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# **Consultation on the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Statement of Strategy 2025 - 2028**

**Response from the American Chamber of Commerce Ireland  
(AmCham) to the Department of Further and Higher Education,  
Research, Innovation and Science on the Statement of Strategy  
2025 – 2028.**

**May 2025**

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# **The American Chamber of Commerce Ireland**

## **The Voice of US-Ireland Business**

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The American Chamber of Commerce Ireland (AmCham) is the collective voice of US companies in Ireland and the leading international business organisation supporting the Transatlantic business relationship. Our members are the Irish operations of all the major US companies in every sector present here, Irish companies with operations in the United States and organisations with close linkages to US-Ireland trade and investment.

The American Chamber of Commerce Ireland (AmCham) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the consultation on the review of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science in relation to the Department's Statement of Strategy 2025 – 2028.

The Department's portfolio covers key areas that relate to Ireland's ability to secure inward Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), namely regarding the development of a highly skilled talent pool in Ireland, creating a vibrant and dynamic research and innovation culture, enhancing Ireland's partnerships with international organisations through academia, deepening linkages between academia and industry; and more. In a recent AmCham survey of member organisations, 63% percent of respondents stated that access to a highly skilled and talented workforce was Ireland's single biggest competitive advantage. This underscores the importance of developing a sustainable and ambitious roadmap for further and higher education in Ireland; and to drive innovation and Ireland's international academic footprint, unlocking new opportunities in the process.

### **Strategic Goal 1**

The mission of Strategic Goal 1 under the Department's current Strategy, seeks to develop talent and skills, and to *"enable everyone across society to develop the skills, talent and knowledge required to participate successfully in the Irish economy and society of today and those essential for the future meeting the requirements of our stakeholders"*. This is of significant importance to continuing Ireland's position as a leading location for talent retention and growth.

This will require continued efforts to identify emerging areas of talent demand, for example AI, digital, and green technology skills. Building robust frameworks that support the education sector in meeting the demands of industry and wider society through policy, funding, and institutional supports.

In a recent AmCham survey of members, respondents who stated that they were experiencing a skills gap in Ireland reported that these areas included, Digital and Data (23%), Engineering (21%), Machine Learning and AI (19%), Cyber (12%). Addressing these skills gaps with the support of the Department and educational institutions will be key to ensuring that Ireland's talent pipeline meets the needs of industry and facilitates economic growth.

Developing pathways between educational institutions and industry, particularly in sectors with skill gaps can provide a more cohesive journey from education to the workplace. Supporting the continued enhancement of apprenticeship programmes will play an important role in this goal and diversify the routes to education in Ireland, ensuring greater participation in further and higher education.

Further, the continued co-operation between the Department and the OECD will be important in assisting with the implementation of international best practices in Ireland and maintaining Ireland's leading position in the OECD for key educational sectors.

## **Strategic Goal 2**

The continued focus on fostering greater research, innovation and science in Ireland, as supported through the current iteration of Strategic Goal 2 which aims to *“Lead a whole-of-Government approach to advancing research and innovation, through implementation of agreed strategies and the promotion of engagement between the 14 enterprise sectors, higher educational institutions and research bodies in Ireland, the public sector, the wider community and internationally”*, will play a pivotal role in developing a dynamic culture of research and innovation in Ireland. This will have a positive impact on Ireland's competitiveness and attractiveness for FDI.

Building on the progress to date under the implementation of Impact 2030 will provide increased certainty to the research and innovation fields in Ireland. Key to the success of this objective will be adequate resourcing for the recently formed Taighde Éireann, the Higher Education Authority, and further and higher education institutions nationwide.

Developing greater supports, in line with recent increases for PhD programmes and research projects will further provide for increased incentives to pursue research careers; and innovation led goals within academia and industry, in turn enhancing Ireland's competitive advantages for FDI.

Increasing the number of PhD students in Ireland will result in greater links between academia and the private sector, this will also strengthen both sectors and lead to greater co-operation and innovation. To achieve this, academic institutions must be supported in matching the research and innovation facilities of industry. This will also facilitate a pathway for PhD candidates to transition to R&D roles in various sectors and ensure that Ireland is a preeminent location for R&D investment and for international talent.

Further efforts to develop the number of students in STEM programmes in higher education, closing the gender gap in STEM courses, and co-ordinating with relevant Government Departments and agencies to integrate STEM studies into primary and secondary education settings will enhance Ireland's STEM outcomes. Combined with Government efforts to increase Ireland's engagement with international research projects, such as Ireland's membership of CERN, Ireland can develop a more vibrant research, innovation and scientific landscape. Appointing a National Champion for STEM to support talent development, build awareness of career opportunities, and support collaboration between industry and academia will also provide a positive advancement in supporting policy outcomes.

Fostering a supporting policy framework that brings Government and industry together to drive research and innovation in Ireland will lead to a more dynamic economy that attracts greater inward investment and international talent.

#### **Strategic Goal 4**

The aim of the Department's current Strategic Goal 4 to "*Position Ireland as a leading international location for researchers, students and postgraduates, and as an advanced knowledge economy with a cutting-edge research and innovation focus*" is critical to supporting the overarching aims of the Department's work. Enhancing Ireland's reputation as a leader in research and innovation will result in a greater number of people and projects choosing Ireland as a location in which to conduct research programmes.

Furthermore, increasing Ireland's attractiveness for international students and the retaining that talent after graduation can play an important role in developing the research and innovation sectors in Ireland. In the 2023/2024 academic year there were approximately 40,400 international students enrolled in Irish higher education institutions. Approximately 30.5% of these students accepted employment outside of the island of Ireland after graduating from the course. By encouraging greater innovation and research in Ireland, retaining key international graduates in areas of demand will become increasingly attainable. Implementing the International Education Mark for Irish educational institutions will further assist in enhancing Ireland's reputation as an education leader.

Deepening Ireland's academic, research, and innovation relationships with the UK and EU partners will also facilitate the development of Ireland's position as a knowledge

economy and drive greater international co-operation and investment. Building on the progress achieved to date with regard to strategies such as the *‘Global Citizens 2030 – Ireland’s Talent and Innovation Strategy’* will set out Ireland’s roadmap for international engagement. Included as part of this strategy is the deployment of Talent and Innovation Attachés across the globe, playing an important role in developing Ireland’s educational attractiveness. It is important that these Attachés provide regular feedback and review strategic approaches, utilising Ireland House locations, to maximise impact.

Other funding streams, such as those delivered through the Horizon Europe strategy, will continue to play a role in securing adequate resourcing for research and innovation projects in Ireland. By supporting entrepreneurs and researchers through the National Support Programme can further ensure that Ireland optimises the amount of funding obtained and contributes to the wider research sector.

Furthermore, utilising the whole-of-Government approach to developing increased North-South co-operation can form an important aspect of the Department’s efforts to developing greater academic, research, and innovation linkages on a cross-border basis, contributing to all-island economy.

## **Strategic Goal 5**

The stated aim of Strategic Goal 5 to, *“Advance the continued progression of the Further and Higher Education systems, collaborating with stakeholders in the development of a Unified Tertiary System, the transformation of approaches to Apprenticeships and embracing the importance of Skills development. We will also focus on a major program for de-carbonisation of buildings”* should remain a priority for the Department.

The development of apprenticeship programmes into a single National Apprenticeship System will further encourage engagement and streamline the processes for both prospective and existing apprentices, as well as providing a singular reference point for the business community. It is paramount that continued data and implementation reviews are carried out in order to maintain consistent apprenticeship programme results that support the growth of apprenticeships in Ireland.

Supporting relevant agencies, such as the HEA in efforts to unify tertiary education in Ireland will also reduce frictions within the education sector and allow for seamless student transitions across the range of educational settings in Ireland. The Department

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in co-operation with other relevant Government Departments and agencies, would benefit from continuing this approach by developing pathways that support the transition from tertiary education to the workforce, particularly in areas of skills and talent demand. This can be achieved through cross-Governmental and industry co-operation.

Investing in Ireland's higher education institutional infrastructure is key to delivering the highest quality facilities that compete with international competitors and supports the ambition of the education sector.