

Northwest Regional Enterprise Plan submittal to Smart Specialisation Public Consultation

Author: Anne McTernan, NW Regional Enterprise Programme Manager

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this submittal is to enhance and provide local updates to the existing 'smart specialisation' information that the Department of Enterprise have provided on the strengths in the Northwest of Ireland (Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal). This submittal is from the Regional Enterprise Plan programme manager local knowledge and data gathered from the regional consultation session.

2. Consultation Questions

Q: What, in your opinion, are the key sectors in your region? What are the skills, assets and capabilities within your region?

Food/Food innovation/Brewery

Each county within the Northwest region has a well-developed food network – Sligo Food Trail, Taste of Leitrim and Donegal Food Coast. Each food network serves a number of purposes, mainly – marketing, networking, collaboration, professional membership illustrating a professional level achieved by its members, tourism attractions. The Drumshambo Food Hub in Leitrim serves as a food facility hire, runs educational courses and networking. There are a number of brewery's in the region which are internationally renowned and tourism attractions in their own right now e.g. White Hag Brewery Sligo, Drumshambo Gin, Leitrim, Kinnegar Brewery Donegal.

IT Sligo and Letterkenny IT run courses including degree in Bachelor of Science in Human Nutrition, Human Dietetics, Culinary arts (St Angela's college, Killibegs college). There are opportunities in the region to expand educational course to Distilling and Brewery courses which is currently only available in Carlow IT.

Tourism

Each county within the Northwest region has a well-developed tourism and marketing brand – 'Leitrim explore experience enjoy', 'Sligo live invest visit', 'Go visit Donegal'. There are strong collaborative synergies with the food industry and tourism. There are considerable efforts ongoing from the County councils/Failte Ireland to assist in the recovery of the tourism industry post COVID. Each county is striving to ensure that the growth of tourism in the region enables high value and sustainable jobs.

The educational institutes in the region have well developed tourism offerings - LYIT has a department of tourism, IT Sligo has a department of marketing, sport, and tourism.

Agriculture/Retail

Agriculture and retail are outside the scope of the role as Enterprise Programme Manager. However, there is considerable Teagasc and agriculture innovation presence in the region. This report recommends engagement with Teagasc to ensure agriculture innovation is included in the smart specialisation report

Creative Economy

The creative economy is a strong industry in the northwest. The creative industries, which can be defined as 'industries and occupations which focus on creativity as a means to deliver commercial success, export growth and resilient employment for Ireland including: advertising and marketing, architecture, crafts, design (exhibition/ performance/ games/ graphic/ industrial/ interior/ landscape/ product/ textiles), fashion, film, tv, radio and photography, IT, software and computer services, publishing, museums, galleries and libraries, music, performing and visual arts.

The creative economy strengths in the region ranges from small individual contractors e.g. musicians, craft creators, musicians to audio visual arts and animation strengths. Donegal has a creative cluster with a creative strategy for the county and Leitrim received funding through the recent REDF fund for the establishment of the creative cluster. Sligo received funding through the REDF fund for a Gaming and Animation campus in Strandhill, Sligo.

The Northwest regional enterprise plan is hosting a consultation session in September to encourage strategic growth of the creative economy in the northwest.

Marine

As a coastal region the blue economy is an important industry in the region, particularly to Donegal and Sligo. Commercial fisheries in particular in Donegal is a large employer. Donegal county council has developed a recent Killibegs regeneration strategy and recruited a Killibegs cluster manager to encourage growth of the marine sector. The marine sector is generally classified as x6 categories – commercial fisheries, fish production, coastal tourism, marine engineering, marine services, aquaculture. The Blue economy is a key strategic objective in the northwest regional enterprise plan. Udaras na nGaeltachta is a key enabler of the marine industry in the Northwest with several clients in the marine industry. This report strongly suggests the engagement of Udaras as a strong enterprise enable in the region.

Manufacturing/Engineering

Manufacturing/engineering is a strong specialisation in the northwest region and perhaps its most well-known. There is a Borders Manufacturing Cluster being formed out of Sligo IT with a dedicated cluster manager and a Donegal engineering cluster with a dedicated cluster manager being recruited. Companies within this industry range from indigenous companies e.g. SL Controls to larger companies e.g. Abbvie Sligo. Sligo county council in collaboration with IT Sligo has recently received funding for an Advanced Manufacturing Centre based in Sligo.

Tech industry

The northwest region has a strong speciality in the technology sector, including Medical device technology and Financial services digital technology. There are a number of clusters in the region – Atlantic Medtech (activity based on a voluntary basis), ICT Fintech Cluster (based in Donegal, activity on a voluntary basis), Tech NW (cluster based in the Sligo and Leitrim area encouraging development of tech companies in these counties).

Pharma/Life science

The pharma/life science sector is a strong specialisation of the Northwest. The sector is anchored by a number of large companies – e.g. Abbott, Abbvie in Sligo, Donegal. This sector is concentrated on when trying to attract foreign direct investment to the northwest. Pharma has remained strong throughout the COVID pandemic and nationally has grown in exports.

Q: Which sectors could achieve critical mass in Ireland over the next seven years? Where are the opportunities and what needs to be done to unlock these opportunities?

Business Process Outsourcing Services

The growth of the BPO industry in the northwest is at an early stage and is anchored by some large companies who have recently moved into the region – Abtran, Sligo; EIR, Sligo; Pramerica, Donegal. This industry has the capability to employ large numbers of employees. In terms of development, concentration on a digital transition in this sector and looking at the education institutes offerings in the region to support its growth will enable growth within the region.

Offshore wind/Coastal energy industry

The offshore wind industry and coastal energy (including tidal and wind energy) is potentially a transformative opportunity for the Atlantic coast and northwest region. The northwest region has several key enablers towards the growth of this region – port infrastructure in Killibegs and Sligo ports, experience onshore in the Leitrim, Sligo and Donegal wind farms. There are a number of barriers to its development (in policy development, and in electrical grid infrastructure limitations) however, international experience has demonstrated if the resource is there, the development is accelerated by the investment of private industry.