

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment,  
23 Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2,  
D02 TD30.

Friday, April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2025

To whom it may concern,

Cork Chamber welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the public consultation on the development of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment's statement of strategy for 2025 to 2028.

Cork Chamber represents 1,200 members together employing 130,000 people throughout the city, metropolitan area and county. Our vision is to lead a transforming and ambitious Cork City and County, uniting, representing and supporting our members and community. Our direction is guided by our formal pledge to uphold the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). Cork Chamber has also been designated an SDG Champion by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications for 2024-25.

Cork Chamber's advocacy efforts are guided by the views and priorities of our partners, and are shaped by our continuous engagement with members, our board and key stakeholders in Cork City and County. Cork Chamber is deeply committed to sustainability, embedding it within all our activities and initiatives.

The formation of this new strategy comes at a time of increased uncertainty on a global scale, impacting all businesses and operators, from SMEs to the largest enterprises. The threat and impact of tariffs on trade emphasises the need for contingencies and support at all levels. Ireland's economy is in a strong position and it is essential that the department's strategy is structured in a manner to ensure that we retain this strength and continue to develop to meet ambitious growth targets as mapped out in government strategies, such as the National Planning Framework and National Development Plan.

Furthermore, the need to develop and implement green policies, adapting and preparing for climate change and its impacts, is also a challenge for businesses and this must be at the heart of any strategy for the coming years. This new strategy will be guided by the goals of the Climate Action Plan and it is imperative that the department keeps these targets at the heart of all steps if Ireland is to have any chance of meeting its climate goals.

In addition, it is noted that since the publication of the department's last strategy and the development of this new one, its remit has been widened to incorporate the crucially important tourism industry, which employs more than 200,000 people in all corners of Ireland.

The strategy must provide a framework within which the tourism sector can thrive and expand to ensure Ireland can continue to meet the needs of domestic and international visitors alike.

## **Sustain full employment and strong regional economic development**

The Programme for Government<sup>1</sup> identifies that developing Ireland's enterprise base will remain a key focus over the next five years. This includes backing the development of small businesses and start-ups, as well as supporting and scaling up indigenous firms, and ensuring that we continue to attract foreign direct investment on a wide scale.

It places an emphasis on enhancing competitiveness, productivity and innovation to deliver a strong and stable economy and it is welcome that the department is working towards this end. There are numerous targets outlined in the Programme for Government that can be implemented as a matter of urgency which will help to sustain full employment and develop regionally, from reducing the bureaucratic burden on businesses to publishing the planned Action Plan for Competitiveness and Productivity.

Implementing targeted approaches in key sectors, such as pharmaceuticals, ICT, AI, financial services, and agri-food as identified in the Programme for Government, will be a key component of the strategy to grow the economy, and it is also welcome that the programme notes the need to develop new strategies on growth areas, such as semiconductors. Ireland's economy must remain agile, in particular in the face of global economic uncertainty.

To maintain our level of competitiveness, it is essential to improve our infrastructure and invest in key utilities, including water, wastewater and the energy grid, which will facilitate the development of housing and industrial and commercial facilities. We have already seen shortages in some of these areas and it is crucial that we move quickly to rectify these and to prepare for further increases in demand in the coming years.

The Programme for Government identifies a target of creating 300,000 new jobs by 2030, supported by strategic investments and supportive enterprise policies and it is key that the department's new strategy supports this aim in every possible way.

This should also extend to working with other departments in areas such as research and development. Targeted supports, including grants to higher education institutions, are needed to ensure Ireland remains at the cutting edge in a number of industries and identifies opportunities in new ones too.

The department's new strategy should also include increased supports for key domestic industries like tourism, which is now directly within the department's remit. More than 226,000 people are directly employed in the tourism sector in Ireland and it remains a key aspect of the country's economy and social offering, with recent research from the Irish Tourism Industry Confederation (ITIC) valuing the sector at more than €10bn annually.<sup>2</sup>

We cannot be complacent when it comes to supporting and sustaining the tourism sector. Ireland remains expensive when compared to many other nations and it is essential that steps

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<sup>1</sup> Programme for Government; <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-the-taoiseach/publications/programme-for-government-2025-securing-irelands-future/>

<sup>2</sup> Irish Tourism Industry Confederation; [https://www.itic.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Press-Release-Tourism-Perfect-Storm\\_25Sep2024.pdf](https://www.itic.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Press-Release-Tourism-Perfect-Storm_25Sep2024.pdf)

are taken to ensure that Irish tourism businesses, hospitality enterprises, and other related actors are all given support to remain competitive.

To that end, the department must ensure that the Programme for Government commitments for the tourism sector are implemented without delay, and it is essential that a long-term strategy for the maintenance and development of the sector is published as a matter of urgency to ensure the sector can develop to its full potential.

There are also opportunities to share knowledge between regions for a wider economic boost and the department should look to facilitate these exercises. Cork Chamber has cooperated with Dublin and Northern Ireland Chambers to foster deeper cooperation and connectivity across the island of Ireland.<sup>3</sup> This relationship has shown the potential to advance a more integrated approach to economic development, harnessing the strengths of each region and creating shared prosperity.

Such collaborations should be promoted and championed by the department as part of its new strategy to ensure that regional expertise is shared and opportunities created.

### **Advance the low carbon and digital transformations to ensure the competitiveness and sustainability of Irish-based enterprise**

Cork has been designated an EU mission city for climate neutrality to 2030 and Cork Chamber's advocacy is guided by our pledge to uphold the UN SDGs. While Cork, its citizens, community groups and businesses already embody many of the qualities that define a sustainable city, it is essential that low carbon initiatives are prioritised by the department in the coming years if Ireland is to have any chance of achieving its climate targets.

Significant funding will be needed from central government to ensure that Cork can complete the transition to climate neutrality by 2030 and the department is going to play a central role in driving sustainable regional growth and fostering economic resilience by supporting domestic industries to innovation and transition to sustainable practices. Enterprises will need to take decisive and sometimes challenging and difficult decisions to adapt to climate change and the department must support them to do so.

This will involve digital transformations in some cases, but it will also involve training, grants and other supports that will allow existing businesses to make steps towards greener operations, reduce energy consumption, and implement sustainable practices.

In its draft strategy, the department notes that the pressure on Irish SMEs and small enterprises in particular in responding to green and digital transformations is challenging, and it is important to support these businesses in whatever way is possible, including supporting innovation and decarbonisation.

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<sup>3</sup> Cork Chamber; <https://chamber.corkchamber.ie/news/details/chambers-spearhead-all-island-connectivity-and-economic-growth>

The department should also invest in the expansion of the provision of upskilling grants for SMEs, enabling small businesses to support continued workforce development, particularly at regional level where further training may be less accessible.

The White Paper on Enterprise 2022-2030<sup>4</sup> establishes the importance of transitioning to a low carbon, sustainable economic model to meet our emissions targets and to seize the economic opportunities presented by a green economy. It aims to put Ireland at the forefront of green policies and to establish the country as a leading green economy and this stance must be used to inform the development of a new strategy for the department.

The digital transformation needs to be at the heart of the plan, too, in particular as AI becomes more commonplace at all levels of society. Large tech and ICT companies are preparing for this step-change and this will soon filter down to everyday business and daily use. For Ireland to even keep pace with this next generation industrial revolution, we need access to more energy for the extraordinary increase in power that this will entail. Therefore, we need to increase grid capacity and Ireland's capability to create and store extraordinary amounts of energy, including in the offshore renewable, biofuel and green hydrogen sectors.

In the meantime, before these are developed, the department must work across government and with key industry players to find creative ways of building in resilience into our existing infrastructure to ensure that we can sustain and support existing operations and prepare for new developments, including the data centres which will become more and more important in the coming years, without undermining the stability of the existing grid.

### **Deepen and extend Ireland's global business and trade**

In the current climate of trade tariffs and global instability, it has never been more important for the department to implement supports and a framework within which businesses can operate on a global scale. In Cork Chamber's most recent quarterly economic trends survey, published in March, more than 80% of respondents said they were very concerned or somewhat concerned about the impact of geopolitical developments on their ability to trade internationally in the coming year.<sup>5</sup>

A key aspect of this is Ireland's impressive research and development sector and the department needs to take steps to deepen the relationship between our R&D institutions and SMEs to drive innovation.

This may require collaboration across a number of departments, including the Department of Further & Higher Education and Research, but has the potential to yield significant benefits.

As an island nation, Ireland is somewhat at the whims of global trends when it comes to the economy. However, the department is operating from a position of strength when it comes to our

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<sup>4</sup> White Paper on Enterprise 2022-2030, <https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/publications/white-paper-on-enterprise-2022-2030.html>

<sup>5</sup> Cork Chamber Q1 2025 Economic Trends Survey; <https://www.corkchamber.ie/quarterly-economic-trends/>

existing economic situation, including our strong FDI base, our impressive indigenous operators who trade on a global scale, and our skilled and well-regarded workforce.

These must be protected to ensure that Ireland can respond to the economic uncertainties caused by tariffs, war, climate change, and other global issues. In recent years, Ireland's economy was rocked but responded strongly to the impact of Brexit and the lessons learned during this process can be adapted to ensure that businesses can respond to current threats, whether that is by identifying and accessing new trading markets, or upskilling staff, revamping products, or finding new opportunities altogether.

Furthermore, the department should implement measures, including tax incentives, grants and information sessions, to help businesses of all sizes to explore new markets. Globally, traditional markets are changing and it is vital that businesses have the support and opportunity to diversify their markets in order to continue to thrive.

### **Improve the business regulatory environment**

Cork Chamber has long advocated for the streamlining of regulatory burdens which impact enterprises in Ireland.<sup>6</sup> The complexity and volume of regulations can prove problematic to enterprises of all sizes, in particular SMEs, undermining competitiveness. This is particularly notable in the case of compliance, such as tax clearance requirements.

It is noted that some welcome steps have already been taken in reducing the cost and regulatory burden on businesses, including measures to address business costs and enhance trade promotion<sup>7</sup>, it is imperative that these are implemented as a matter of urgency and that further steps are taken to bridge the gap in the high cost of doing business in Ireland in comparison to competitor nations.

In addition to facilitating new entries into the business landscape in Ireland, all of these measures must also be designed in a manner that will support existing enterprises, bolster business resilience and foster competitiveness to safeguard our economic future.

The Programme for Government included a proposal to develop a new Small Business Unit within the department and it is essential that we see this delivered as a matter of priority to ensure small businesses have support and a focus within government. This also extends to the proposed Cost of Business Advisory Forum, which should be operational as soon as possible to review all business taxes and costs.

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<sup>6</sup> Cork Chamber General Election Manifesto; <https://www.corkchamber.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/general-election-manifesto-digital-1.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Action Plan on Competitiveness and Productivity, <https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/news-and-events/department-news/2025/april/minister-for-enterprise-tourism-and-employment-peter-burke-announces-government-approval-to-accelerate-the-development-of-a-new-whole-of-government-action-plan-on-competitiveness-and-productivity.html>

## **Promote safety in the workplace, quality employment and uphold employment rights**

Our people are the heart of Cork Chamber, and we are committed to creating a supportive, dynamic and inclusive workplace. This will be achieved through continuous development and meaningful engagement with employees.

In recent months, we have seen the emergence of a trend of major employers rolling back diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programmes internationally. This is a concerning trend and it is welcome to see the department commit to promoting safety in the workplace and quality employment.

Rolling back DEI programmes has the potential of undoing decades of good progress and deepening inequality, and Cork Chamber as a Government-appointed SDG Champion encourages the department to be steadfast in its commitment to maintaining such programmes here and supporting businesses in Ireland to do the same.

## **Conclusion**

Cork Chamber is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the public consultation on the development of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment's statement of strategy for 2025 to 2028. Ireland's economy is performing well and while there is an element of uncertainty ahead in the context of global economic challenges, we stand ready to adapt and thrive with the right support.

We are available to support in any way possible or if you require any further information on the above.

Yours sincerely,



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Cork Chamber