



Energy for generations

CIPD People Development Partner



## CIPD and ESB - Sparking a journey of professionalisation

‘ESB is delighted to be the first company in Ireland to be recognised as a CIPD People Development Partner. This is an endorsement of the professional standards of our HR function and more importantly, our practice of putting people front and centre of everything we do.’ Pat Naughton, ESB Executive Director, People and Organisation Development.

Ireland’s premier energy provider ESB has been in existence since 1927 and remains majority owned by the Irish government. It has a workforce of 7,900 people, of which around 200 are HR professionals, and operates across the electricity markets in Ireland and the UK, from generation and distribution through to supplying power to businesses and households.

Although today it faces stiff competition, ESB is a byword for electricity supply. Irish consumers commonly refer to their electricity bills as ESB bills, even if they are with a rival supplier.



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**#CIPDPeopleDevPartner**

### Solution

ESB has had a longstanding relationship with CIPD in Ireland, contributing to research, offering opinion and providing representation on the national committee. It has also hosted CIPD meetings and made a significant contribution to events.



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‘I really believe what this partnership gives is a win-win for the CIPD and ESB in terms of future development and professionalisation of the HR function.’

**Orla Maher, ESB HR Capability Manager**

**#CIPDPeopleDevPartner**

‘We do believe in that “giving back” aspect of partnership,’ says Orla Maher, ESB HR Capability Manager. ‘Because CIPD are the professional body for HR, they are the organisation we look to for guidance and support – and for a standard of professionalism that we aim to adhere to.’

Orla describes People Development Partner (PDP) status as ‘a perfect marriage’ that has benefited from great timing. ESB was in the midst of launching a new People strategy when PDP came onto the HR function’s radar. Aligning the strategy with PDP standards has allowed ESB to speed up the HR function’s ‘journey of professionalisation’.

A key aspect of this is close alignment of HR and Learning & Development practices with CIPD’s new Profession Map. While ESB has its own career and competencies framework, the HR team has in recent years made sure that competencies and people-focused learning programmes are in harmony with CIPD standards.

Another example is ESB's HR Business Partner learning and development programme, facilitated in-house by CIPD. An important plank of the programme is a quarterly Business Partner Forum designed to ensure people share ideas and learn from one another.

'Because we are a diverse, geographically dispersed organisation, it's great to be able to bring the business partner community together on a regular basis,' says Orla. 'We have had great feedback internally'.

The emphasis ESB places on learning is underlined by the fact that it is a recognised CIPD study centre – the only employer-led qualification centre in Ireland accorded this status. For over 20 years it has run a highly regarded HR for Line Managers programme and is also noted for its apprenticeship scheme for network technicians, which at any one-time numbers several hundred participants.



## Outcome

Orla says ESB has 'completed quite a number of steps' on its professionalisation journey over the past couple of years. But there are further opportunities yet to be realised.

'We have agreed next steps and we want to do that in partnership with the CIPD. We want to do things like supporting our senior leaders and other HR professionals to attain or upgrade their chartered membership status. And we want to explore opportunities for aligning other programmes that we have.'

An existing, comprehensive competency-based HR graduate programme which the HR function is very proud of may well fit the bill and the aim is for it to be aligned in some way with chartership. There are also plans to make use of the CIPD's practitioner assessment tool to 'identify if we are as good as we think we are in HR' through objective measurement with respect to services and standards.



ESB has also run a programme that brought together HR professionals involved in learning and change management as it considers these to be opposite sides of the same coin. Again, the aim here was to foster greater collaboration and understanding to help the community design better business appropriate solutions. In our competitive environment, it is critical that our HR professionals can assist the Business to respond with agility and creativity.

Additionally, ESB's mentoring programme has been revamped and is now accredited by the European Mentoring and Coaching Council. 'We are constantly looking to benchmark ourselves externally where we can.' Explains Orla.

As the partnership comes to full fruition, the intention is to analyse the CIPD membership profile within HR's ranks with a view encouraging more colleagues to pursue the Experience Assessment route to qualification. Moreover, ESB intends to shine a light on other potential opportunities arising out of the PDP relationship.

And what better business can there be for shining a light than a widely admired electricity supplier?