

Circular Skills to Pay the Bills - The EU Circular Economy Package



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Ireland produces 14 million tonnes of waste every year according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), a little over 3 million tonnes of this is the waste most of us are familiar with - that which goes into our black, green and brown bins. Although Ireland has made great strides in recycling materials such as packaging, with approximately 60% of that being recycled annually, Ireland is still not close to where it needs to be.

Ireland needs to produce less waste, and the waste has to be reused as much as possible before it inevitably heads into landfill or is incinerated for use in energy production.

A large proportion of Ireland's waste legislation springs from our membership of the European Union. The EU Circular Economy package of measures is designed to ensure that once raw materials have entered our economy, they are kept in circulation for as long as possible, rather than being disposed of after one use.

Building a truly circular economy, where products are designed for ease of repair and upgrade and built to last, made from reclaimed or recycled materials, is a work in progress; however, it offers boundless opportunities for firms willing to enter the sector in the coming years.

There is also a huge upside in potential new job creation in the Circular Economy, with the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment having announced, in April 2026, *‘€29 million in funding to support projects across Ireland that will help communities reduce waste, reuse more, and build a more sustainable local economy.*

The funding, provided through the Circular Economy Fund, will support initiatives in every region of the country — from community repair hubs and reuse centres to innovative business projects that cut waste and make better use of materials. This means more opportunities for people to repair items instead of throwing them away, more affordable second-hand goods, and more local jobs in areas such as repair, refurbishment, and sustainable manufacturing.’¹

An issue the economy is already encountering is that there currently isn't sufficient training and education resources available, across all sectors, to meet the needs of the transition.

CIRCULÉIRE, Ireland's Circular Innovation Network (led by Irish Manufacturing Research and funded

¹ Minister Alan Dillon announces €29 million to support local jobs, reduce waste, and help communities reuse and repair



by DCEE) recently published the report ‘Circular Skills Insights (2025)’ and noted that there is some distance between what leadership wants to do and what is operationally possible due to skills gaps. The lack of candidates with sustainability and circular skills needs to be treated as a transformation challenge; Ireland has too few for its current goals, a position which will worsen as transitioning to a

vibrant sustainability sector becomes a ‘need to have’, rather than a ‘nice to have’.

Leaving aside the more technical skills in manufacturing, design and engineering, the CIRCULÉIRE report identified ten non-technical skills which need to be developed within our workforce:

Skills Category	Related Skills/Activities
Adaptability & Problem Solving.	Spotting opportunities, advancing dynamic capabilities, agility, pivoting business models.
Purpose-driven and mission-oriented Ideological alignment.	Ethical decision-making, core value integration.
Strategic Foresight & Innovation.	Business model innovation, spotting future trends.
Systems Thinking.	Multidisciplinary, and complexity-handling skills.
Change Management & Leadership.	Driving internal buy-in, overcoming institutional inertia.
Collaboration & Networking.	Value chain collaboration, industrial symbiosis, B2B matchmaking.
Cross-functional Working.	Breaking silos, inter departmental synergies.
Knowledge Management.	Capturing, storing, and transferring CE learnings.
Communication & Storytelling.	Pitching, marketing circular value, internal advocacy.
Customer Engagement & Education.	Changing consumer habits, stakeholder education.

None of the categories or activities listed above are sector specific and all are extremely useful both inside and outside the sustainability realm.

What are the constraints preventing firms obtaining these skills? The answer is that although firms know they need the skills, funding the training and education programmes is challenging, or the training and education programmes may not even exist.

65% of firms surveyed identified a need for additional skills compared to only 35% currently implementing learning amongst their staff to professionally develop them to a place where they could internally resolve the identified skill gaps.

For a lot of firms, sustainable economic activity isn’t at a stage yet where a dedicated resource (such as a Sustainability Officer) makes sense from a cost perspective as such a person would need to bring enough value to the business to justify the expense. There’s scope in many enterprises to make this job part of an employee’s other duties. The challenge

is finding the person with the correct background and knowledge to take on an element of dual responsibility.

Presently, the Circular Economy sector evidences a lack of capability in financial modelling, value proposition development, and market creation as well as difficulties in stakeholder alignment, behavioural change, and embedding the circularity and sustainability trend into governance and decision-making structures. No single person can possibly handle all those roles, but a small group could handle all those elements across their wider responsibilities: a business just needs to support them to improve their capabilities.

Addressing the skills gap requires:

- Building up hybrid talent (people within the organisation who can ‘wear two hats’), to cover sustainability while also working in other necessary roles,
- Stronger cross-functional working, where individuals from across different departments



come together as part of a team to deliver on clear, focused projects,

- Workforce development needs to be aligned to the organisation's needs. Management need to identify what skills, knowledge and resources they're lacking and incentivise staff to upskill while putting in place strong career pathways for the staff who step up.
- Industry bodies and educational institutions also need to cooperate to put in place recognised qualifications and skills development programmes to support the growing number of roles which need to be filled.

The Compliance Institute, in collaboration with the IOB, has offered a Professional Diploma in Sustainable Finance for Governance, Risk and Compliance Professionals. That course was aimed at addressing some of the talent gaps identified previously, reinforced by the CIRCULÉIRE report, and discussed in this article. There may be scope to expand that course in the future, to include areas such as leadership, collaboration, ethical decision-making and knowledge management.

The IOB is also currently taking applications for a Professional Diploma in ESG and Sustainable Finance Leadership, commencing October 2026, which will cover topics such as formulating and

implementing an ESG strategy and sustainability risk management.

References.

Circular Economy - Environment - European Commission

Minister Alan Dillon announces €29 million to support local jobs, reduce waste, and help communities reuse and repair

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