 3.5 Priority Areas

There are 4 main areas, or Pillars, which Skillnets will prioritise for the 2005 - 2010 period:

- > **Driving skills strategies through sectors and partnerships to encourage training participation at sector level.**
- > **Growing the skills base by giving workers access to lifelong learning opportunities.**
- > **Developing local learning responses to allow enterprises to develop training opportunities for employees at local level.**
- > **Building training and development methods in enterprises by continuously identifying and promoting best practice and quality in all aspects of the design, delivery, evaluation and dissemination of enterprise training.**

Groups of companies are invited to apply for funding under one of the three network pillars. In addition, all networks can also engage in activities to build best training practice by incorporating activities under pillar 4 in network plans.

### 3.6 Strategic Pillars

Each of the individual strategic pillars are expanded below.

#### Pillar 1: Driving Skills Strategies through Sectors and Partnerships

The primary focus of this pillar will be on enhancing skills and achieving best practice competence within industries and sectors. This pillar will support enterprises in any economic area to lead sector skills development. This may involve sector based partnerships for training between employees and the enterprises, enterprises and enterprises, and between enterprises and others engaged in the world of learning.

#### Pillar 2: Growing the Skills Base

The aim of this pillar is to foster the development of new and higher levels of knowledge, skills and competence across the workforce. This will support life-long learning for employees as well as increasing the competitiveness of companies in a rapidly changing and increasingly knowledge-based economy. This pillar will enable employees at all levels within enterprises to move 'One Step Up' to raising their skill and employability options. This Pillar will be guided by four themes:

#### Theme 1 - Increasing Adaptability of Workers to the Knowledge Economy

This theme will support companies and workers to implement training activity focused on helping workers to adapt to technological change and respond effectively to the challenges of the knowledge economy.

#### Theme 2 - Building Management Capacity in SME's

This theme will support training activity within networks of SME's and micro enterprises to develop the leadership, management and operational capacity of owner-managers and other key staff in the enterprises.

#### Theme 3 - Facilitating Access to Learning and Adaptability

This theme will support training networks focused on workers who have traditionally had less access to training or who may need the skills to adapt to a changing workplace. It may include employees with low basic skills, those at risk of becoming unemployed in areas of the economy encountering rapid change, workers in declining sectors, non-national employees, part-time workers, women workers, and older workers.

#### Theme 4 - Adopting Advanced Business Practices for Increased Productivity

This theme will support training networks to implement leadership and organisational development and change management programmes in enterprises and to develop related skills. Areas may include, for example, high performance work practices (team-working, gain sharing, communications etc), diversity/equality, computer integrated manufacturing (CIM), business awareness, sales and marketing, product development, cost reduction programmes etc. Any skills related to the development and adoption of advanced strategic, operational and management processes required to gain competitive advantage in the marketplace of the future will be supported.

#### **Pillar 3: Developing Local Learning Responses**

This Pillar will support training networks with a local or regional focus to implement training aimed at reducing the relative disadvantage in current provision at local level. This action will encourage the development of training networks to create dynamic, flexible systems in all regions of the country. It is expected that networks will form strategic links and partnerships with local training providers, educational establishments, and regional bodies to enable proximate and accessible support for workplace learning for enterprises.

#### **Pillar 4: Building Best Practice in Learning and Development**

Pillar 4 is a practice development strand which aims to develop, transfer and promote best training and development practice across enterprises engaged in Skillnets networks.

This Pillar will:

- > promote the increased up-take of training in enterprises;
- > support the introduction of techniques for companies to determine value and return on investment in training;
- > support benchmarking systems for companies to assess and improve training practice (such as Excellence Through People);
- > support methods of aligning training to business goals;
- > support capacity-building among in-company and external training providers;
- > provide support to networks seeking to create sector-relevant standards, modules or awards for independent certification and accreditation;
- > support the development of methods to support individual trainee development, career planning and lifelong learning
- > foster other areas of practice development within enterprise training.

### 4.1 General

Skillnets will support private enterprises in addressing individual and organisational learning needs. Such support to enterprises will be aimed at people in employment. Skillnets will co-fund enterprise training and networking or other learning activities which support and encourage participation in enterprise training.

Support for existing and new networks will be on the basis of open and competitive calls for proposals, combined with transparent and equitable assessment procedures. Skillnets will seek confirmation from promoters in receipt of grant support from Skillnets that training funded by Skillnets is either not currently available from public sources, or current provision does not meet the needs of the enterprise group.

Full proposals for Training Networks may be submitted to Skillnets in September 2005. This allows time for groups of companies to develop network plans and decide on the members, strategy and priorities for the Training Network. A number of support activities (as well as seed funding in the form of development grants) will be provided prior to September to allow promoters to explore ideas and fully develop comprehensive proposals.

### 4.2 Eligible Activities

The activities listed below are eligible for inclusion in Training Network proposals. The list is indicative rather than prescriptive. In principle, the delivery of any activity which provides learning, skills, knowledge development and networking between enterprises can be supported by the Training Networks Programme.

Eligible activities that may be carried out by Training Networks include:

- > The **engagement of network companies**
- > The **provision of staff**, office facilities and administration required for network activities
- > The **provision of accounting services** necessary to manage and administer network grants and network matching funds
- > The **analysis of training needs** of individuals, enterprises, sectors or regions

- > The **provision, development and customisation of training programmes** for managers and staff within enterprises
- > The **commissioning of trainers** to design, deliver and evaluate training for network members
- > The **engagement of industry and training and development experts** to assist in the development and carrying out of learning activities within the network
- > Best practice visits, case studies, networking events and **other inter-firm learning activities**
- > **Networking events** and activities including workshops, seminars and conferences
- > The provision of inter-firm mentoring, coaching and other knowledge transfer activities
- > The publication of **new training materials and information**
- > The **promotion of network training activities** and programmes
- > The **development and administration of certification** within the context of the National Qualifications Framework
- > The **development of methodologies, tools and materials** to support best training practice
- > **Surveys, studies and evaluations** of the impact of network activities of business performance and staff development
- > The **development of strategic partnerships** between enterprises, providers, industry bodies and certification awards bodies
- > The **development of training and development plans, processes and people** (decision makers, trainers and staff ) within enterprises to improve the internal capacity of firms to identify and meet training needs
- > The **development of processes at sector or regional level** to provide strategic support and direction for skills development to meet future market needs and competitive challenges.

### 4.3 Duration of Network Activities

Skillnets will fund Training Network plans for 2-year periods. After the completion of a 2 year network plan, the network can re-apply to Skillnets for further funding (subject to the overall availability of funds within the programme). This allows Training Networks to implement long-term development processes and achieve sustainable and strategic impact in their sector, region and enterprise membership.

### 4.4 Network Funding

Skillnets funds networks by co-investing with network member companies in the delivery of Training Network plans and activities. Under the Training Networks Programme, up to 75% of the costs of all eligible network activities (listed in section 4.2) will be provided for a sustained period. This allows enterprises to carry out a wide range of learning, development and networking activities to achieve a marked change in performance and skills.

The Training Network provides funds to match the Skillnets investment. The specific mix of funding between Skillnets and network members is decided on an individual network basis. Matching funds must be sourced from private sector contributions. In general, networks which have significant numbers of small companies (i.e. employing less than 50 staff) are more likely to attract higher levels co-financing from Skillnets.

Skillnets will work with networks who also are receiving grants or support from other funding agencies to jointly invest, with other bodies, in network plans and strategies. In addition, Skillnets will co-invest with funding organisations in other EU member states where networks are seeking to develop transnational learning activities (such as cross-border Training Networks).

### 4.5 Application Deadlines & Procedures for Network Approvals

Two key deadlines should be noted in 2005

1. **Deadline for applications for development grants - Friday, 22nd April 2005**
2. **Deadline for applications of full network proposals - Friday, 9th September 2005**

In order to ensure fair and equitable allocation of funds, deadlines are fixed for all applicants. No submissions can be considered unless they are submitted in the required format by the relevant deadline.

#### 2005 Procedures - New Networks

- > Information briefings: 9th March - 5th April
- > Applications for development grants: Deadline Friday 22nd April
- > Decisions issued on applications for development grants: By Monday 16th May
- > Registration with Skillnets of full network proposals under development: May/September
- > Seminar for new networks in development: 25th/26th May 2005
- > Thematic seminars for promoters: Dates posted on Skillnets website
- > Applications for full 2-year network proposals: Deadline Friday 9th September
- > Decisions issued on network proposals: By Wednesday 16th November
- > Contracting and payment approval: November/December
- > Networks commence: By January 2006

#### 2005 Procedures - Existing Networks

- > Registration with Skillnets of network proposals under development: April/September
- > Seminar for existing networks developing new proposals: May
- > Thematic seminars for promoters: Dates posted on Skillnets website
- > Applications for full 2-year network proposals: Deadline Friday 9th September
- > Decisions issued on network proposals: By Wednesday 16th November
- > Contracting and payment approval: November/December
- > Networks commence: By January 2006

### 4.6 Application Guidance and Network Development Support

**Information events:** A number of public information events will be hosted by Skillnets over the period March-April 2005. These will provide interested parties with information on the programme and future opportunities as well as enabling them to meet and talk to members of current Training Networks. We can also accommodate groups which are already coming together for workshops, seminars or conferences by providing information, presentations or other inputs on request.

**Development grants:** A 'development grant' provides seed funding for promoters seeking to develop full network proposals and make an application to Skillnets in September 2005. The 'development grant' is made available to support companies in meeting the resource needs of a network development process. This usually involves bringing companies together, identifying the Network objectives, developing the Network plan, investigating training needs and developing plans to meet these training needs.

**Application forms and criteria for network development grants** are available from the Skillnets office or can be downloaded from the Skillnets website.

The closing date for applications for development grants is Friday 22nd April, 2005.

#### Registration of Networks under Development.

Promoters can register at any time between March and September to notify Skillnets that they are in the process of developing a network proposal. All promoters of network proposals under development which have registered with Skillnets will be provided with ongoing information and support from the Skillnets office for the network development period March - September 2005. Promoters will also be able to access information on other networks under development that may be working in similar areas or offer opportunities for collaboration or synergies between networks.

Any of the following groups may register with Skillnets to have access to the full range of information and support in the network development phase:

- > Promoters and groups of enterprises have received development grants
- > Promoters and groups of enterprises which have not received development grants.
- > Existing Training Networks
- > Other existing Networks

It is important to note that full network applications submitted by any of the groups identified above, will be treated equally by Skillnets in the September application process, and will be assessed on a transparent and comparable basis. This is a competitive process and the highest quality proposals will be selected for funding. Therefore the approval of a development grant is not a guarantee of further funding from Skillnets.

**Network development workshops:** A number of development workshops will be hosted by Skillnets from April - August to assist network promoters in the development full network proposals. All details of development workshops will be posted on the Skillnets website. To attend workshops, promoters should register as a network under development. An initial 2-day introductory workshop will be held on 25th & 26th May 2005.

**Information and resources:** A list of resources for developing networks is listed at the back of this document. Further information will be published on the Skillnets website during 2005 to provide guidelines and other information which can assist promoters and enterprises in developing ideas, plans and costed proposals for submission to Skillnets in September.

**Individual support from Skillnets advisors:** Skillnets has a number of network advisors and staff that can assist enterprise groups in developing ideas and proposals. Advisors can be contacted by phoning the Skillnets office or sending an email request or query to [info@skillnets.com](mailto:info@skillnets.com).

**Peer support from existing Training Networks:** A number of existing networks have agreed to provide peer support to networks under development. In the past, peer support has been highly beneficial to networks under development. It provides an opportunity for new networks to examine directly how other networks work, talk to the companies involved in the network, identify pros and cons of different network models and processes and learn from the experience of other enterprises. It is also an invaluable tool in the recruitment of members for new networks, as many companies involved in Training Networks are willing to talk to other groups of enterprises about the benefits of the process.

#### 4.7 Submission of full network proposals

**The deadline for submission of full network proposals is Friday 9th September, 2005.**

Deadlines for network applications in subsequent years will be posted on the Skillnets website.

Proposals can be submitted online through the Skillnets website at [www.skillnets.com](http://www.skillnets.com). This will allow applicants to track the progress of their full network proposal through the assessment process, and for successful promoters it will allow ongoing tracking of contracts, payments and reports. Alternatively applicants can download application forms from the Skillnets website or request the documents by post from the Skillnets office.

All applicants - including those applying online - must submit paper copies of their proposals to the Skillnets office. These must be signed by an authorised representative of the applicant organisation and must be received by the Skillnets office on or before the stated application deadline. It is the sole responsibility of promoters to ensure that hard copy applications are received by the deadline date. No failure of postal, courier or other transportation services will be considered as a reason to make an exception to these conditions. Receipt acknowledgements will be issued by Skillnets to confirm that applications have been submitted on time and will proceed for assessment.

Promoters should consult the Skillnets website for full details of all eligibility criteria and application forms. Ineligible proposals will not be submitted for assessment. Applicants must ensure that they read and understand all documentation and guidelines issued by Skillnets. These will be sent to all networks under development which have registered with Skillnets. All necessary information will also be available on the Skillnets website.

Any questions or queries on information issued by Skillnets or further clarification or additional information that is required by promoters can be forwarded to the Skillnets office. Responses and clarifications on eligibility or application requirements will be posted on the Skillnets website.

#### 4.8 2005 Assessment and Selection of Applications

All full network proposals submitted to Skillnets by the application deadline will be assessed against structured criteria. Assessments of each eligible application are conducted by two independent evaluators and final decisions on allocations of funding are made by the Skillnets Board. The key objectives of the Skillnets strategy 2005-2010 will guide the selection of network proposals to be funded.

A sub-committee of the Skillnets Board oversees the assessment process to ensure that fair, transparent and equitable consideration of all applications received is applied throughout the process. Overall assessment criteria are outlined below.

##### General Criteria guiding the assessment of Training Network Applications

- > Enterprise-led Approaches
- > Collaboration and Networking
- > Needs Driven Plans
- > Business and Employee Impact
- > Small Company Focus
- > Innovation & Partnership
- > Additionality rather than Duplication
- > Contribution of Matching Funds
- > Operational Effectiveness
- > Key Outputs and Value for Money
- > Best Training Practice

#### 4.9 Contracts and Payments

Skillnets can only enter into a contract with promoters fulfilling the following minimum conditions:

- > Promoters must be a recognised legal entity to allow a contract to be issued
- > Promoters providing a current Tax Clearance Certificate

- > Promoters that are businesses, an organisation whose membership is comprised of businesses, or an organisation representing enterprise stakeholders
- > Promoters who have been issued 'letters of offer' by Skillnets and have adequately fulfilled any conditions of funding set by Skillnets
- > Promoters who have structures in place to allow enterprises to take full ownership of network processes and make decisions in relation to the network processes and activities.

Payments are made on a phased basis and networks are provided with a schedule of payments on the commencement of the network. In general, payments are issued in advance of activities, to allow networks immediate access to the funds they require to deliver plans. In general, when a network has spent 80% of a previous payment, a further payment will be issued to the network.

Payments are made by interbank transfer to a dedicated account established by the Training Network. Payments may be associated with reports on network activities and key performance indicators.

Skillnets has developed a web-based system called 'Smartnet' which allows networks to easily track and manage all financial and other information associated with network activities. The 'Smartnet system' also allows for automatic requests and processing of network payments.

#### 4.10 Future Opportunities to apply for funding

This document related specifically to applications for Training Networks in 2005. There will be further opportunities for enterprises to apply for funding support under annual Calls for Proposals in 2006 and 2007. Each Call for Proposals will be open to both new and existing networks. If applicants are not successful under the 2005 Call for Proposals, they may reapply to Skillnets in subsequent years.

## Further Information

### 5. Further Information

A list of resources is provided at the back of this document. Further resources, application forms, guidelines and other information as they are issued will be posted on the Skillnets website. All registered networks under development will be directly notified of information as it is issued.

A Frequently Asked Questions section will be provided on the Skillnets website to provide promoters with answers to queries that have been submitted to Skillnets.

Skillnets will also respond to suggestions for additional information or seminars. We welcome any ideas on how Skillnets can assist developing networks or other interested parties.

**Skillnets phone number: 01-2079630**

**Email queries to [info@skillnets.com](mailto:info@skillnets.com)**

**Website [www.skillnets.com](http://www.skillnets.com)**

# Resources Available for Networks



Skillnets has a variety of resources available to assist new networks to take advantage of the programme. These are available for download at the Skillnets website [www.skillnets.com](http://www.skillnets.com)

## **The Skillnets Story**

A DVD which tells how Skillnets works, from the experience of participating companies and networks.

## **Skillnets Network Profiles & Directory 2002-2005**

The stories of the existing training networks that have come together to address their competitive skills needs through the application of an enterprise-led training model.

## **Skillnets Network Series**

This is a series of guides for enterprises covering the following: Why Networks, Network Formation, Network Management, Problem Solving, Barriers to Participation, Network Success Factors, SMEs and HR Development, and Information Technology.

## **Selecting The Right Trainer**

A comprehensive guide to all aspects of selecting, contracting, monitoring and managing external trainers.

## **Training Courses and Programmes**

Information on training products and materials already developed by existing Skillnets Networks.

## **Case Studies**

A selection of best practice case studies of networks developed under the first round of the Training Networks Programme.

## **Measuring Return on Investment**

A Handbook of tools and job aids to help you evaluate training programmes up to the level of analysing return on investment.

## **Guidelines and Application Form for Development Grants**

Information on how companies can apply for funding to develop Training Networks. Development grant applications to be submitted by Friday, 22nd April 2005.

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