

16th April 2026

Re: Strategic Planning Consultation – Cork Education & Training Board

To whom it concerns,

Cork Chamber welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on Cork ETB's 2027 – 2031 Strategy Statement.

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.

One of the critical components of Cork's economic competitiveness is talent and skills. Cork city and county's capacity to grow and scale across sectors is dependent on its ability to ensure a robust talent pool, from work-ready graduates to highly skilled international talent.

With this in mind, we value our continued, productive engagement with Cork ETB through Chamber-led forums such as the Cork Development Forum (CDF), as well as initiatives like the recently established Working Connections partnership, and ongoing shared participation in regional forums and projects such as the Cork Access Network. Initiatives such as these, alongside the continued development of outreach programmes such as Youthreach, are vital to encourage workforce participation among as broad a range of individuals as possible, as well as engagement with educational opportunities.

Skills development remains a key priority for Cork Chamber members across a wide range of sectors. Members consistently report concerns with skills availability; in the latest Cork Chamber Economic Trends Survey, specialist skills shortages emerged as the top barrier to filling vacancies. Of the 50% of survey respondents with vacancies currently

advertised, 41% reported difficulties with filling these roles. 66% cited specialist skills gaps as the top barrier to filling roles in Q1 2026, increasing from a low of 46% in Q2 2025.¹

Given the persistent challenges reported by Cork firms in relation to skills shortages, ensuring accessible, affordable opportunities for upskilling and reskilling is vital in order to address skills shortages across sectors. Specialist skills shortages are particularly acute in emerging and growing sectors, such as green energy. Supporting skills provision for these sectors will be critical to future-proofing the region's economy and ensuring that Cork remains a competitive and attractive location for inward investment.

In addition, transversal skills have an increasingly important role to play as economic activity evolves at pace in response to enhanced digitalisation and AI deployment across many sectors. Supporting those in employment or seeking employment in developing such skills will play an important role in future-proofing individuals' capacity to participate in the workforce and contribute to ongoing economic growth.

Close collaboration with industry should also be prioritised over the lifetime of the strategy to ensure that Cork ETB's offering remains aligned with evolving skills shortages across key sectors of the regional economy. Ongoing engagement with Cork Chamber and other representative bodies, as well as with key regional sectors and large employers in the region, will help to identify and address skills gaps as they emerge. Building on the close collaboration that already exists between Cork ETB and UCC and MTU will also be vital to ensure the region's educational offering remains well-rounded and responds effectively to the skills needs that exist in the wider Cork region.

The provision of accessible and affordable childcare and early years education is another important priority for Cork Chamber members, and plays a critical role in enabling participation in the workforce and in educational opportunities. With regard to education and training for early years educators, reinforcing the professionalisation of the sector is important and can be achieved through the establishment of clear professional career pathways within the sector. The early years sector is a clear example of a sector of the economy that would benefit from closer collaboration between industry and education providers, particularly with regard to the delivery of structured work placements within all childcare-related programmes. This would also help to strengthen the transition from education to long-term employment within the sector.

Ensuring the provision of upskilling and reskilling opportunities on a flexible basis is crucial to support broader participation and enable those in employment to access opportunities on an ongoing basis. The use of new technologies and flexible modes of learning should be prioritised in this regard. Financial constraints are often a barrier to accessing courses and continued engagement with government in relation to expanded funding supports for both individuals and companies to invest in skills should be a key

¹ Cork Chamber, [Economic Trends](#)

priority for the coming years, alongside work to deliver on government's commitment to unlock the National Training Fund.

Recognising that people benefit from having access to different pathways to education and training is essential. In this regard, the continuous development of apprenticeship opportunities and other alternative pathways to education and work has a vital role to play in supporting holistic economic development and wider population growth. Construction skills, for example, have a critical role to play in supporting the projected growth in housing supply and infrastructural development over the coming years. Skills in areas such as Modern Methods of Construction will be increasingly important in this regard.

Cork Chamber has consistently advocated for apprenticeships to be positioned as strategic workforce pipelines. A considerable shift in perception among learners, parents, educators and employers is required to support the increased uptake of apprenticeships needed to support and sustain projected economic growth and development over the decades to come. Additional support for career guidance at second level should be considered, alongside informational campaigns focused on the promotion of apprenticeships and other pathways to training.

Cork Chamber looks forward to continued engagement and close collaboration with Cork ETB over the lifetime of the new Statement of Strategy.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'CH' or similar initials.

Conor Healy

CEO