

Consultation paper on the National Smart Specialisation Strategy

Input from the North-East Regional Enterprise Development Office

As alluded to in the consultation paper on the *National Smart Specialisation Strategy* the REP's are 'important vehicles for translating national level policies into regional and local impact'. Arising from the recent consultation sessions on the NE REP to 2024 two specific sectors have emerged that will be the focus of attention over the lifetime of the plan.

1. Agri Sector:

The Agri Sector is of immense importance across the North-East Region. The Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 presents an opportunity to explore in a structured manner, opportunities to strengthen existing and emerging sustainable opportunities in the Agri sector and to bring together the key players and their expertise to map out an ambitious long-term strategic blueprint for the development of the Agri Sector in the North-East Region.

The new REP will support the establishment of a North-East Agri Sector Forum which will identify emerging trends and opportunities in the Agri Food and Agri Tech sectors and develop an Action Plan to capitalise on opportunities for the region. One of the main focus areas will be on Innovation and in helping the sector with new product development – identify emerging trends and understand changing food patterns. The Monaghan Bioconnect Centre will also play a key role in advancing the bioeconomy in the region.

It is noted that the Agri sector has been highlighted as an emerging area of opportunity in the S3 consultation paper and the REP to 2024 will support further development of our regional competitive advantage and innovation in this area.

2. Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing:

It is important to note the importance of the Engineering Sector in the North-East Region. The Focused Engineering Network (FEN) specialises in business development, collaborative working and training & development for Engineering companies in the counties of Monaghan, Louth and Cavan. The consultation sessions on the new REP emphasised the

fact that Engineering is seen as a regional strength that can be built on and the new Advanced Manufacturing and Training Centre of Excellence in Dundalk is seen as an asset that can further support developing specialisation and skills in engineering right across the North-East region.

While the sector may not be as advanced as it is in other regions it is still regarded as a sectoral strength and using the existing FEN and the new AMTCE in Dundalk we hope to be in a position to elevate the status of this sector both inter and intra regionally. It may be appropriate to reference this sector as an emerging area of opportunity (in the NE) as part of the new S3 Strategy.

Cross Cutting Issues:

The NE REP to 2024 lends particular focus to two of the cross-cutting issues referenced in the S3 consultation document with two of the draft Regional Strategic Objectives devoted to: Digitalisation and Digital Transition and Green Transformation for enterprise, with the former devoted specifically to advanced and smart manufacturing and sustainable food production in an attempt to keep the plan focused while building on our regional strengths.

1. Digitalisation and digital transformation

Strategic Objective 2: *Position the North-East Region as an exemplar in guiding and supporting digital transition for enterprise.*

We must now identify and put in place the appropriate interventions for enterprise across the region to enable them to embrace the digital transition while exploiting new opportunities particularly in *advanced and smart manufacturing and sustainable food production* and processing. Adoption of Industry 4.0 and the digitalisation of manufacturing will be critical to maintaining a competitive manufacturing base into the future.

As a first step in this digital transition, we must decipher where enterprise within the region, specifically within the *engineering/manufacturing and Agri food*, is positioned in terms of their

digital readiness. Once this is complete and using existing expertise within the region we can then review and develop a suite of appropriate supports and interventions to enable enterprise to adopt to and maximise opportunities from digitalisation.

1. Green transformation for enterprise

Strategic Objective 4: Support enterprise to mainstream climate action and transition to a low carbon into their business planning and delivery.

The transition to a low carbon economy presents a significant transformational challenge for enterprise – part of this challenge includes an understanding of the transition process and the opportunities and barriers that may present. Action 4.1 seeks to identify such opportunities and barriers along with the identification, development and implementation of appropriate supports and interventions required to enable enterprise to withstand the challenges and impacts of transition.

The inclusion of these specific cross cutting themes will help us meet some of the S3 criteria over the lifetime of the plan.

General Comment:

It is noted that the S3 consultation paper refers to the strong financial services sector along the “M1 Payments Corridor” (Fintech Corridor). Notwithstanding the fact that no specific actions emerged from the consultation sessions with regards to the M1Corridor it is recognised as a competitive strength of the region. Strategic Objective 1 which aims to position and promote the North-East as a Region to support enterprise investment and growth with a particular focus on talent, property solutions/enterprise lands and sectoral strengths will include the Fintech Corridor as part of this proposition and seek out opportunities to build on this over the lifetime of the plan to 2024.

