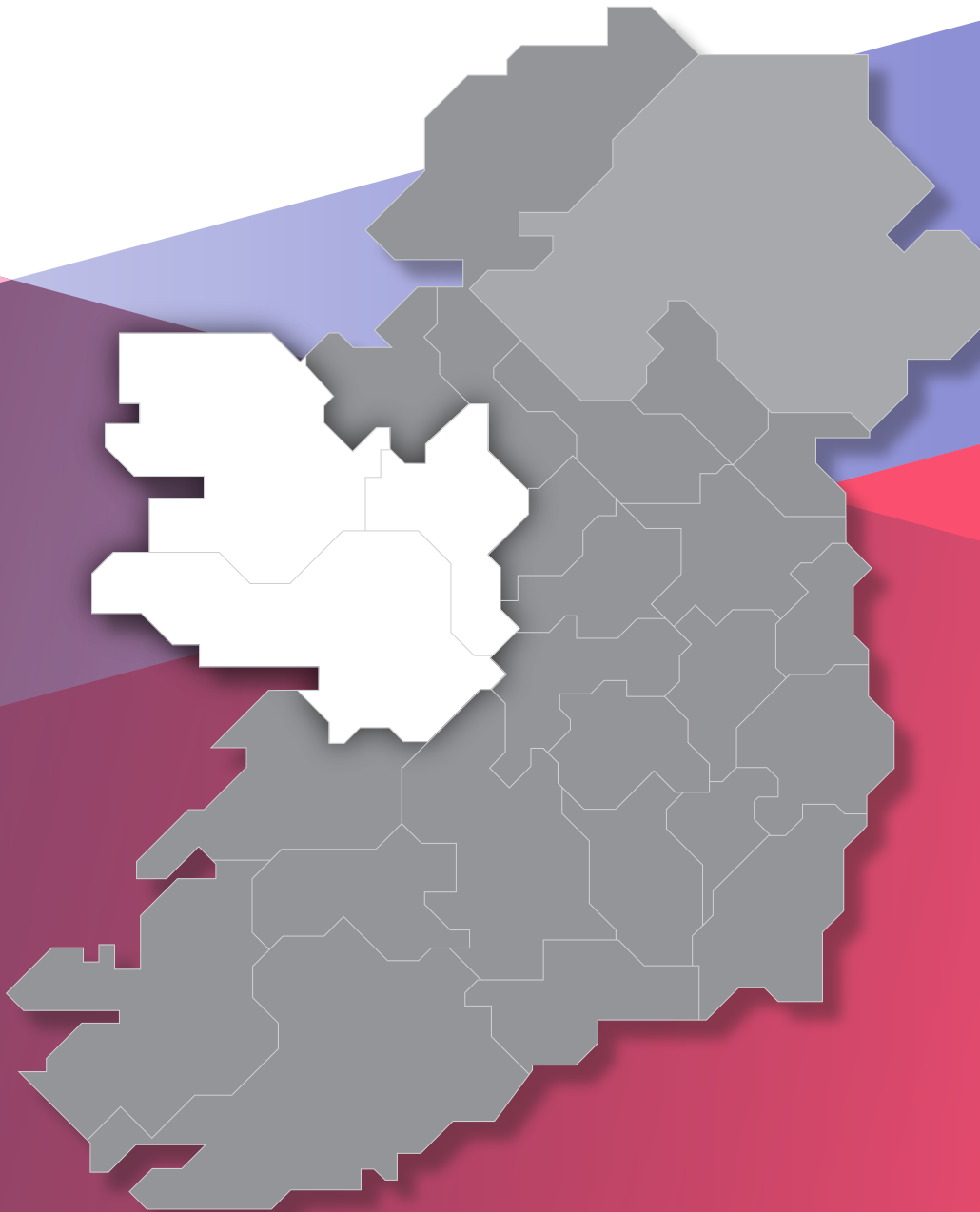




Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020

WEST



An initiative of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation

Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020

WEST

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Minister's Foreword

Realising the enterprise and jobs potential in all of the regions and thereby reducing disparities between regions continues to be a priority of this Government. We remain committed to achieving an overall jobs uplift of between 10 and 15 percent in each region by 2020 and to bring and/or maintain unemployment levels in each region to within at least one percentage point of the State average.

In the West region, the 2015-2017 Regional Action Plan for Jobs (RAPJ) set out 194 actions to support job creation and accelerated economic recovery. At the end of that period, more than 135 actions were completed or substantially progressed, and more than 28,400 jobs have been created in the region. With an unemployment rate currently at 6.6 percent much has been achieved.

This Regional Enterprise Plan (REP) for the West aims to build on the strong progress achieved under the RAPJ initiative towards our 2020 ambition. Under the refreshed approach, I have placed a renewed emphasis on collaboration and delivery on measurable actions. I have also stressed additionality and asked the Regional Committees to bring forward and elevate ideas that, through collaborative working, complement and add value to the core work of the enterprise agencies and other bodies. The Plan is therefore deliberately selective and 'bottom-up' in terms of its strategic objectives and not intended to be a comprehensive regional enterprise strategy in its own right.

I have been very pleased to note that in preparing this REP, the West Regional Implementation Committee (along with the other eight Regional

Committees nationally) has engaged in a regionally co-ordinated manner on important considerations to do with strengthening productivity, driving job creation, and supporting enterprise resilience in their region. These include: diversifying the regional economy, building on place-specific strengths, regional brand development, business clustering and ecosystem strengthening initiatives to support new business creation and investment.

I look forward to seeing a further strengthening of the collaborative mindset that has grown in the West and in each region, bringing together Local Authorities, the enterprise agencies, higher and further education institutions, Local Enterprise Offices, the business community, and others, to work towards a better future for their region.

As we look towards 2020, it is clear that the context for enterprise development in Ireland has changed. Unemployment levels in all regions are now at more stable levels, but we have some new challenges; the forthcoming departure of the UK from the European Union will have far reaching impacts as yet not fully known; while our competitiveness is challenged by a tightening labour market and unrealised productivity potential, especially in our Irish-owned SMEs.

My Department's *Enterprise 2025 Renewed*, has oriented our enterprise policy towards building resilience in our enterprise base so that our businesses and our economy more generally can withstand new challenges and realise sustained growth and employment creation for the longer-term. Together with the Department

of the Taoiseach, we are defining a whole of Government *Future Jobs Ireland* agenda that will give effect to that policy focus, with key actions to drive productivity growth and innovation, build enterprise resilience, increase participation in the labour force, and enable businesses to transition to a low carbon economy context. In addition, through *Project Ireland 2040* we will make sustained investments in place-making so that Ireland remains an attractive place to live, work and invest over the longer term.

Every region has a part to play in realising sustained enterprise and economic performance; and no region should lag behind their potential. This refreshed West Regional Enterprise Plan, one of nine regional plans, sees the RAPJs evolve to a more strategic, focused approach, in line with and complementing these policy developments at the national level. Through the established mechanism of the Regional Steering Committee, these Plans will be maintained as “live” agendas so that new ideas and collaborative initiatives can be propagated and national policy initiatives can be effectively translated into regional impact; for example, in areas such as climate action and the digital economy.

Under my Department’s €60 million competitive Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) the West has already secured more than €7 million across four projects that will enhance the region’s potential for enterprise growth and job creation. Guided by this new Regional Enterprise Plan, the region is well positioned to compete for further competitive calls, including the REDF, on a rolling basis, as part of the further roll-out of *Project Ireland 2040*.

I want to commend the work of the Implementation Committee, under the chairmanship of Gerard P Kilcommins Vice-President, Medtronic, for their work on the roll out of the first RAPJ for the West Region. I welcome the new focus and energy embodied in this refreshed Regional Enterprise Plan for the region and recognise the extensive collective reflection and effort that has gone in to its production.

My Department will continue to work closely with you as you implement the agenda set out and seek to realise the potential that you have recognised. I look forward to engaging with you over the coming months and supporting you in your endeavours.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heather Humphreys".

Heather Humphreys TD

*Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation
February 2019*

Chair's Introduction

As Chair of the Regional Steering Committee, I am pleased to present this Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 for the West Region. This Plan marks the culmination of 8 months of collaborative effort on the part of the committee, building on the commitment and willingness to work together brought about through the implementation of the first Regional Action Plan for the West, 2015-2017.

In revising that original Action Plan, our aim has been to refine the committee's focus to the 'vital few' areas that best represent the direction we want to set for the West: working to achieve a connected region that capitalises on its unique strengths, ensuring growth in key sectors is underpinned by the crucial and continued supply of skilled workers and the availability of high quality enterprise space.

Over the past 3½ years employment has grown substantially, with over 28,000 more people in employment since the start of 2015. Despite this achievement, the outlook of the region should be mindful of the uncertainties of the current economic climate, in addition to the broader technological challenges that are already impacting on the way in which we work; a process that is likely to accelerate significantly in the near future.

The cohesiveness of the West region and its ability to develop strategic responses to shared challenges will be key to ensuring our resilience in the face of these challenges.

This Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 is built around 6 core objectives: enhancing the region's offering in four sectors that are key and common to each of the counties of Galway, Mayo and Roscommon, while working to ensure the region's capacity to support its enterprise base is strengthened through a focus on skills and the provision of enterprise space. In summary, these objectives are:

1. Build greater capability within the Life Sciences sector to meet its future needs
2. Ensure the continued sustainable growth of tourism, including business tourism
3. Enhance the growth potential of AgTech in the West
4. Build on the region's unique creative assets to realise increased employment and investment in the sector
5. Align training provision to local current and future skills needs
6. Enhance the quality and availability of enterprise space in the West

Through *Project Ireland 2040*, the Government has put in place a number of different funds that can be targeted to maximise the impact of this Plan. Recent successes for the West under the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF), Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF), and Urban Regeneration and Development Fund

(URDF) demonstrate the capability and ambition that exists in the region, which must be supported and sustained.

Lastly, I want to take the opportunity to thank the committee for their contributions and commitment over the past number of months, and I look forward to leading the group through the implementation of this Plan.



Gerard P Kilcommins

VP Worldwide Vascular Operations, Medtronic

Chair

West Regional Enterprise Plan

1 Policy Context

The West Regional Enterprise Plan (REP) is one of nine such Plans that have emerged from a process to refresh and refocus the Regional Action Plan for Jobs (RAPJ) initiative which originally focused on the 2015-2017/8 period. The purpose of the refresh and refocus was to further build on the positive regional collaboration fostered by the RAPJs over the period to 2020, taking account of the changed and improved economic circumstances nationally, the emergence of new challenges to enterprise development and competitiveness both domestically and internationally in origin, including Brexit, and the persistence of uneven economic progress across the regions in Ireland - as of Q3 2018 there were three regions¹ with rates of unemployment more than one percent above the State average of 6 percent.

The REPs provide perspective and ideas from the 'ground-up'. They are informed by an understanding of unique local strengths and assets and have the potential to enable more effective translation of national policy into regional and local impact². They focus on leveraging the added value from regional and local actors working collaboratively, and in so doing, they aim to complement and build on the existing activities being undertaken by the Enterprise Agencies, the LEOs and the wider range of State Bodies directly involved in supporting enterprise development in the regions (see section on Enterprise Agency and LEO activities and Appendix 4). As a result, the Plans are focused on a suite of selected priority objectives requiring a collaborative regional effort and are not meant to be comprehensive economic development

strategies on their own. The Regional Steering Committees will oversee these Plans as "live" agendas. Through them new ideas and collaborative initiatives can be propagated and national policy initiatives can be effectively translated into regional impact; for example, in areas such as climate action and the digital economy.

The REPs are an integral part of the broader policy system aimed at driving economic growth and sustaining better standards of living throughout Ireland. As a 'bottom-up' initiative, the Plans complement national level policies and programmes emanating from a 'top-down' (see Figure 1) and in particular, there is strong alignment with Ireland's national enterprise policy, *Enterprise 2025 Renewed*.

Enterprise 2025 Renewed aims to embed resilience in our enterprises, contributing to strong economic performance over the longer term, through a number of key policy priorities. These include:

- an increased emphasis on developing our Irish owned enterprises – enhancing productivity and delivering quality jobs – and helping companies to navigate Brexit;
- exploiting the potential offered by collaboration and clustering within our distinctive foreign and Irish owned enterprise mix;
- placing a spotlight on innovation (including disruptive technologies) and talent development, so that more enterprises are developing new products, services and solutions, and are more competitive internationally;

1 Midlands 7.1% | Mid-West 7.2% | South-East 8.6%

2 Appendix 2 contains a brief regional profile and statistical snapshot of West

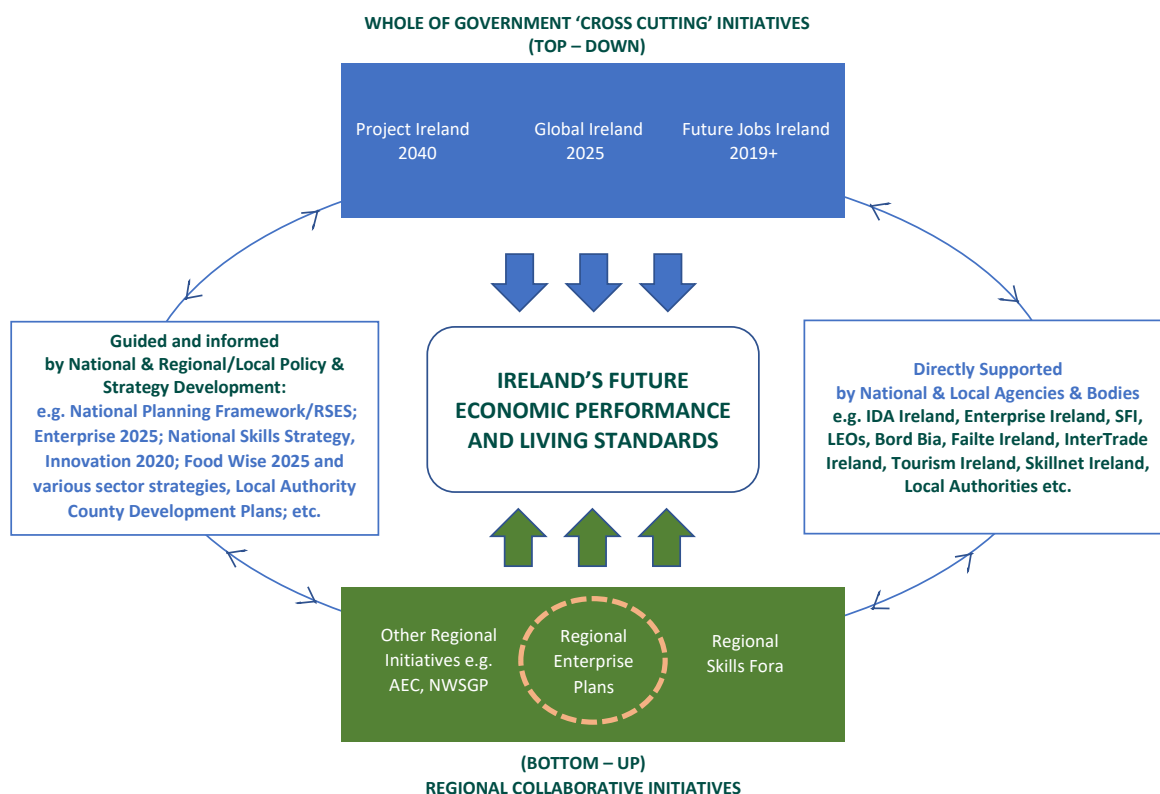
- realising the full potential of our regions
 - developing places that are attractive for business investment and for people to live and work; and
- raising Ireland's visibility internationally, protecting Ireland's reputation, and providing opportunities for our enterprises supported by the Global Footprint 2025 initiative.

At the national level, the recently launched *Future Jobs Ireland 2019* initiative will, as part of a multiannual framework, give effect to national enterprise policy objectives and leverage a 'whole of Government' approach so that all policy levers at the national level, relevant to job creation and labour force participation, talent development, enterprise growth, innovation and competitiveness, and transition to a low carbon economy, are engaged on an agenda that will prepare for Ireland's future enterprise and economic needs. The coming together of public and private sector stakeholders to set regional strategic objectives for enterprise

development under these refreshed Regional Enterprise Plans will have an important role to play in the realisation of *Enterprise 2025 Renewed* and the ongoing *Future Jobs* agenda.

The REPs also have a strong role to play in the context of *Project Ireland 2040*, and more specifically in the implementation of the National Planning Framework and its constituent Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs) at NUTS 2 (Regional Assembly) level. The refresh of the Regional Action Plans has informed and will continue to inform the implementation of these future planning strategies for Ireland (see Appendix 5 on *Project Ireland 2040* for further details). The RSEs will be key to addressing longer term strategic planning and infrastructural requirements that will be needed to unlock the potential in all regions recognised in the REPs. The diversification of rural economies is an important objective of *Project Ireland 2040*, and this objective can also be supported through the Regional Enterprise Plans.

Figure 1



2 West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1:

Build greater capability within the life sciences sector to meet its future needs



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2:

Ensure the continued sustainable growth of tourism in the West, including maximising the opportunities for the growth of Business Tourism



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3:

Build on the West's unique creative assets to realise increased employment and investment in the sector



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4:

Enhance the growth potential of Ag Tech in the West



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5:

Align training provision to local current and future skills needs



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 6:

Enhance the quality and availability of enterprise space in the West

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

1

Build greater capability within the Life Sciences sector to meet its future needs

CONTEXT

Across the West there is a globally recognised cluster of Life Science multinationals and indigenous companies, supported by active research assets, infrastructure and property solutions. NUI Galway (NUIG) and Galway Mayo IT (GMIT) collaborate closely with industry in the region in addition to providing a large graduate talent pool.

Research facilities include the SFI Centre for Research in Medical Devices (CÚRAM); National Centre for Biomedical Engineering Science (NCBES); Regenerative Medicine Institute (REMEDI); Network of Excellence for Functional Biomaterials (NFB); Centre for Chromosome Biology (CCB) and the Medical & Engineering Technologies Gateway at GMIT, among others.

However, it is important to note that there are both global and local challenges that will impact on the Life Sciences sector in both the short and long term. These include the impact of digital disruption on existing work practices, the demand for skilled workers and the changing profile of skills needs, and the need to support the development of the West region's Life Sciences ecosystem through the nurturing of entrepreneurs and start-up companies.

Supporting the continued prominence of Life Sciences in the West to the benefit of enterprise and the region's workforce requires a focused exploration of the sector's current and future needs, and a collaborative approach to providing solutions.

This objective will be pursued by a working group of the Steering Committee, bringing in expertise from industry representatives, training providers, and other stakeholders where needed.

VISION TO 2020

Future needs of the sector in the West are met to ensure the region's continued reputation as a recognised Life Sciences cluster.

KEY ACTIONS TO 2020

Action 1:

Establish a panel of life-science sector representatives to assess skills needs and to engage with the Regional Skills Forum to explore relevant provisions to meet these needs

Digital disruption is creating new skills needs and the potential for a digital 'talent gap' in the Life Sciences sector. This action involves bringing together a panel of sector representatives, from multinational and indigenous companies, to map the current and future skills needs of the Life Sciences sector and the region's ability to meet those needs.

Timeframe for delivery: Q1 2019

How will delivery be measured?

Group established

Mapping undertaken

Increased take up of supports

Responsibility: Life Sciences working group (IDA, EI, LEOs, Údarás na Gaeltachta, ETBs), with RSF

Action 2:

Identify opportunities to strengthen the life sciences innovation ecosystem and its connectivity within the region so as to drive increased take up of innovation supports and programmes.

A functioning innovation environment that maximises the use of local research assets and innovation supports is important to the ongoing development of the Life Sciences sector in the West. Under this action, the working group will examine barriers to the take-up of innovation supports and programmes, identifying areas where levels of adoption can be increased.

Timeframe for delivery: Q3 2019

How will delivery be measured?

Support and programme landscape in the region mapped; gaps identified

Responsibility: Life Sciences working group (HEIs, IDA, EI, LEOs, Údarás na Gaeltachta, ETBs)

Action 3:

Improve the delivery of supports to Life Sciences start-ups in areas such as enterprise space, finance, and mentoring.

Supporting start-up companies is crucial for the sustainability, diversity, and innovative capacity of the Life Sciences sector in the West. This action will focus on improving the delivery of supports to Life Sciences start-ups in areas such as enterprise space, finance, and mentoring.

Timeframe for delivery: Q2 2020

How will delivery be measured?

Increased take-up of supports

Responsibility: Life Sciences working group (IDA, EI, LEOs, Údarás na Gaeltachta, ETBs)

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

2

Ensure the continued sustainable growth of tourism in the West, including maximising the opportunities for the growth of Business Tourism

CONTEXT

In 2017, the West welcomed 1.9 million overseas tourists who spent €694 million while 1.6 million Irish residents visited the Region, generating €353 million. In recent years, there has been a strong increase in tourism to the West, in particular owing to the success of campaigns such as the Wild Atlantic Way. Alignment of regional tourism initiatives with the established Fáilte Ireland brands of the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands is vital to the success of tourism potential.

The challenge facing the sustainable growth of tourism in the West is to ensure the sustainable growth of business in destinations that are already performing well, including Galway City, Connemara, Westport, etc., while spreading the benefits of tourism to the more under-visited parts of the region, such as North Mayo and Roscommon. Therefore, policies which will deliver greater regionality and seasonality for the region should be prioritised.

Through the establishment of its two tourism experience brands, the Wild Atlantic Way (covering West Galway and Mayo) and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands (covering East Galway and Roscommon), Fáilte Ireland has put in place a clear vision and strategy for the sustainable development of tourism in the region. Through the roll out of a series of Visitor Experience Development Plans for a range of destinations in the West under each of these brands (there is one in place already for Connemara), Fáilte Ireland, together with the Local Authorities, the industry and other stakeholders, has taken a plan-led approach to the development of tourism in the region.

Within the Ireland's Hidden Heartlands brand area, a key project over the coming years will be the delivery and implementation of the Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon. The key challenge facing the Ireland's Hidden Heartlands part of the region will be to raise awareness of the area as a visitor destination, particularly to the domestic visitor in the formative years, and to ensure the delivery of viable clusters of attractions and activities.

In a region with a high proportion of people employed in the accommodation and food services sector (9 percent of all people employed), Business Tourism/Conferences and Conventions provide a means to sustaining employment and businesses in the sector through balancing out business across tourist seasons and across the whole seven-day week. In addition, the average international business tourist is worth 3 times that of the leisure tourist at €1,663 per international delegate (research conducted by IPSOS on behalf of Fáilte Ireland).

The West region is currently competing with other established convention bureaus in Ireland (Cork, Kerry, Shannon/Limerick and Dublin). Dublin Convention Bureau is part of Fáilte Ireland. Stemming from the activities of Galway Convention Bureau, convention/business tourism is currently concentrated in Galway, but membership extends out to Mayo and Clare and conference leads have been passed to Sligo and Mayo.

While the Convention Bureau is active in Galway it has the resources of one person, required to generate funding in order to keep the company going. This current funding model, with part-funding delivered through memberships, council, and other stakeholders is felt to be unsustainable; it is planned to secure guaranteed resources or a self-financing solution to make the company financially secure.

VISION TO 2020

The West region as an established 'destination' for conferences/conventions.

KEY ACTIONS TO 2020

Action 1:

Business Tourism Training

Continue to offer training programmes which specifically assist businesses in winning more business from corporate clients i.e. in terms of ensuring that familiarisation trips and site inspections are delivered in a professional manner. Fáilte Ireland will also continue to offer programmes to help businesses to develop their experiences and explore the financials of extending the tourism season. In addition, Fáilte Ireland will offer the following business supports in 2019/2020:

- Business Operations Excellence
- Sales Skills and Marketing Excellence
- Brexit Response Programme
- New Emerging Markets Readiness
- Fáilte Ireland Accredited Service Excellence

Timeframe for Delivery: 2019 – 2020

How will Delivery be Measured: Net Promotor Score

Responsibility: Fáilte Ireland

Action 2:

Support Fáilte Ireland in the delivery of and implementation of Visitor Experience Development Plans under the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands brands.

How will delivery be measured:

- Publication and implementation of a series of Visitor Experience Development Plans.
- Publication and implementatino of the Shannon Tourism Masterplan
- New product development

Responsibility: Fáilte Ireland, Local Authorities, Waterways Ireland, OPW, Coillte

Action 3:

Continue the work to roll out an integrated network of greenways, blueways and key trails that stretch across the entire region and connect to networks outside of the region.

Through the development of the Great Western Greenway, the West has set the template for the delivery of a successful greenway. The West can continue to deliver on a wider network of greenways and blueways that can be both motivating for international and domestic visitors and that can deliver great memorable experiences, in line with the Government's published policy on Greenways. The network needs to link with regional attractions, align with Fáilte Ireland brands, and be expanded by the development of connected walks, trails and drives. A shared plan between Fáilte Ireland, the Local Authorities, LEOs and the Leader Companies will be developed to ensure that the business environment around the network will be stimulated and facilitated so that all associated business opportunities are harnessed. Within Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, the delivery of an Activation Plan for the Beara Breifne Way will be a key action.

Timeframe for delivery: Ongoing Q1 2019 – Q4 2020

How will delivery be measured?

1. Funding applications for the development of greenways/blueways
2. Workshops to stimulate the business environment

Responsibility: Local Authorities; Leader companies; LEOs; Fáilte Ireland; Industry

Action 4:

Establish a plan for the sustainability of the Galway Convention Bureau

Develop a model for sustaining the Galway Convention Bureau, including securing any necessary funding or resources.

Timeframe for delivery: Q2 2019

How will delivery be measured?

Additional financial and personnel resources secured

Responsibility: Galway Convention Bureau, Fáilte Ireland, Local Authorities, WDC

Action 5:

Secure conference/convention bookings from multinationals in the region

Approach MNCs based in the region, with a view to pitching for the West as a destination for companies' global conferences.

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2019

How will delivery be measured?

Leads generated

Responsibility: Fáilte Ireland, Galway Convention Bureau, Local Authorities, WDC

Action 6:

Develop a suite of new and improved experiences for Mayo and Roscommon outside of the high season

In line with Fáilte Ireland's strategy to further develop regionality and seasonality, support the development and implementation of a series of Saleable Visitor Experiences with the private sector aligned to the Wild Atlantic Way and Irelands Hidden Heartlands strategic objectives, and complementary to the pursuit of leads for the business tourism sector.

Timeframe for delivery: 2019 to 2020

How will delivery be measured

Quantity of experiences on offer; extension of the season.

Increase in the number of visitors to Mayo and Roscommon outside of the high season.

Responsibility: Fáilte Ireland, private tourism operators, Local Authorities

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

3

Build on the West's unique creative assets to realise increased employment and investment in the sector

CONTEXT

Creative industries are globally significant and growing, and represent a unique regional strength for the West region and an opportunity to build on. The sector also has the potential to support a good balance of urban/rural employment. It is geographically dispersed and significant to the communities that support this kind of activity. The image of the West as a 'creative' region is also a factor that is attractive to potential investors and significant for placemaking.

This sector has a significant base of employment to sustain/develop, and the economic impact of this growth sector is measured. The Western Development Commission (WDC) undertook an analysis of the sector in the West region in 2009, which demonstrated a sector employing over 10,000 and with revenues over €500m³. More recently an NUIG study⁴, involving the WDC, established a sectoral value in 2017 of €729m with 12,871 employed.

The West region also has several unique Creative Assets:

- National Centre for Furniture Design and technology (GMIT Letterfrack)
- A recognised audio-visual and film sector
- A broad unique talent pool supported by Higher Education courses in NUIG, GMIT etc.
- An internationally recognised creative event schedule, Film & AV, Arts, Gaming etc.
- Regional Film fund: WDC developed with Galway film Centre and partners a solution for the regional film sector- Western Regional Audio-visual Producers Fund (WRAP Fund). This €2m fund was launched in October 2017
- Creative economy business network/platform: the region has established through EU Interreg funds a unique creative economy platform with 119 regional businesses showcasing their wares to global markets (<https://mycreativeedge.eu/>)
- European Capital of Culture 2020 (Galway)
- UNESCO City of Film (Galway)

The recent funding of An Spideal digital/incubation space through the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund will be a further asset to the region, through which recently established and medium-size enterprises in the creative sector can interact with one another, share resources and experience, and draw on integrated supports provided through Creative Enterprise West.

VISION TO 2020

- To be a globally recognised creative region with a clear understanding of how to grow the value to over €1b p.a.

3 www.wdc.ie/wp-content/uploads/reports_CreativeWest.pdf

4 https://mycreativeedge.eu/app/uploads/2018/02/west-ireland-eia-report-web-final_rev-compressed.pdf

KEY ACTIONS TO 2020

Action 1:

Form a project team for the creative economy (business/education/public sector) to develop and implement a plan to achieve enterprise and employment growth in the creative sector

The purpose of this group of regional 'specialists' will be to both answer questions and provide insights into the sector, as well as using data available to develop a plan for sector development; the regional advisory group will first conduct a formal review of the current position of the Creative Sector in the West and identify key needs for growth in enterprise and employment. Together with West REP Steering Committee members, the group will also develop and commence implementation of a plan to achieve sector growth in value and employment, based on the recommendations of the initial review.

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2019

How will delivery be measured?

Commencement of plan to achieve sector growth in value and employment
Identification of key steps/plan to achieve sector growth in value and employment
Implementation of the plan

Responsibility: WDC, Údarás na Gaeltachta, LEOs

Action 2:

Develop a programme to increase scale of companies in the Creative Sector

This action will focus on developing the business capability and acumen of small companies and sole traders in the creative sector, with a view to increasing scaling potential and resilience

Timeframe for delivery: Q2 2020

How will delivery be measured?

Programme developed and delivered.
Growth of creative sector companies

Responsibility: WDC, Údarás na Gaeltachta, LEOs, ETBs

Action 3:

Develop an umbrella brand for the promotion of the West region creative sector

This action proposes to achieve for the creative sector in the West region what the Wild Atlantic Way has achieved for tourism along the Atlantic coast – a branding proposition that brings together existing assets and which will feed into diverse placemaking and regional promotion initiatives

Timeframe for delivery: Q2 2020

How will delivery be measured?

Development of brand

Responsibility: WDC, Údarás na Gaeltachta, LEOs, EI

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

4

Enhance the growth potential of Ag Tech in the West

CONTEXT

The AgTech sector in the West offers the potential for job creation, job retention, and specialisation. There are multiple opportunities to be pursued: the opportunity to network companies that are operating separately; to bring sub-suppliers into food production; and to explore potential of collaboration in the West and beyond.

There are an estimated 14 indigenous companies operating in the sector, employing approximately 500 people. However there is no clear picture of the landscape and what companies need to develop and scale, and the West currently lacks an AgTech 'brand' like other regions. An examination of the Agri sector in the region is needed, including an assessment of the extent of networking and to assess if this network can be further developed and/or connected further into networks nationally.

VISION TO 2020

- To develop a best practice network of AgTech companies in the West who will share knowledge and create linkages to boost their production, sales and customer base.
- Forum of Government bodies in place to meet on a regular basis such as Teagasc, LEADER, Enterprise Ireland, Local Enterprise offices & Bord Bia.

KEY ACTIONS TO 2020**Action 1:**

Conduct a scoping exercise for the AgTech sector in the West region

This exercise will explore the supply side of the sector (what is out there and what do companies need?), and the demand side (what opportunities exist in the marketplace?) as a basis for the development of a 'plan of action' for the sector. Funding options such as LEADER will be considered for this exercise. The scope of what defines 'AgTech' for the purposes of this objective will also be decided (i.e food production, primary and secondary agriculture, engineering sector and bio science sector, marine; confinement to rural locations)

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2019

How will delivery be measured?

Increased interaction with Government agencies from AgTech clients or businesses

Responsibility: AgTech 'Forum'/Working Group - Teagasc, Leader, Enterprise Ireland, Local Enterprise Offices & Bord Bia.

Action 2:

Identification of best practice in enhancing capability and strengthen the AgTech network by identifying an Enterprise Champion

Develop a network of best practice with AgTech companies and other relevant partners within and outside of the region aimed at knowledge sharing, capability building and collaboration. An industry 'champion' is a useful mechanism to encourage businesses to collaborate..

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2019

How will delivery be measured?

Case studies and models of best practice examined and explained within Ireland and overseas. Increased take up or programmes/funding mechanisms for companies in the AgTech sector

Responsibility: AgTech 'Forum'/Working Group

Action 3:

Develop a 'plan for action' for the sector

With the information gathered within the scoping exercise above and best practice models, the group can then begin to examine the possibilities of programme development to increase scale in existing companies and encourage startups in the AgTech space.

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2019

How will delivery be measured?

Increased scale and job numbers for existing AgTech companies and increased numbers of startups in the AgTech industry.

Responsibility: AgTech 'Forum'/Working Group

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

5

Align training provision to local current and future skills needs

CONTEXT

The West is synonymous with a number of key industries with both national and global recognition, with Medical Technology, IT Services, Agriculture, and Marine playing a huge role in supporting economic growth and development. Action to support the supply of skilled workers to local industries is necessary to promote enterprise growth and sustain existing businesses, including:

- Employers to be made aware of what the educational institutions can offer and the range of programmes already available
- Design of bespoke programmes for industry to cater for current and future skill needs
- Provision of programmes that provide participants with portable and transferable skills
- Consolidation of links with the Regional Skills Forum and strengthening of sub-groups in key industry areas such as Med Tech, IT, Hospitality, Tourism, Business, Agriculture, and the Marine
- Provision of programmes aimed at increasing competencies, particularly among those who have returned to work or are working in small to medium enterprises and/or low paid sectors.
- Formalisation of links with agencies such as IDA, EI, Údarás na Gaeltachta, Western Development Commission, Teagasc, BIM.

Existing assets in the region include:

- Third Level colleges NUI Galway, GMIT, Athlone IT and Sligo IT offer a range of career options from level 6 to Level 10 on the NFQ
- Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board and Mayo Sligo Leitrim Education and Training Board offering programmes from level 1 to 6 on the NFQ
- ETB Training Centres offering a range of apprenticeships, from traditional craft apprenticeships to new technologies. A wide range of traineeships and Post Leaving Certificate programmes are available in IT, finance, hospitality, media, fashion, hairdressing, equine
- West Regional Skills Forum

Funded by the Department of Education and Skills, the West Regional Skills Forum is part of a network of nine Regional Skills Fora that has been created as part of the Government's National Skills Strategy 2025. The Fora provide an opportunity for employers and the education and training system to work together to meet the emerging skills needs of their regions.

The Fora have been established to align with wider Government policy and initiatives on regional economic development. The innovative structure of the Fora sees the work plan within each region being driven by key stakeholders in the region including employers, enterprises and education and training providers. The work of the Fora through facilitation and engagement will contribute to better outcomes for learners and support enterprise development.

The Fora provide a single point of contact in each region to help employers connect with the range of services and supports available across the education and training system; provide more robust labour market information and analysis of employer needs to inform programme development, greater collaboration and utilisation of resources across the education and training system; and enhancement of progression routes for learners. The Fora also provide a structure for employers to become more involved in promoting employment roles and opportunities for career progression in their sectors.

VISION TO 2020

State actors/education and training bodies working closely with industry to avoid duplication, with future skills needs identified and provision of supply to meet those needs.

The Steering Committee will seek to monitor performance under this objective in terms of:

- Employer engagements with industry and Education Sector. Consortium groups established
- Number of new employer engagement relationships formed in specific sectors
- Numbers accessing lifelong learning
- Review of targets of employees engaging in Skills for Growth or similar initiatives will take place
- Increase in current programmes and delivery of new initiatives in areas where there are definite skill gaps e.g. construction, sales, IT /languages
- Increased provision of on-line blended education and training options for employees

KEY ACTIONS TO 2020

Action 1:

Progress the development and roll-out of a 'Skills for Growth' initiative in the West Region.

As part of 'Skills for Growth' initiative the Regional Skills Forum will assist local enterprises identify their skills' needs through a variety of audit tools to ensure that the region has the effective use of skills to support economic and social prosperity. Once skill needs have been identified, Regional Skills Fora will link companies with the education and training providers best suited to responding to identified skills need.

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2019

How will delivery be measured?

Number of enterprises audited

Responsibility: RSF, and partners including EI, IDA Ireland, ETB, and DEASP

Action 2:

Develop a panel of business representatives to engage with second level students.

FET Steering Group to put together a panel of business representatives and employers who will be available to participate in planned seminars/webinars in relation to employment opportunities. ETBs

will partner with the LEOs in the region to avoid duplication and add value to existing programmes such as Student Enterprise Programmes and employer/student engagement events.

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2020

How will delivery be measured?

Increase number of seminars delivered in the region

Responsibility: Individual Educational Institutions and ETBs in partnership with Regional Skills Forum, LEOs

Action 3:

Support education and training providers in preparing applications under Springboard+ 2019 in collaboration with local enterprise in order to increase provision of programmes for upskilling and reskilling within the region.

Timeframe for delivery: Q2 2019

How will delivery be measured:

Number of successful applications.

Responsibility: RSF, HEIs.

Action 4:

Double the number of participants on the EXPLORE programme over the 2018 figure. The EXPLORE programme is designed to address the need for enhanced digital skills among older workers in manufacturing sectors within the region.

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2019

How will delivery be measured:

Number of participants

Responsibility: ETB, Regional Skills Forum.

Action 5:

Communicate to employers the services available through Regional Skills Forum to assist with resolution of emerging skills needs.

Timeframe for delivery: Ongoing

How will delivery be measured:

Increased number of engagements

Responsibility: RSF and other stakeholders.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

6

Enhance the quality and availability of enterprise space in the West

CONTEXT

Project Ireland 2040 has targeted a goal of achieving a one-third increase in levels of entrepreneurship and survival of start-ups trading in all regions. The availability and quality of suitable enterprise space will be important to supporting this ambition, with well serviced, connected locations for businesses and individuals to work serving as an attractive force for locating or starting a business.

Under this objective, the committee will ensure that appropriate assets are available to harness the entrepreneurial potential in the West region. The West region has a number of existing assets: part of this work will be to ensure that the region's existing portfolio of spaces is fit for purpose to attract start-ups and small businesses.

A number of projects in the West have been successful under recent funding calls of the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) and the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF), which will contribute to the enhancement of enterprise space provision in the region. These include:

- Galway City Innovation District (GCID) CLG (REDF): this project intends to refurbish the Portershed's 'Stables' building and construct on the site three new floors to provide coworking and event space for Technology and MedTech scale-up companies graduating from the PorterShed and from other incubation hubs in the region
- Midc Páirc na Mara (REDF): This project will develop a market-focused Marine Innovation and Development Centre that will provide 1,800 sq. mtrs. of enterprise and incubation space for marine enterprises. Through collaboration with regional stakeholders and the higher education institutes, the project will provide specialist training and business development supports and targets the creation of 200 jobs
- The Burren Lowlands CLG (REDF): The Burren Lowlands Project is a rural enterprise support project with co-working space, which aims to act as a focus point for the development of activities to create and attract additional jobs to this area
- gteic Hubs, Béal a' Mhuirthead (RRDF): The provision and redevelopment of 8 Enterprise/Digital Hubs at 6 locations (Belmullet, Gweesalia, Aughleam, Achill, Tourmakeady and Greanaí/Ballina) in Co. Mayo (2 facilities in both Belmullet and Achill). The hubs in Aughleam, Gweesalia, Achill and Belmullet will have a specific focus on business clusters in Irish Language development, sports, marine and creative industries, respectively.
- gteic Hub An Spidéal (RRDF): This project will deliver a dedicated enterprise and digital and incubation space totalling 750m² in Spiddal, in which recently established and medium-size enterprises in the creative sector can interact with one another, share resources and experience, and draw on integrated supports provided through the Creative Enterprise West.
- Ballina Innovation Quarter (URDF)

In addition to enterprise space, there is an emerging understanding of the importance of assets that can facilitate remote working – which can benefit both businesses and individuals and is of particular relevance outside core urban areas.

There is an opportunity to build the functionality and improve the sustainability of existing assets by connecting enterprise spaces to other relevant offerings such as mentoring, finance facilities, and business development supports.

This objective will support and complement the work ongoing under the Enterprise Space subgroup of the Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) Taskforce, which aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of the enterprise space offering along the AEC. AEC officers, funded jointly by the Department of Rural and Community Development and each local authority, have also been put in place to develop the AEC concept and support the work of the AEC Taskforce and sub groups, such as the mapping of enterprise space across the broader region.

VISION TO 2020

The West region will have the capacity of enterprise space available to meet the needs of local businesses and entrepreneurs, with spaces linked to supporting business services.

KEY ACTIONS TO 2020

Action 1:

Publish a regional enterprise space audit

Through engagement with the work of the AEC Taskforce, develop and publish a central list of information on enterprise space availability in the region

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2019

How will delivery be measured?

Audit published

Responsibility: Local Authorities, AEC Officers, DRCD

Action 2:

Work with the owners/managers of existing enterprise space to assess and address the facilities and functionality of current enterprise spaces

Assess the quality and suitability of existing enterprise spaces in the region, identifying areas for improvement and gaps in provision

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2019

How will delivery be measured?

Assessment complete and gaps identified

Responsibility: Local Authorities, AEC Officers, LEOs, EI, IDA

Action 3:

Network/connect existing enterprise spaces to other business supports

Assess the extent of connection between existing enterprise spaces and other supports such as mentoring, finance facilities, and business development supports, developing a plan to improve this networking where there are gaps.

Timeframe for delivery: Q2 2020

How will delivery be measured?

Network established; potential for common/linked supports mapped

Responsibility: Local Authorities, AEC Officers, LEOs, EI

3 Enterprise Agency and LEO activities in the West to 2020

In order to achieve the 2020 employment targets and maintain strong regional enterprise and job creation performance, the Strategic Objectives and collaborative actions identified for the West are set alongside and complement the core activities of the Enterprise Agencies, the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs).

The Enterprise Agencies each have corporate strategies which include national level objectives as well as frameworks for bespoke regional activities that support regional enterprise development potential and leverage regional assets and opportunities.

This section provides an overview of these activities in the West to 2020, including their ongoing support for the installed base of companies in the region as well as the range of supports and initiatives that they are undertaking to foster and attract new enterprise development and investment for the region.

The contributions and remit of other relevant agencies and bodies in the West are outlined in Appendix 4.

Enterprise Ireland

Enterprise Ireland supports companies in urban and rural areas to start, innovate and remain competitive in international markets, now and into the future. At the centre of the agency's strategy, *Build Scale, Expand Reach 2017 - 2020*, are strategic targets focused on:

- Assisting clients to create 60,000 new jobs by 2020 while sustaining the existing record level of jobs;
- Growing the annual exports of client companies by €5bn to €26bn per annum;
- Increasing the level of spend made by client companies in the Irish economy by €4bn to €27bn per annum by 2020; and
- Inspiring more Irish owned companies to have global ambition.

The 5,000 manufacturing and internationally traded services companies that Enterprise Ireland works with are a critical source of existing employment and job creation in every county in Ireland.

Reflecting the strength of the Irish economy and of global markets in 2018, Enterprise Ireland client companies reported strong employment performance. Enterprise Ireland's 2018 employment survey reported:

- the highest employment in the 20 year history of the agency with 215,207 people employed in Enterprise Ireland supported companies;
- the successful number of net jobs created which saw 9,119 new jobs created after losses are taken into account, with over 60 percent of these outside Dublin;
- the lowest number of job losses since 1998; and
- employment growth across all regions.

Enterprise Ireland is working with client companies through a network of market and sector advisers from ten offices located throughout the country. This network enables the agency to connect and collaborate at a local level with enterprise development partners to assist in driving the multiagency response required to promote regional development. Enterprise Ireland engages with established client companies through teams of sectoral focused development advisors using a company led diagnostic approach which is used to establish clients' business needs. Based on this, the agency can tailor a support package to the company's growth potential based on their ambition, capability and need. A support package focuses, where relevant, on six business pillars (Innovation, Finance, Operations, Sales and Marketing, People and Organisational Development). Enterprise Ireland actively works with established clients throughout the country on an one-on-one basis to deliver this client engagement model.

The EI Corporate Strategy "Build Scale Expand Reach 2017 - 2020" places the regions at the core of economic growth in Ireland. The strategy sets ambitious targets to sustain 200,000 existing jobs and to create 60,000 new jobs nationally by 2020.

Enterprise Ireland's Regional Plan 2019 builds on this Strategy. It is a plan which identifies "National Initiatives" that are impactful and will develop regions of scale. The plan entails a vision that is ambitious and proposes a number of new initiatives which will have significant impact on economic development in the regions. The plan is founded on four core objectives:

- To maximise growth of Enterprise Ireland Clients in the regions
- To strengthen Regional Infrastructure to maximise future growth of Irish Enterprise in the Regions
- To support Entrepreneurship in the Regions
- Work in collaboration to deliver Regional Growth

Enterprise Ireland's overall vision for the region is: "All regions growing optimally, based on their innate and unique strengths and capabilities, sustaining and creating regional jobs and thereby, maximizing the contribution made by each region to economic growth & national prosperity".

Enterprise Ireland in the West

- In 2018, 14,547 people were employed across 391 Enterprise Ireland supported companies in the Western region.
- EI supports all sectors with success deriving from sectors such as manufacturing of food products, pharmaceutical production and specialised construction activities.
- Enterprise Ireland has co-funded, with local enterprise development groups, 157 Community Enterprise Centres across the country including 43 in the Western region. These centres provide space in a supportive environment for budding entrepreneurs and serve to help the development of entrepreneurship locally.
- Enterprise Ireland, in partnership with the Institutes of Technology, has established a nationwide network of 15 Technology Gateways which deliver technology solutions for Irish industry close to their market needs and are open to all sizes of companies. The Galway-Mayo IT has one such gateway; MET - Medical & Engineering Technology.
- Enterprise Ireland has funded the establishment of a national network of business innovation centres and specialist bio-incubation facilities across the Higher Education Sector. Galway is currently home to 3 business innovation centres; NUI Business Innovation Centre, NUI Galway Innovation in Business Centre (IIBC), Galway, Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology and the Innovation in Business Centre (IIBC), Castlebar, Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology.
- EI supports and collaborates with HEIs in the region including NUI Galway and Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology through Innovation supports such as the Commercialisation Fund, Innovation Partnerships and Innovation Vouchers.

Local Enterprise Offices

The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) in every county are the 'first-stop-shop' for providing advice and guidance, financial assistance and other supports to those wishing to start or grow their own businesses. In the first instance, the LEOs provide a 'signposting' service in relation to all relevant State supports. The LEOs can also offer advice and guidance in areas such as Local Authority rates, Public Procurement and other regulations affecting business.

The LEOs can offer grant aid to microenterprises in manufacturing and internationally traded services sectors which have the potential to develop into strong export entities, in addition to 'soft' supports in the form of training, a mentor to work with the business proposer, or targeted programmes such as Lean for Micro (to help boost business productivity and competitiveness).

In line with the Regional emphasis of the LEOs, the results from the Annual Employment Survey 2017 show that 7,135 gross jobs were created of which 5,775 were outside Dublin or 81 percent. A total of 3,760 net jobs were created of which 3,051 were outside Dublin or 81.2 percent.

The West is served by its Local Enterprise Offices in Galway, Mayo and Roscommon which are co-located with the Local Authorities. In 2017, the LEOs operating the West supported an additional 354 jobs from 2016 (total of 3057 jobs) and the establishment of 10 new companies, bringing the total number of companies supported by the LEOs in the West to 628.

IDA Ireland

IDA Ireland is the State's inward investment promotion agency. The mission of the agency is to partner with multi-national companies to win and develop foreign direct investment, providing jobs for the economic and social benefit of Ireland.

IDA's current strategy, *Winning: Foreign Direct Investment 2015-2019*, sets out ambitious targets to support the delivery of its mission to win and develop Foreign Direct Investment in Ireland. These include:

- Win 900 new investments for Ireland
- Support clients in creating 80,000 new jobs
- Grow market share and help maximise the impact of FDI investments
- Focus on greater balanced regional development

Regional development is a key pillar of IDA's strategy. For the first time, ambitious investment targets have been set for each region. IDA is targeting a minimum 30% to 40% increase in the number of investments for each region outside Dublin. These investments are a combination of new name investments, expansions from existing overseas companies in Ireland and R&D investments. To deliver on these ambitious targets IDA Ireland has;

- Worked with public bodies and the private sector on the Regional Enterprise Plans
- Worked with existing clients to retain and strengthen their presence in each region
- Increased Global Business Services and High-Tech Manufacturing investments
- Aligned IDA business sectors with regional strengths to develop sectoral ecosystems
- Work more closely with EI and its client companies to identify synergies, enhance clusters, participate in site visits and maximise benefits for the region through the Global Sourcing Program
- Delivered property solutions in designated regional locations
- Increased IDA Ireland's regional footprint to adequately support the regional strategy

2019 represents the final year of IDA's current Strategy "Winning 2015-2019". In implementing the strategy, IDA Ireland has shown a clear determination to showcase the many benefits that are to be found for companies locating in regions. Significant gains have been made in deepening and growing FDI outside Ireland's main cities. To date, 407 regional investments have been won and 27,000 net jobs have been added on the ground in regional locations. A total of 58% of all IDA client supported jobs are now located in the regions

with every region of the country experiencing employment gains in 2018. In addition to direct employment and skills transfer, IDA Ireland's client companies have a hugely positive effect on the local economy with over eight jobs being created for every 10 jobs in an FDI company. A total of 50% of the €5.7bn in annual capital expenditure by IDA client companies occurs outside of Dublin. These investments have been won despite the demographical challenges that exist and international trends of greater urbanisation.

IDA Ireland is committed to playing its part in the economic development of Ireland's regions. However, winning investments is a challenge and will require a continued collaborative effort by all national and regional stakeholders.

Regional locations must continuously demonstrate the capability to deliver on a number of exacting criteria which generally inform the location decisions of multinationals.

An assessment of investments delivered for regions since 2015, would confirm the strategic importance of key criteria in actually influencing the investment decision;

- Critical mass in population
- The ability to attract and develop appropriate skills
- The presence of Third Level Institutes
- The existence of clusters of companies in specific industry sector
- Regional Infrastructure
- Regional Place Making Strategies
- Availability of high spec standard Manufacturing & Commercial Office Properties

To support the delivery of IDA's current strategy and the attraction of investments into different parts of the country, a €150m property investment plan was announced in 2015. IDA Ireland's approach of developing strategic sites and developing advanced buildings has proven to be hugely successful. In 2019, IDA Ireland will continue its building programme with the design and construction underway of advance buildings

in Sligo, Dundalk, Athlone, Waterford, Galway, Monaghan and Limerick.

Over the course of 2019, IDA Ireland will be developing the agency's new five-year strategy. This strategy will take account of the changing nature of work and the impact of technology on specific sectors. Profound changes are occurring in the world of work and this is already reflected in the jobs being created by the IDA Ireland client base. We can see an increasing complexity in the roles being created, technology skills becoming ubiquitous across roles, increasing demand for business professionals and a fall in the number of low-skilled jobs including back office support and basic manufacturing. This transition is likely to impact the nature and type of roles across the Regions of Ireland.

Building on the success achieved to date, IDA will continue to collaborate with all stakeholders and parties in the Regions to realise the economic potential and ambition of Irelands regions under the Regional Enterprise Plan.

IDA in the West Region

The IDA West includes the counties of Galway, Mayo and Roscommon. There are 106 IDA supported companies in the West, employing 25,968 people in total.

The West has been successful over a number of years in mobilising inward foreign direct investment (FDI) with employment levels in IDA client companies consistently increasing every year since 2009.

There is a significant ecosystem of well-established Medtech and Life Sciences companies, which has helped drive strong cluster development. This is evidenced by the continued growth of Life Sciences companies such as Allergan, Baxter and Hollister in Mayo and Medtronic, Merit Medical and Boston Scientific in Galway and Harmac Medical in Roscommon. The number of people employed in software engineering, technical support, global business services and R&D in the Region has also grown considerably in recent years. Companies such as Valeo in Tuam, Lionbridge in Ballina, SAP, Cisco, Avaya and EA Games in Galway have all

expanded their operations. The existing FDI base of client companies in the West continue to perform well in terms of their operational sustainability, job retention and ongoing transformation.

There is a thriving, dynamic and innovative enterprise base in the region and the presence of the 3rd level institutes of the National University of Ireland Galway and the Galway Mayo Institute of Technology in Castlebar and Galway are key to nurturing and producing the talented graduates required to help attract further investment in existing FDI companies in the region and winning new investments.

The West, while embracing a new multicultural and multilingual identity, has, at the same time, retained its focus on Irish heritage and language making it a unique location in which to live work and relocate to.

To support the delivery of IDA's current strategy Winning FDI 2015-2019, a €150m property investment plan was announced in February 2015. This investment was to focus on the building of Advance Building Solutions (ABS), infrastructure investment in a number of Utility Intensive Strategic site solutions and the upgrade of Business and Technology Parks within IDA's national portfolio. IDA's property investment programme for the West includes the construction of Advance Building Solutions (ABS) in Castlebar, Co. Mayo and in Galway. An Advance Office Building (AOB) has also been constructed in Parkmore Galway, and delivered through a PPP model. New developments by the private sector in developing incubation space are welcomed and IDA Ireland will continue to promote FDI appropriate properties that support co-working spaces (eg The Portershed in Galway). IDA will continue to work closely with Enterprise Ireland and its indigenous base of companies to identify synergies, enhance clusters, participate in site visits and maximise benefits for the Region.

IDA has a number of flagship Business Parks in key locations in Galway, Mayo and Roscommon which have been designed and landscaped to a high standard and are occupied by many high end manufacturing and international services clients with capacity to facilitate and accommodate new

international investment. IDA also has strategic sites available in Oranmore and Athenry in Galway which have and are being developed to facilitate large scale utility intensive developments to support further growth in the region. IDA also works closely with the private sector to secure the provision of appropriate and cost-effective building and property solutions suitable for FDI clients.

The West is very well positioned to continue to attract new FDI investment and grow employment in existing companies and IDA will continue to collaborate with all stakeholders and parties in the region to achieve this under the Regional Enterprise Plan.

4 Implementation of the Regional Enterprise Plan

The consultation process to refresh and refocus the original Regional Action Plans was enhanced by an understanding amongst stakeholders of the importance of ownership, collaboration, and the definition and delivery of specific measurable actions in the new Plans that could add value to the existing activities being undertaken by the Enterprise Agencies, LEOs and other relevant bodies involved in supporting enterprise development. These priorities are reflected in the implementation structure for the new Regional Enterprise Plans.

The existing Regional Implementation Committee construct will be maintained for each region but will be renamed as a 'Regional Steering Committee'. Each Committee will continue to be chaired by a senior figure from the private sector who has been appointed by the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation. The functions of the Steering Committee are as follows:

- Oversee and drive delivery of the REP.
- Agree an annual work programme for the Committee based on the Plan.
- Nominate and secure 'Champions' to support delivery of the Strategic Objectives.
- Agree key milestones and metrics for delivery of each actions.
- Oversee the formation of working groups as necessary to drive implementation of actions.
- Explore and propagate new ideas and opportunities for collaborative projects, and funding.

- Provide a forum for the sharing of updates and information by members on key enterprise development initiatives including those set out by the Agencies and LEOs in this Plan and other pertinent updates (incl. REDF, RSES, *Project Ireland 2040* etc.).
- Oversee, contribute to and sign off (through the Chair) on annual Progress Reports to DBEI.

Full details of the composition of the Steering Committee is contained in Appendix 1.

The Chairperson will convene at least three meetings of the Steering Committee per year and will present a progress update on their Plan to the Minister at an annual meeting of all Chairpersons in the second half of 2019. This meeting will provide a fora for the Chairs to share good practice and identify potential areas for inter-regional co-operation. The Chairperson will also lead the Committee in the preparation of two progress reports to be submitted to the Department at the end of 2019 (mid-term) and end of 2020 (final report).

It is intended that each Steering Committee will oversee the formation of smaller working groups to drive delivery of actions or groups of actions in the REP. Working Groups will convene as frequently as is required and will report on progress to the Chairperson and the Steering Committee on a regular basis. They will also provide input to the annual progress reports in relation to their action(s).

Each region has the resource of a Programme Manager/Secretariat which has been provided through the Local Authorities. The Programme Manager/Secretariat will support the Chairperson and the Steering Committee in the coordination and delivery of the Plan and will be the primary operational point of contact with DBEI.

The Final Progress Reports for the Regional Action Plans for Jobs 2015-2017/8 provide a closing status in relation to all actions in these original reports and can be found on the Department's website at www.dbei.ie. The original Plans continue to be a useful resource for the REPs going forward as an input to the rolling work agenda for the initiative.

Finally, DBEI will be responsible for the oversight and coordination of all REPs at a national level. The Department will provide ongoing advice, guidance and support to the Chairpersons, Programme Managers/Secretariat and Steering Committees.

Targets for the West Region to 2020

The Regional Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017 set out two core outcomes for achievement in each region by the end of 2020:

- employment growth of between 10 and 15 percent; and
- an unemployment rate reduced to within one percentage point of the State average.

Utilising new data from the CSO Labour Force Survey (LFS)⁵, the rate of growth and unemployment rates achieved for the West region during the 2015-2017 lifetime of the original Regional Action Plan and up Q3 2018 are outlined in Table 1.

The West region has already achieved an employment growth rate exceeding the upper end of the 2020 target at the beginning of 2018, and unemployment in the region had reduced to below the State average. Since then, the unemployment rate has moved back to 6.6 percent due to an increase in the number of unemployed people. For a more detailed statistical analysis of the region's performance, please see Appendix 2.

The focus for the West over the period to 2020 is to sustain the momentum of employment growth achieved since 2015 and to reduce unemployment levels further to more closely match the national average. The strategic objectives and actions in this Plan, along with the core activities of the various Agencies and Bodies involved in supporting enterprise development over the coming two-year period will support this.

5 In 2018, the CSO introduced a new quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS) to replace the original Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS), which incorporated a new survey methodology and applied new NUTS 3 regional administrative boundaries used by Eurostat. The CSO later produced comparable ('back-casted') data at regional level to overcome the resulting break in the time series between old QNHS data and the introduction of the new LFS.

Table 1

	Numbers Employed				Unemployment Rate	
	Q1 2015	Q3 2018	Change Q1 2015 to Q3 2018	Growth Q1 2015 to Q3 2018	Q1 2015	Q3 2018
West	180,300	208,700	28,400	15.8%	12.6%	6.6%
State	2,014,400	2,273,200	258,800	12.8%	10.5%	6.0%

Source: CSO Labour Force Survey, Q3 2018

Appendix 1: Membership of the Regional Steering Committee

Organisations represented on the West Steering Committee⁶

Chair of the West Committee:

Gerry Kilcommins
VP Worldwide Vascular Operations, Medtronic

Membership of the Committee:

Enterprise Champions	Fáilte Ireland
Galway County Council	InterTrade Ireland
Mayo County Council	Ibec
Roscommon County Council	Bord Bia
Galway City Council	Teagasc
Galway Local Enterprise Office	Waterways Ireland
Mayo Local Enterprise Office	Bord Iascaigh Mhara
Roscommon Local Enterprise Office	NUIG
Enterprise Ireland	GMIT
IDA Ireland	Athlone Chamber of Commerce
Northern & Western Regional Assembly	Galway Chamber of Commerce
Regional Skills Forum: West Region	WestBIC
Galway Roscommon Education & Training Board	Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation
Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education & Training Board	Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
Údarás na Gaeltachta	
Western Development Commission	Department of Rural and Community Development

Secretariat/Programme Management:

Mary Blowick

⁶ The existing Implementation Committees will be renamed 'Steering Committees'

Appendix 2: Brief profile and statistical snapshot – West

Constituent counties	Galway, Mayo and Roscommon	
Regional Population & change (1996-2016)	352,353 (1996): 453,109 (2016) increase of 100,756	
GVA ⁷ per person 2000 and 2015	€18,954: €29,677	
Total in employment	208,700*	
Labour Force Participation rate	61.1%*	
Unemployment rate	6.6%*	
Unemployment blackspots ⁸	8 ⁹	
Percentage employed in Manufacturing: Services: Public sector	17%: 20%: 23%	
Educated to third level in West: State	46%: 45%	
Third Level Students (full-time & part-time)	24,085 ¹⁰	
Number of enterprises ¹¹ (micro: small: medium: large) (2016)	21,840: 1,416: 249: 28	
Number of Enterprise Ireland High Potential Start-Ups ¹² (HPSUs) West: State (2017)	9: 90	
EI supported employment & no. client Companies 2016 - 2017	2016	2017
	Jobs: 12,838	Jobs: 13,997
	Companies: 618	Companies: 628
IDA supported employment & no. client companies (2017)	2016	2017
	Jobs: 22,070	Jobs: 23,286
	Companies: 96	Companies: 101
LEO supported employment & no. client companies (2017)	2016	2017
	Jobs: 2,905	Jobs: 3,057
	Companies: 618	Companies: 628
Number of LEO Priming Grants ¹³ West: State (2017)	15: 294	

7 Gross Value Added (GVA) is the measure of the value of goods and services produced in an area, industry or sector of an economy.

8 Unemployment Blackspots are defined as Electoral Districts with at least 200 people in the labour force and an unemployment rate of 27% or higher

9 Unemployment blackspots in the Region: Galway County (2), Mayo (5) & Roscommon (1)

10 National University of Ireland, Galway (17,703) & Galway – Mayo Institute of Technology (6,382)

11 A Small Enterprise is defined as: an enterprise that has fewer than 50 employees and has either an annual turnover and/or an annual Balance Sheet total not exceeding €10m: A Medium Sized Enterprise is defined as: an enterprise that has between 50 employees and 249 employees and has either an annual turnover not exceeding €50m or an annual Balance Sheet total not exceeding €43m: A large Enterprise is defined as: an enterprise that employs greater than 250 employees, has either an annual turnover of greater than €50m or an annual balance sheet of greater than €43m

12 HPSUs are start-up businesses with the potential to develop an innovative product or service for sale on international markets and the potential to create 10 jobs and €1m in sales within 3 years of starting up.

13 A Priming Grant is a business start-up grant, available to micro enterprises within the first 18 months of start-up.

The West is home to a strong ecosystem of both indigenous and multinational companies operating across a diverse range of sectors, with particular strengths in the Medical Device/BioMed and ICT sectors. The West is the hub of a globally recognised MedTech cluster, employing the highest per capita of Medical Technology personnel in Europe. There is a growing cluster of Lifesciences/Pharmaceutical companies, especially in Mayo and Roscommon, while Galway is becoming a major technology hub, particularly around internet and collaborative working technologies.

The Region has traditionally had a spirit of innovation and collaboration, coupled with a high level of self-employment and entrepreneurship, including in the Creative Industries.

There are strong educational and research institutions in the West, notably through NUI Galway and Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT), with a large, well-educated young talent pool available to companies. Given the region's natural resources, the West has the potential to significantly harness opportunities in renewable energy and maritime technology.

The Region is home to significant tourism and cultural assets, which includes a large section of the Wild Atlantic Way as well as the Shannon River and Lakelands.

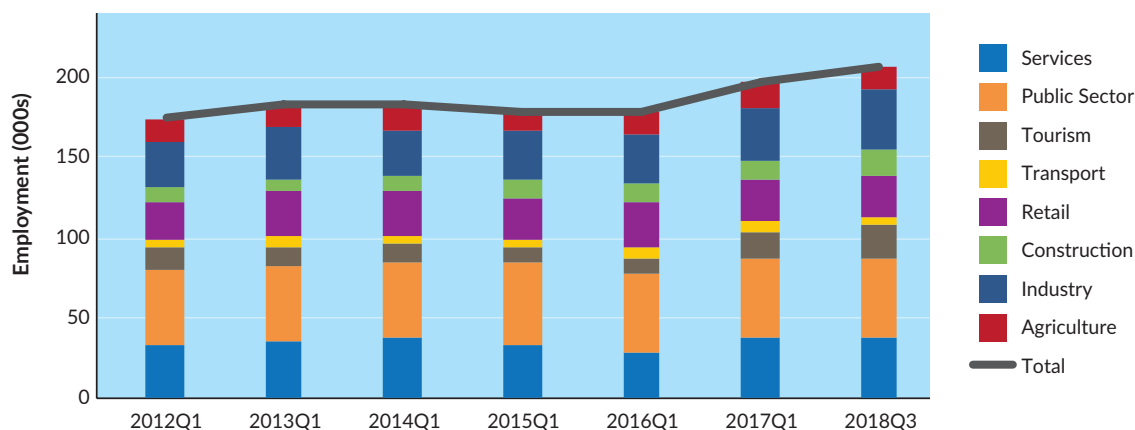
The West neighbours the the North-West, Mid-West and Midland and has close collaborations with those regions. For example, Athlone town straddles the counties of Roscommon in the West region, and Westmeath in the Midland region. The enterprise and labour market base of the Athlone hinterland therefore overlaps the two regions and is equally important to the economy of both regions.

Transport links to and within the West region have improved considerably over recent years, although some intra-regional linkages remain weak. The region is well served by air through Ireland West Airport, Knock and by Shannon Airport as an intercontinental gateway, in the neighbouring Mid-West region. Local connectivity by air and sea to the offshore Aran Islands is also important both for residents of the islands and for tourists. The West region is also served by Galway Port - a designated Port of Regional Significance under National Ports Policy - which provides shipping links to the UK and Europe and is an important strategic regional hub for petroleum importation, storage and distribution.

Employment trends

In Q3 2018 there were 208,700 people employed in the West. Over the period Q1 2015 to Q3 2018, employment overall has grown by 15 percent with 28,400 more people employed. The structure of the sectoral employment has changed little over that period, with some adjustments evident. Chart 1. shows the employment figures from Q1 2012 to Q3 2018.

Chart 1. West employment growth (CSO)



Services

Employment in the Services sector, including the Public sector, has increased significantly from 123,700 in 2012 to 140,000 in Q3 2018 and the Sector currently accounts for 67 percent of all employment in the West. This highlights the contribution to employment in the West. There are currently 140,000 people working in the Services Sector and within the broad Services sector, the combined areas of Public Administration/Defence, Human Health/Social Work and the Education sector account for 50,600 of those employed in the West which represents 36 percent of all Services employment and 24 percent of the total employment in the region, which is similar to other regions.

Retail/Wholesale

Retail and Wholesale which forms a significant part of the Services sector and is the largest private sector employer in the country, with particular significance for regional towns and villages. Employment in the sector in Ireland is regionally dispersed with approximately 70 percent employed outside Dublin, 26,700 people are employed in the sector in the West region.

Industry/Manufacturing

Employment in the Industry/Manufacturing sector has also increased slightly over the period Q1 2012 to Q3 2018 with 9,500 more employed in the Sector. Employment in this sector counts for 18 percent of employment in the region which is above the national figure of 12.5 percent.

Construction

The Construction sector employed 8,200 in Q1 2012 and this numbers has increased to 14,400 in Q3 2018, accounting for 7 percent of the total employment which is similar to the national trend.

Agriculture

The Agricultural sector employed 15,000 in Q1 2012 and this fell to a low of 13,800 in 2015, however, the numbers have started to grow and is now at 14,800 at Q3 2018.

Tourism

CSO figures indicate that the Tourism sector employed 19,000 in Q3 2018. However, these figures can be considered as conservative as they only cover employment in accommodation and food services. The actual figure maybe somewhat higher if other "Services" employment, for example in visitor attractions is included.

Appendix 3: Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF)

The €60 million Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) was launched in May 2017 with the overarching aim of driving enterprise development and job creation in each region throughout Ireland. Administered by Enterprise Ireland, it supports new collaborative and innovative initiatives that can make a significant impact on enterprise development in the region/across regions, or nationally.

Over the first and second calls under the REDF, the West Region secured funding of over €7 million across four projects:

Call	Project	Description
1	BIA Innovator Campus CLG	Food entrepreneurship and innovation centre
2	Galway City Innovation District CLG	Co-working, office, event, and soft-landing space
2	Midc Páirc Na Mara	Market-focused Marine Innovation and Development Centre
2	The Burren Lowlands CLG	Local enterprise platform

The West Regional Steering Committee will work closely together with other stakeholders to leverage the opportunities that these projects will generate in the coming years. The Steering Committee can also assist in identifying projects that have the potential for funding in the future.

Appendix 4: State Agencies and Bodies supporting enterprise development

Local Authorities

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 provided for the strengthening of the role of Local Authorities towards economic, social and community development. Local Authorities therefore have a strong role in promoting economic development and sustaining and creating a positive environment for job creation. There is good rationale for increased local government involvement in economic development because of the economic impact of its functions generally, its links with enterprise, its local knowledge and leadership, the economic initiatives by many Local Authorities, and its local development and enterprise functions.

Operation of micro-enterprise support services through the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) and Local Authority Business Support Units are now key elements of the local government role in economic development. Other economic development functions include:

- contribution to Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies,
- a strong direct role for Local Authorities in promoting economic development, more clearly specified in legislation;
- ensuring that all Local Authorities focus their general functions and services proactively towards supporting enterprise and economic development;
- leading and mobilising economic development locally in conjunction with relevant agencies;
- drawing up local economic development plans in conjunction with the overall City/County Development Plan.

The economic development role is supported by a dedicated Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) in each local authority service.

Bord Bia

Bord Bia, the Irish Food Board, is responsible for the development of new markets and the promotion of Irish food, drink and horticulture, reporting to the Department of Food, Agriculture, and the Marine. The agency's mandate covers trade development, promotion, quality programmes, information provision and marketing support especially for export markets. Bord Bia operates in thirteen overseas locations. Its Origin Green programme is the only sustainability programme in the world that operates on a national scale, uniting government, the private sector and food producers.

Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM)

BIM is the state agency with responsibility for developing the Irish sea-fishing and aquaculture industries. BIM's mission is to lead the sustainable development of a competitive, market-led, innovative and quality-driven Irish seafood industry, maximising the returns to industry stakeholders and the socio-economic contribution to communities in coastal regions in particular. BIM is focused on expanding the volume, quality and value of output from the Irish seafood industry. It provides a range of advisory, financial, technical and training services to all sectors of the Irish seafood industry. BIM's Strategy 2013-2017 is an action plan that aims to deliver 1,200 jobs and €1 billion seafood sales by building scale and enhancing competitiveness in the Irish seafood sector.

Fáilte Ireland

Fáilte Ireland is the National Tourism Development Authority. Their role is to support the tourism industry and work to sustain Ireland as a high-quality and competitive tourism destination. Fáilte Ireland provide a range of practical business supports to help tourism businesses better manage and market their products and services.

Fáilte Ireland also work with other state agencies and representative bodies, at local and national levels, to implement and champion positive and practical strategies that will benefit Irish tourism and the Irish economy.

Fáilte Ireland promote Ireland as a holiday destination through domestic marketing campaigns and manage a network of nationwide tourist information centres that provide help and advice for visitors to Ireland.

InterTradelreland

InterTradelreland's mission is to support businesses, through innovation and trade initiatives, to take advantage of North/South co-operative opportunities to improve capability and drive competitiveness, jobs and growth. InterTradelreland helps small businesses through a strong mix of funding support, business intelligence and meaningful contacts. It supports companies not only with funding, but also with specialist expertise and introductions.

Regional Skills Fora

Funded by the Department of Education and Skills, the network of 9 Regional Skills Fora has been created as part of the Government's National Skills Strategy 2025. The Fora provides an opportunity for employers and the education and training system to work together to meet the emerging skills needs of their regions. The Fora have been established to align with wider Government policy and initiatives on regional economic development. The innovative structure of the Fora sees the work plan within each region being driven by key stakeholders in the region including employers, enterprises and education and training providers. The work of the Fora through facilitation and engagement will contribute to better outcomes for learners and support enterprise development.

The Fora provide a single point of contact in each region to help employers connect with the range of services and supports available across the education and training system; provide more robust labour market information and analysis of employer needs to inform programme development; greater collaboration and utilisation of resources across the education and training system; and enhancement of progression routes for learners. The Fora also provide a structure for employers to become more involved in promoting employment roles and opportunities for career progression in their sectors.

Skillnet Ireland

Skillnet Ireland was established in 1999 and is funded from the National Training Fund through the Department of Education and Skills. The primary objective of Skillnet Ireland is to increase participation in enterprise training by companies. Skillnet Ireland fosters an enterprise led approach to workforce development. The process of determining training needs and coordinating the delivery of training, is primarily owned by the enterprise groups engaged with Skillnet Ireland. Skillnet Ireland operates under a joint investment model, part-funded by matching contributions from participating businesses in our learning networks. Encouraging enterprise to lead the process in this way helps ensure that programmes delivered through Skillnet Ireland are highly relevant to the needs of industry. This approach also enables cohesive enterprise networking and the flexibility to respond to ever-changing skills demands through

both formal and informal learning. Through 65 plus Skillnet Learning Networks, Skillnet Ireland allocates funding to groups of companies in the same industry sector (or region) and with similar training needs, so they can deliver subsidised training for their teams. Skillnet Ireland also plays a key role in supporting and enabling Skillnet funded groups to reach their full potential.

Science Foundation Ireland (SFI)

Science Foundation Ireland is the national foundation for investment in scientific and engineering research, operating under the auspices of DBEI. SFI invests in academic researchers and research teams who are most likely to generate new knowledge, leading edge technologies and competitive enterprises in the fields of science, technology, engineering and maths. SFI has supported the establishment of 17 National Research Centres, aligned with the research priority areas set out in Ireland's research prioritisation exercise (which is currently being refreshed). SFI plays a key role in developing international relationships in the research and innovation domain. It is instrumental in raising Ireland's profile and visibility as a location of research excellence in international markets, thus strengthening Ireland's attractiveness for overseas investment.

Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI)

The purpose of the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) is to play a leading role in transforming Ireland into a society based on sustainable energy structures, technologies and practices. SEAI provides a range of programmes and services to homes, businesses, schools and communities. It is a key actor in providing research and advice to Government on sustainable energy policy, including renewables and energy efficiency.

Údarás na Gaeltachta

Údarás na Gaeltachta was established in 1980 as the regional authority responsible for the economic, social and cultural development of the Gaeltacht. The overall objective of Údarás na Gaeltachta is to ensure that Irish remains the main communal language of the Gaeltacht and is passed on to future generations. Údarás supports businesses in developing new markets, technologies, products and strategic alliances through research and development.

Waterways Ireland

Waterways Ireland is one of six North-South Implementation Bodies established under the British-Irish Agreement in 1999. It has responsibility for the management, maintenance, development, promotion and restoration of inland navigable waterways, principally for recreational purposes. The waterways under the remit of the Body are the Shannon-Erne Waterway, the Shannon, the Erne Navigation, the Barrow Navigation, the Grand Canal, the Lower Bann, and the Royal Canal.

Department of Rural and Community Development

The Department of Rural and Community Development also has a role to play in contributing directly to the Regional Action Plans through initiatives such as the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, the Town and Village Renewal scheme and the Atlantic Economic Corridor initiative. The Department's social inclusion programmes - most notably the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SIACP) - also contribute to supporting disadvantaged urban and rural communities.

Western Development Commission

The Western Development Commission (WDC) was established under statute in 1998 to help tackle population decline in the West of Ireland. Its remit covers seven counties: Roscommon, Mayo, Galway,

Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, and Clare. The WDC works to ensure that economic and social policy and practice meet the development needs of the Western Region effectively. Activities include conducting research on regional and rural issues, promoting specific initiatives including sectoral opportunities, and managing and administering the WDC Investment Fund (WIF). This dedicated fund provides risk capital on a commercial basis to projects and businesses through equity and loans.

Third Level Institutes

- National University of Ireland, Galway
- Galway – Mayo Institute of Technology

Appendix 5: Project Ireland 2040

The National Planning Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan under *Project Ireland 2040* have been developed in conjunction to link spatial planning policy and infrastructure capital investment to support the potential in all regions. The NPF, as part of *Project Ireland 2040*, aims to guide the future development of Ireland to 2040 and to influence the spatial patterns of a projected 1 million increase in our population.

The NPF is a long-term framework that sets out how Ireland can move away from the current 'business as usual' pattern of development. The purpose of the NPF is to enable all parts of Ireland, whether rural or urban, to successfully accommodate growth and change, by facilitating a shift toward Ireland's regions and cities other than Dublin, while also recognising Dublin's ongoing key role.

The NPF also sets out a number of key national objectives which include enhanced regional accessibility, strengthened rural economies and communities, and enhanced amenities and heritage. The Ireland 2040 plan sets out a strategy to enable people to live closer to where they work, moving away from the current unsustainable trends of increased commuting; reverse rural decline and promote environmentally sustainable growth patterns and plan for and implement a better distribution of regional growth, in terms of jobs and prosperity.

The Government is focused on unlocking the potential in each region by a co-ordinated delivery of infrastructure and at the same time, enabling regional enterprise development that will enable better distribution of the future anticipated population growth across the whole country while also tackling congestion and quality of life issues.

Project Ireland 2040 Funds

In 2018 the Government launched *Project Ireland 2040* and committed €4 billion in funding under the Rural regeneration and Development Fund, Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund and the Climate Action Fund. The four funds are a major innovation in *Project Ireland 2040* and rather than allocating funding in a 'business as usual' way to Government Departments, money is allocated competitively to the best projects, which leverage investment from other sources thereby ensuring that the impact of this investment goes further.

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF)

As part of *Project Ireland 2040*, the Government has committed to providing an additional €1 billion for a new Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) over the period 2019 to 2027. Initial funding of €315 million is being allocated to the Fund on a phased basis over the period 2019 to 2022. The Fund will provide investment to support rural renewal for suitable projects in towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000, and outlying areas. It will be administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development.

The new Fund provides an unprecedented opportunity to support the revitalisation of rural Ireland, to make a significant and sustainable impact on rural communities, and to address de-population in small rural towns, villages and rural areas. It will be a key instrument to support the objectives of the National Planning Framework, and in particular to achieve Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities – one of the National Strategic Outcomes of the NPF.

Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF)

The €2 billion Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) is intended to drive regeneration and rejuvenation of strategic and under-utilised areas within Ireland's five cities, key regional drivers and other large towns. The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG) has responsibility for implementing the fund, which has €100m available for expenditure in 2019 and an overall allocation of €550 million allocated to the fund up to the end of 2022. The fund will operate on a competitive, bid-based Exchequer grant basis, with proposals being required to demonstrate that they will be:

- Innovative and transformational urban regeneration projects;
- Public-sector led and with the option of community and/or private sector partners;
- Matched by at least 25 percent direct funding from other public and/or private sources;
- A minimum bid of €2m;
- A catalyst for development that would not otherwise occur; and
- Likely to leverage significant further public and private sector investment.

Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund

The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation launched funding under the Government's new Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund. €500 million is available for co-funded projects involving enterprises and research partners over the period to 2027.

Disruptive technology is that which has the potential to significantly alter markets and their functioning and significantly alter the way that businesses operate. While it involves a new product or process, it can also involve the emergence of a new business model. Disruption is about the combination of technology and business model innovation.

Proposals are expected to address the development, deployment and commercialisation of one or more disruptive technologies to deliver new solutions through investment in the development and implementation of new products and services. Ultimately, the projects funded will create the jobs of the future.

Climate Action Fund

The National Development Plan 2018-2027 sets out the creation of a Climate Action Fund to support climate action projects which will leverage investment by public and private bodies. The Fund will have an allocation of at least €500m over the period to 2027.

On 29 May 2018, the Government agreed to establish the Climate Action Fund. This includes the objective of funding initiatives that contribute to the achievement of Ireland's climate and energy targets in a cost-effective manner. It also offers the potential for innovative interventions which, in the absence of support from the Fund, would not otherwise be developed.

Regional Spatial & Economic Strategies

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly has a leadership role to play in identifying regional policies and coordinating initiatives that support the delivery and implementation of national planning policy. It will also be the way the region organises for success in economic development – for the entire region – to shape a sustainably resilient place. The RSES adopts unique and innovative 'place-based' policies that harness the strengths of initiatives like the Regional Enterprise Plan and Atlantic Economic Corridor.

Set out in the RSES, by 2027 the collaboration on a focused growth agenda has the potential to generate significant economic growth and increased employment across the region. But both public and private stakeholders in our regions must cooperate to achieve the vision of an urban led, rurally-connected place with high growth and quality of life.

The intent behind the RSES is to provide regional level strategic planning and economic policy in support of the implementation of the National Planning Framework. Our region justifies a focus in the National Planning Framework. This is due to a historically lower level of urbanisation compared to other regions, proximity to the border and risks posed by geopolitical dynamics.

The region also has a number of historical challenges impacting on its competitiveness and sustainability. Most notably the comparably lower level of investment in enabling infrastructures such as ports, harbours, utilities, roads, rail and utilities.

The resulting impact has created a profile of a region addressing matters such as:

1. Distance and Scale
2. Skills retention and development
3. Generating Greater Value From Our Knowledge and Innovation System
4. Access to Capital to Fund Innovation
5. Infrastructure and Accessibility
6. Perception of this region and associated narrative

A concerted response is required. A certain level of infrastructure, quality of education, advanced producer services and quality of life are needed to support informational-type economic activities and businesses.

In the absence of centres of scale that can provide these items, certain economic activities will not operate in the region and specific groups of workers will migrate out of the region. If these resources are lost, the region risks entering a vicious circle of regional economic decline.

Thus, the NWRA is concerned with initiatives that focus on achieving higher economic growth from both the existing (or mature) sectors of our economy as well as those that are new or emerging.

We need to supply the right housing, infrastructure, jobs and services where and when our communities need it. We must be even better at the things we do well to create new growth. We are perfectly positioned to lead development if we connect our strengths as a low carbon, green and natural economy.

The primary vehicle for delivering the NPF is through the implementation of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies. This strategy aims to provide regional level strategic planning and economic policy in support of the implementation of the National Planning Framework and provide a greater level of focus around the National Policy Objectives and National Strategic Outcomes.

Atlantic Economic Corridor

The Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) initiative is a collaborative project between the public and private sectors to maximise the infrastructure, talent and enterprise assets along the western seaboard from Kerry to Donegal, and to combine the economic hubs, clusters and catchments of the region to attract investment, support job creation, improve quality of life and contribute to the Government's regional development objectives.

In this context, the AEC initiative and the Regional Enterprise Plans for the regions along the western seaboard will be mutually reinforcing in supporting enterprise growth, job creation and investment in the regions concerned.

The AEC initiative involves business representatives, national and local government, State agencies and Third Level Institutions. It is led at Government level by the Department of Rural and Community Development.

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