Press release

11,000 free or heavily subsidised college courses announced for unemployed, self-employed or returners to work

From Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (/en/organisation/department-of-higher-education-innovation-and-science/)
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Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Simon Harris and Minister of State for Skills and Further Education Niall Collins have today (Monday, 5 June) launched more than 11,000 free or subsidised places on college courses.

The courses are in areas that have been identified as of critical importance such as Cybersecurity, Virtual Reality, Health Innovation, Logistics and Online Retail.

Programmes in Climate, Sustainability and Energy which are central to the Programme for Government are also being funded.

Courses are free for the unemployed, previously self-employed and returners to the workforce.

For others, 90 per cent of the course fee is funded by the government, with participants required to contribute just 10 per cent of the fee.

Speaking today, Minister Harris said:

"This is providing brilliant opportunities for people to upskill and reskill in areas of skills shortages, futureproof their career, and progress in, or re-enter the workforce.

"Most programmes are delivered either fully online or in a blended format making them fully accessible, meeting the rapidly-evolving needs of our economy and our commitment to lifelong learning.

"Today's announcement help us to ensure that our workforce is equipped to respond to the rapid changes in the world of work brought about by digitisation, with courses spanning areas such as Artificial Intelligence, Cybersecurity and Financial Technologies.

"They will also play a vital role in our response to the green transition by providing funding for programmes in areas such as Climate, Sustainability and Renewable Energy which will provide the skills needed to help us reach our ambitious 2030 targets for energy efficiency and decarbonisation.

"In this, the European Year of Skills, it is vital that we all consider the opportunity to learn a new skill. Skills and continuous learning are vital for enabling individuals and countries to thrive in an increasingly, interconnected and rapidly changing world."

The 11,000 courses consist of 8,291 places on 252 courses under Springboard+ 2023 and 2,922 places on 105 courses under Human Capital Initiative Pillar 1 Graduate Conversion Programmes for the academic year 2023/24.

This leads to a combined total of 11,213 places on 357 courses across Springboard+ 2023 and HCI Pillar 1 to be delivered by public and private higher education providers around the country.

Minister Collins said:

"Springboard+ and HCI Pillar 1 are government initiatives – managed by the Higher Education Authority on behalf of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science– that provide free and subsidised courses for people who are unemployed, returning to work, or those who would like to upskill or reskill in areas of skills shortages and emerging technologies.

"Funding is allocated to Springboard+ from the National Training Fund (NTF) on an annual basis. Now entering its thirteenth year, over 100,000 people have benefitted from the Springboard+ programme to date."

Alan Wall, Chief Executive Officer of the HEA, said:

"2023 marks the European Year of Skills, where stakeholders across Europe will work together to promote investment in training and upskillng.

"In this important year, the HEA and the Higher Education providers are delighted to offer courses that will put reskilling and upskilling centre-stage.

"The subsidised nature of Springboard+ and HCI Pillar 1 programmes means that the funded courses are accessible to a diverse group of people across the economy. The programmes on offer will appeal to those looking to obtain new skills to get back into the workforce, as well as those seeking to develop their skillset as our economy grows."

Notes

Helpline – 1800 303 523

The Springboard+ system will open for course applications on Wednesday 7 June.

Experienced guidance counsellors will be available to advise potential Springboard+ and HCI Pillar 1 participants on their options on the freephone Springboard+ helpline, which will go live in mid-June.

Candidates who wish to participate in Springboard+ 2023 or HCI Pillar 1 courses will find full details on the approved courses on the Springboard+ website. (https://springboardcourses.ie/) Applications are now open.

Background to Springboard+

Springboard+, which is managed by the Higher Education Authority on behalf of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and complements the core State-funded education and training system and provides free and heavily subsidised upskilling and reskilling higher education opportunities in areas of identified skills need.

Springboard+ courses are at Level 6 (Certificate) to Level 9 (Masters) on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and are delivered by public and private higher education providers around the country. Courses are not all a full award at each level – they may also be minor awards or special purposes awards. All courses provide job-readiness training and most offer the opportunity for work placement, project-based learning or industry site visits where appropriate.

All courses approved for funding under Springboard+ are selected following a competitive tendering process, with multi-annual funding arrangements in place. In particular, courses with a proven track record in getting people back into employment are recommended for funding. The majority of courses approved under Springboard+ 2023 will start later in 2023 and in early 2024.

Human Capital Initiative Pillar 1 – Graduate Conversion Courses

The Human Capital Initiative (HCI) was announced as part of Budget 2019. The initiative provides additional capacity across the Higher Education Sector to meet priority skill needs for enterprise. Graduate Conversion Programmes under HCI Pillar 1 offer

incentivised places for graduates to reskill in areas of skills shortage and emerging technologies. These are being run alongside, and complementary to, the Springboard+ offerings.

These courses are one year, full time conversion and part-time courses at Levels 7-9, in areas of identified skills need, building on experience of the ICT Conversion Courses under Springboard+. To date, HCI Pillar 1 has provided 7,288 graduate conversion places on 95 courses over a 3-year period.

Under HCI Pillar 1 2023 a call for proposals was published to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in January 2023. The deadline for submissions was February 2023.

Full details on Springboard+ and HCI Pillar 1 courses, the eligibility criteria and how to apply can be found on the Springboard+ website. (https://springboardcourses.ie/)

About the European Year of Skills

The European Year of Skills 2023 aims to give a fresh impetus to lifelong learning, empowering people and companies to contribute to the green and digital transitions, supporting innovation and competitiveness.

Having a workforce with the skills that are in demand contributes to sustainable growth, leads to more innovation and improves companies' competitiveness. The European Year of Skills will help companies, in particular small and medium enterprises, to address skills shortages in the EU.

The EU Year of Skills will promote a mindset of reskilling and upskilling, helping people to get the right skills for quality jobs.

For more information, visit the European Year of Skills website. (https://year-of-skills.europa.eu/index_en)

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