

Department of Social Protection,  
Áras Mhic Dhiarmada,  
Store Street,  
Dublin 1,  
D01 WY03.

7<sup>th</sup> March 2025

**Re: Public Consultation on the development of the Department of Social Protection's Statement of Strategy 2025 – 2028**

To whom it concerns,

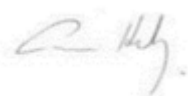
Cork Chamber represents 1,200 members together employing 130,000 people throughout the city, metropolitan area and county. Our vision is to lead a transforming and ambitious Cork City and County, and our purpose is to unite, represent and support our members and community. Our direction is guided by our formal pledge to uphold the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Cork Chamber has also been designated an SDG Champion by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications for 2024 – 2025.

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. Our members have identified a number of priorities relevant to the work of the Department of Social Protection, including sustainability, talent and skills, and supports for SMEs, local businesses and start-ups.

The ambition of the Department's current mission, namely to promote active participation and inclusion in society, is shared by Cork Chamber and its members. Sustainability, inclusivity, equality, diversity and belonging are at the core of Cork Chamber's values, and all of our public affairs and other activities aim to work in support of the community and future generations.

Cork Chamber welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the public consultation on the Department of Social Protection's Statement of Strategy 2025 – 2028.

Yours sincerely,



Conor Healy

CEO

## **Feedback on the Department of Social Protection’s Statement of Strategy 2025 – 2028:**

Cork Chamber very much welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Department of Social Protection’s new Statement of Strategy for the period 2025 to 2028. The high-level goals and objectives set out by the document, alongside the strategies and actions to be progressed over the period to achieve these goals, will be critical as Ireland faces into a period of increased economic uncertainty.

With ongoing geopolitical concerns, it is vital that an open economy like Ireland enhances its resilience. The Government must work to preserve and enhance the country’s economic competitiveness to mitigate the impact of these external challenges insofar as possible. Increasingly divergent approaches to sustainability around the world also pose a risk to Ireland’s economy and to progress in the pursuit of further inclusion in society.

Cork Chamber welcomes the Department’s mission statement’s ambition to promote active participation and inclusion in society through the provision of income supports, employment services and other services. Indeed, Cork Chamber and its members share the objective of promoting active participation and inclusion in society – sustainability has been identified by members as a key area of focus and, accordingly, guides all of the Chamber’s work and areas of activity.

In January 2025, Cork Chamber published a new Strategic Plan for the period 2025 – 2028, which sets out the Chamber’s purpose: to unite, represent and support our members and community.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the Strategic Plan identifies the Chamber’s core values, including a commitment to sustainability, inclusivity, equality, diversity and belonging.

To this end, Cork Chamber has partnered with SECAD on the WorkAbility Cork: Inclusive Pathways to Employment Programme. The programme aims to create opportunities for individuals with disabilities, providing them with the tools and supports needed to allow them to achieve their employment goals. As part of this programme, the Chamber collaborates with local employers to source opportunities for those participating in the programme and supports them in accessing these opportunities.<sup>2</sup> Such collaborations play an important role in promoting social cohesion in local areas, while also supporting individual employees to reach their full potential.

In addition, Cork Chamber is also a partner of the Cork Access Network and became the first formal partner from the business community to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with Cork City’s Education and Lifelong Learning Partners in 2024. Cork Chamber’s participation in the initiative serves to highlight the essential role of businesses in fostering a culture of continuous education. All project partners work together to mitigate against educational disadvantage in Cork City where possible, with project partners working across four broad

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<sup>1</sup> Cork Chamber, [https://www.corkchamber.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/CC\\_Strat-Plan-2528web.pdf](https://www.corkchamber.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/CC_Strat-Plan-2528web.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Cork Chamber, <https://www.corkchamber.ie/workability-cork/>

pillars of access, namely further and higher education, community, the workplace, and schools.<sup>3</sup>

The value of these initiatives, both for the business community and the wider community in Cork, is clear and Cork Chamber is committed to building on the success of these initiatives to promote active participation and inclusion in the workforce and in society.

The Department's new Statement of Strategy should give due consideration to the value of these and similar initiatives already in place across the country. The new Statement of Strategy should explore opportunities for collaboration with external organisations, both business organisations and community-based organisations, who may be able to share learnings and collaborate on new projects with the Department at a local and regional level with a view to promoting social inclusion from a community level upwards.

Alongside this collaboration, consideration should be given to the supports available for employers who wish to participate in these programmes and offer positions to those availing of such projects. While there is already a high level of supports available, the Department should seek to ensure in the first instance that companies are aware of supports available through the use of effective communications campaigns and collaboration with business representative organisations and community groups.

In the face of high costs and increasing regulatory burdens, access to supports for businesses should be simplified where possible and administrative and reporting burdens streamlined. The benefit will be twofold, enhancing active participation in society, while also supporting economic growth for businesses of all sizes, particularly SMEs operating domestically.

Additional opportunities for collaboration with regional and national further education and training providers could also be explored to support long-term workforce participation and active participation in society. Expanded access to upskilling and reskilling grants, as well as the provision of courses in a flexible manner, with tailored modes of delivery to suit different learning styles and types of employment, could play an important role in sustaining active participation. Emerging technologies and innovations should be explored to support this ambition.

Initiatives like these will also have a positive impact on Ireland's economic competitiveness, helping to address skills gaps and supporting workforce retention across vital indigenous sectors, such as tourism and hospitality.

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<sup>3</sup> Cork Learning City, <https://www.corklearningcity.ie/>