

Skillnet Ireland  
5th Floor,  
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Sandyford,  
Dublin 18,  
D18 E268.

19<sup>th</sup> December 2025

**Re: Skillnet Ireland Strategy Submission 2026 - 2028**

To whom it concerns,

Cork Chamber welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the public consultation on Skillnet Ireland's Statement of Strategy 2026 – 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, and our purpose is to unite, represent and support our members and community. At Cork Chamber, our direction is guided by our formal pledge to uphold the UN SDGs, five of which have been identified as priority areas by the Chambers Ireland network. Cork Chamber has also recently been appointed an SDG Ambassador by the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment.

Our advocacy is shaped by the views and priorities of our partners, and is informed by our continuous engagement with members, our Board and key stakeholders in Cork city and county.

Cork Chamber's quarterly Economic Trends surveys are a key element of this continuous engagement, measuring business sentiment and economic outlook among members at the close of each quarter.<sup>1</sup> Results indicate persistent concerns among the business community with regard to skills shortages, impacting firms' ability to fill vacant roles and plan for future growth. With this in mind, ensuring that Skillnet Ireland's offering remains enterprise-led and ready to adapt to the needs of a rapidly evolving business environment is crucial, and should be a core focus for the years ahead.

As the promoter organisation of Cork Chamber Skillnet, we are committed to supporting the development of Skillnet Ireland's new Statement of Strategy across the three themes

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<sup>1</sup> Cork Chamber, [Economic Trends Surveys](#)

of strengthening enterprise competitiveness, accelerating digitalisation and AI, and climate change and sustainability.

### **Strengthening Enterprise Competitiveness**

With increased geopolitical uncertainties and external pressures, investing in economic competitiveness at a domestic level is crucial. Strengthening enterprise competitiveness therefore remains a key priority, particularly for SMEs, many of whom have more limited resources and stand to benefit from improved access to upskilling opportunities. Ensuring balanced regional access to courses and upskilling opportunities is also critical, including access to specialised courses where relevant. For example, Cork is home to an important cluster of organisations and educational institutions operating in the green energy sector, with immense potential for growth in the area of offshore wind in particular. Ensuring access to relevant course offerings in important regional sectors should be a key focus of efforts to strengthen enterprise competitiveness. Opportunities for collaboration between different Skillnet networks should be explored in this regard, as well as the potential for a formal mechanism allowing Chamber networks to propose and deliver multi-regional or national programmes, similar in ambition and scale to existing Skillnet Ireland initiatives, for example the academies. Chambers are often uniquely positioned to measure and respond to enterprise demand on the ground and deliver courses efficiently through their established business networks.

It is vital that Skillnet Ireland's offering remains primarily enterprise-led, rather than policy-led. Programme design and delivery modes should be driven by the needs of enterprises and their experiences on the ground, ensuring flexibility and adaptability. Skills demand is evolving faster than policy cycles, and a flexible, demand-led model is essential if Ireland is to respond effectively to competitiveness pressures and workforce disruption. In addition, consideration should be given to a return to a 100% funded research model in order to strengthen Skillnet Ireland's position as a thought leader in the area of workforce development. Independent, high-quality research is essential to anticipating skills needs in evolving areas such as digitalisation and the climate transition and ensuring that course offerings can respond effectively.

### **Accelerating Digitalisation and AI**

One of the clearest examples of rapid workforce disruption and evolving enterprise needs is the area of digitalisation and AI. Recent years have seen a significant increase in the deployment of digital tools, particularly in the area of AI, leading to evolving workplace practices and enterprise needs. Skillnet Ireland should prioritise applied, business-ready digital capability, particularly for SMEs. This includes data-driven decision-making, AI

adoption and governance, cybersecurity resilience and process automation. In 2025, some of the most popular courses offered by Cork Chamber Skillnet included those related to digital marketing, video production, cybersecurity for SMEs and AI for marketing.

Digital capability development should be regionally grounded and aligned with existing enterprise clusters to ensure relevance and impact, while avoiding duplication across the system. Enhancing digital skills and supporting enterprise digitalisation will also support strengthened economic competitiveness.

## **Climate Change and Sustainability**

Climate change and sustainability have increased in importance for firms of all sizes in recent years. Cork Chamber was recently appointed an SDG Ambassador by the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment, following a successful term as SDG Champion for 2024 to 2025. Cork Chamber has also recently launched a Sustainability Strategy for 2024 to 2025, building on existing sustainability initiatives and ensuring that sustainable practices are at the core of all activities undertaken by Cork Chamber.<sup>2</sup> This also plays an important role in responding to the needs of the local business community, who continually emphasise the importance of embedding sustainable models into their business operations. However, with increased cost pressures a concern for many, partially or fully-funded course models should be prioritised in this area to ensure that businesses, particularly SMEs, are not left behind in the climate transition and can access the supports needed to enhance their sustainability credentials.

With enhanced sustainability reporting requirements at EU level and rapidly approaching national climate targets, ensuring that enterprises are equipped with the skills and tools needed to respond to the climate transition is vital. Courses offered by Cork Chamber Skillnet such as ‘Simplify Sustainability & Gain a Competitive Advantage’ have been particularly popular over the course of 2025, demonstrating the appetite for applied, sustainability-related upskilling opportunities among businesses. Ensuring a varied offering in the area of sustainability, across energy efficiency, ESG reporting and diversity, equality and inclusion, is important too, ensuring that enterprises have the skills to embed sustainability across all activities and policies.

Cork Chamber welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the public consultation regarding Skillnet Ireland’s Statement of Strategy 2026 – 2028 and looks forward to

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<sup>2</sup> Cork Chamber, [Sustainability Strategy and Report](#)

continued engagement and collaboration through Cork Chamber Skillnet over the lifetime of the strategy.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'CH' or 'Conor Healy' in a stylized, cursive script.

Conor Healy

CEO