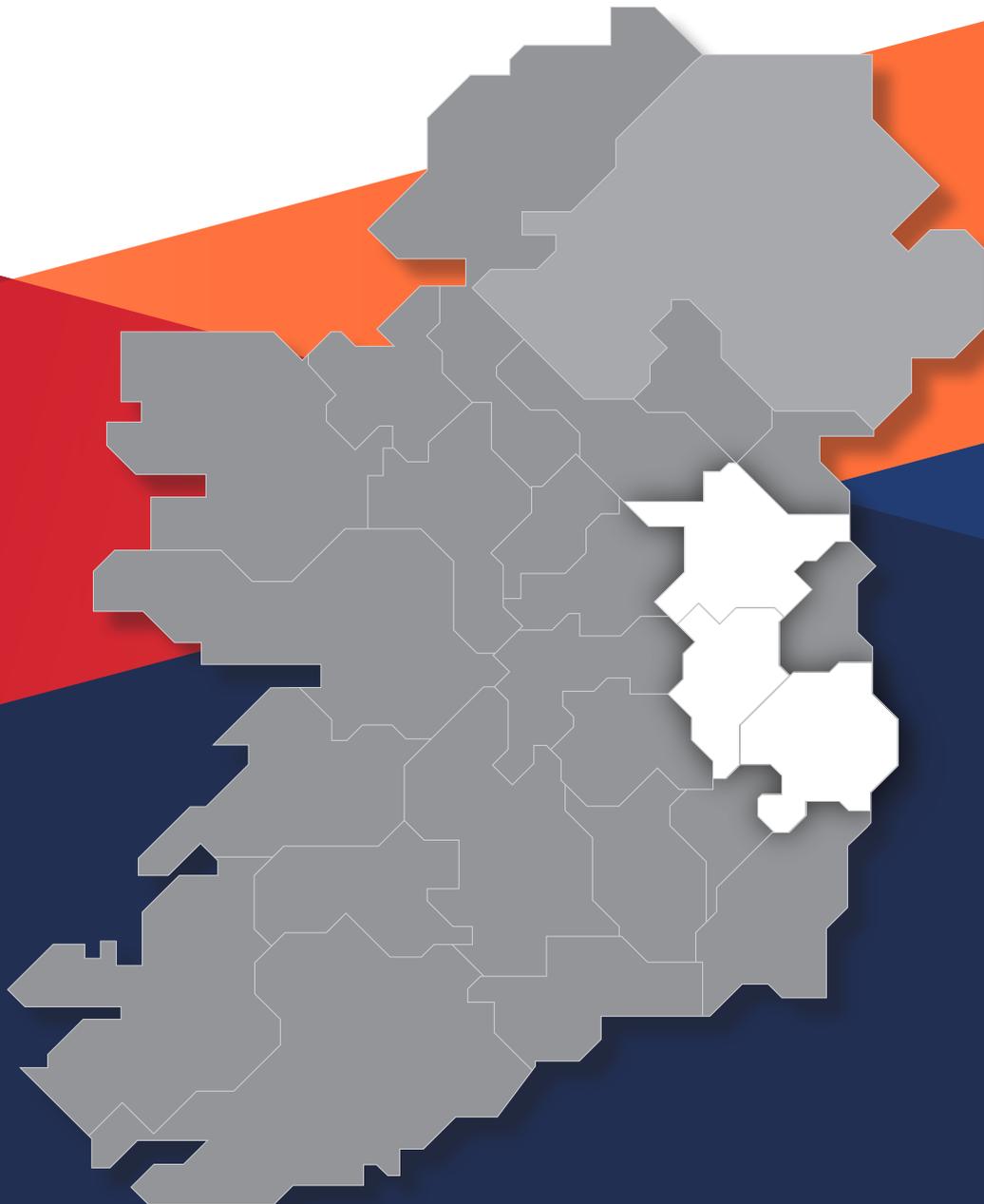




Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020

MID-EAST



An initiative of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation

Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020

MID-EAST

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Minister's Foreword

Realising the enterprise and jobs potential in all 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 Mid-East region, the 2015-2017 Regional Action Plan for Jobs (RAPJ) set out 163 actions to support job creation and accelerated economic recovery. At the end of that period, more than 136 actions were completed or substantially progressed, and more than 32,200 jobs have been created in the region. With an unemployment rate currently at 5.8 percent much has been achieved.

This Regional Enterprise Plan (REP) for the Mid-East 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 Mid-East 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 Mid-East 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 Mid-East 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 as 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 Mid-East has already secured nearly €3.5 million across two 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 Eamonn Sinnott for their work on the roll out of the first RAPJ for the Mid-East 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 Mid-East Regional Enterprise Committee, I am pleased to see the publication of this Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 for the Mid-East Region.

Overall, it reflects a vision for Kildare, Meath and Wicklow that is not just about delivering the four core objectives identified in the Plan, but setting out an ongoing legacy and culture of enterprise development in the Mid-East that revitalises and sustains our communities.

As a committee we have identified a number of challenges that could act as barriers to the continued growth of our region and country. The availability of high speed broadband will be critical in ensuring connectivity to the local and global marketplace. It is imperative that we continue to engage with the education and training providers to deliver a highly skilled and adaptable workforce. We must also continue to invest in key infrastructural projects that will assist the region in delivering on the objectives set out.

This Regional Enterprise Plan is the product of a period of positive and productive collaboration with key stakeholders of the Implementation Committee, through which we have achieved a much more strategic approach that focuses on core, 'game-changing' projects for the region.

While the original Mid-East Action Plan for Jobs set out a framework for public and private sector organisations to collaborate, the time and

commitment given since April to 'refresh and refocus' the direction of the APJ has allowed this Plan to truly develop from the ground up. The focus and commitment achieved through this process will be key to the success of the Plan, as will the recent recruitment of a dedicated Programme Manager: an essential differentiator for this new phase of implementation.

This Plan focuses on four core objectives:

1. Developing the Mid-East as a hub for the Screen Content Creation Sector
2. Developing a Network of Innovative Co-working Workspaces
3. Building an ecosystem framework to support the Agri-food sector
4. Ensure the availability of Skills and Talent to realise the Region's future economic potential and address upskilling requirements

The achievement of these objectives will be met through the delivery of defined actions, outlined in the Plan. The willingness and buy-in from all local stakeholders to collaborate regionally will be essential to the success of the Plan.

With that in mind, I want to take the opportunity to thank the committee for their contributions and commitment over the past number of months, and I also want to thank the Mid-East Enterprise Champions – Siún ní Raghallaigh, John Cunningham, and Kate Brosnan – for giving of their time and

significant expertise to make sure this Plan is informed by a strong enterprise perspective. I look forward to continuing to work with this group to see the Plan implemented successfully.



Eamonn Sinnott,
Vice President, Technology & Manufacturing Group
General Manager, Intel Ireland

*Chair
Mid-East Regional Enterprise Plan*

1 Policy Context

The Mid-East 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 Chapter 3 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 as national policy initiatives and 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 the '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 the Mid-East

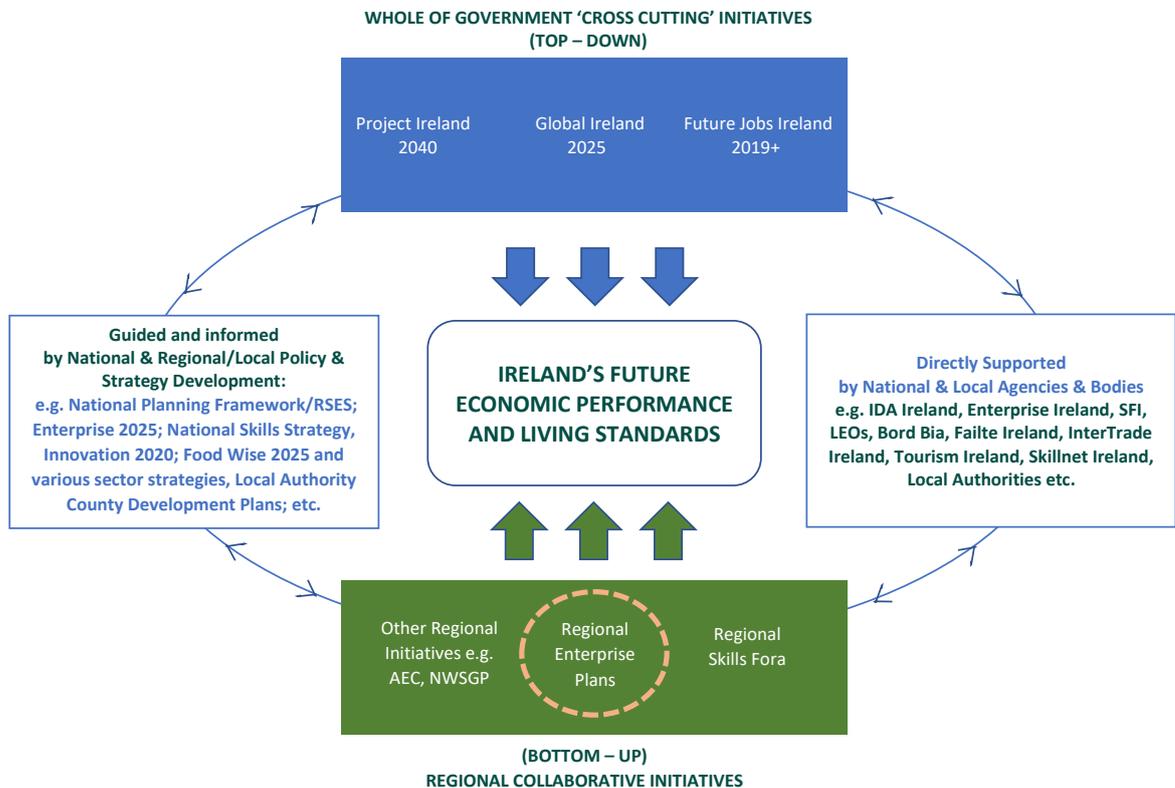
- realising the full potential of our regions
 - developing places that are attractive for business investment and for people to live and work; and
- raising Ireland's visibility internationally, protecting Ireland's reputation, and providing opportunities for our enterprises supported by the Global 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 Mid-East Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1:

Develop the Mid-East as a hub for the Screen Content Creation Sector



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2:

Develop a network of innovative co-working spaces



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3:

Build an ecosystem framework to support the agri-food sector in the Boyne Valley



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4:

Ensure the availability of skills and talent to realise the Mid-East's future economic potential and address upskilling requirements

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

1

Develop the Mid-East as a hub for the screen content creation sector

CONTEXT

The ways in which screen content such as video, audio and animation is created, produced, disseminated and consumed has altered dramatically in the past decade. These rapid changes internationally in the screen industry are set to endure, as the requirement for content continues to escalate, technology advances, and consumers change how they consume content. The opportunities for content creators are significant and continue to grow rapidly, across all forms of content, including short videos, episodic programmes, and full feature films.

The screen industry in Ireland has developed an international reputation and makes a significant economic contribution. A recent report by consultants Olsberg SPI with Nordicity found that the Irish Audio-Visual Industry supported 14,370 full-time equivalent jobs in 2016; with Gross Value-Added amounting to €857 million and an estimated €191 million in export earnings for Ireland. The Irish film, television and animation industry is experiencing a period of sustained success and critical acclaim providing valuable cultural exports reaching substantial global audiences and bringing benefits to other industries such as the tourism sector.

Reflecting the established strengths in Ireland in the screen industry, Irish Government policy has identified the economic opportunity, in terms of jobs potential, revenues, exports and regional development, that the screen industry presents, to enable Ireland to become a global hub for screen content creation and doubling employment in this sector within the next five years.

Within the Mid-East Region, Wicklow and the East Coast has an established screen creation sector with an existing internationally recognised screen industry cluster, a long tradition of content creation for the film and television industry, the presence of two of the major studios in Ireland, a large number of skilled crew and talent living in the area, and an attractive connected location. The screen creation cluster in Wicklow represents a strong best practice model.

There is also potentially an opportunity for the development of screen tourism experiences and this will be looked at further with Fáilte Ireland.

VISION TO 2020

Develop and strengthen the proven screen content creation hub in the Mid-East region and assist the creation of jobs in the region in this sector, in alignment with the industry-wide Audio Visual Action Plan as part of Creative Ireland.

KEY ACTIONS TO 2020

Action 1:

Develop and operate a Content Creation Enterprise Hub at Wicklow County Campus, Rathnew

Finding affordable business premises is a challenge for smaller companies, particularly those working in the Animation, VFX, and Games sectors. There is a current distinct lack of suitable cluster or accelerator spaces, meaning many of these companies end up with employees working from home, which has a major impact on productivity. In other markets, investment in such facilities has been shown to generate networking and agglomeration effects, magnifying the impacts of public support for these industries.

Providing specialised, customised and sector-specific business supports that drive start-ups, growth and internationalisation of Irish content creation businesses, the Content Creation Enterprise Hub at Wicklow County Campus will support the positioning of Ireland's East Coast region as a leader in content creation and production by facilitating content creation entrepreneurs to identify and exploit new businesses models for the creation and commercialisation of content. The scope of the project will impact across the East Coast region including counties in the South-East, Mid-East and Dublin regions.

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2020

How will delivery be measured?

- The Wicklow County Council Project Team will identify and apply for funding streams that will deliver upon the development of the content creation enterprise hub
- Hub manager appointed
- Hub developed and in full operation

The project management will be supervised by the Wicklow County Council Project Team. Hub specific KPIs will be monitored on an on-going basis by the Hub manager who will report monthly, quarterly and annually to the Board and members of the special purpose company (Clermont Enterprise Hub CLG) established to set up and operate the new facility and at half year intervals to the Industry Advisory Group. The KPIs for the Content Creation Enterprise Hub focus on:

- Firms that directly access supports e.g. start-ups on Start programme; users of co-working space/shared spaces, participants in industry events and support services as well as enterprises permanently located in the building
- The broader industry in terms of impact on growth and internationalisation of firms, IP creation, levels of financing of projects, foreign investment
- The financial operation of the Hub

Responsibility: Wicklow County Council/LEO Wicklow, Enterprise Ireland

Action 2:

Activate Content Creation and Feeder Industry Networking Events

Building on the South Eastern Creative Corridor programme, further networking opportunities to facilitate business partnerships and collaboration will assist in the consolidation of this existing cluster. Development of a programme of Expert Voices Seminars and stand-alone networking events will also be undertaken.

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2020

How will delivery be measured?

- Number of seminars and events established. Sector impacts in terms of industry cluster
- Growth in employment
- Internationalisation of businesses
- Increases in access to financing
- Value of IP created

Responsibility: Wicklow County Council/ LEO (Screen Skills Ireland/Screen Ireland/Enterprise Ireland/IDA Ireland/industry partners)

Action 3:

Develop the talent pool through Skills, Training, and Education

Commence the provision of content creation industry related training programmes in partnership with 3rd level institutions, vocational training bodies and Screen Skills Ireland/Screen Ireland, to address the skills gaps and screen creation needs, at Wicklow County Campus, Rathnew. Development of innovation in the sector through partnership with IT Carlow at Wicklow County Campus and the Courtyard Content Creation Hub will be undertaken.

The Screen Industry is one of County Wicklow's unique selling points due to the location of Ardmore and Ashford Studios and the long film making history in the county. Beside the tourism development opportunities, there are also skills and training and education opportunities to address the skills gaps currently present in the industry as identified by the Crowe Horwath report . There are also opportunities to develop sectors associated with the screen content industry such as animation, design, construction, CGI, graphics and VR.

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2020

How will delivery be measured?

Sector specific training programme established. Sector impacts in terms of industry cluster and talent pool:

- Number of start-ups participating in 'Screen Industry Start'
- Number of start-ups progressing to next round funding
- Number of start-ups achieving HPSU status with Enterprise Ireland
- Value of IP created
- Number of established SMEs participating in 'Accelerate' type programmes.

Responsibility: Wicklow County Council/LEO/IT Carlow (Screen Skills Ireland /Screen Ireland/ KWETB/Industry partners)

Action 4:

Encourage and assist in the growth and scaling up of the existing content creation industry in the Mid-East

Wicklow is the only county in Ireland with two large scale studios, Ardmore Studios and Ashford Studios. These facilities are the enablers for the employment of hundreds of people who work on high end TV series such as *Vikings*, *Penny Dreadful*, *Into the Badlands* and many feature films. To achieve

growth in jobs, the infrastructure needs to be supported and expanded. There is currently international demand in the marketplace for quality industry standard studio space which in turn attracts millions of euros of investment and spend in the local economy creating hundreds of jobs.

In light of the popularity of *Vikings* and the development of a Visitor Experience Development Plan for Viking, there is an opportunity to scope out the potential of screen tourism experiences.

This action involves engaging with the existing key stakeholders in the industry in Wicklow to determine the needs/supports that can be put in place to ensure the Mid-East is in a prime position to be a key location of international content creation.

In implementing this action, the key stakeholders will collaborate to assist the content creation industry to scale upwards in the Mid-East region.

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2019

How will delivery be measured?

Mid-East to support a plan to cover:

- Infrastructure
- Training needs
- Identification of gaps in support services
- Location services - identifying key locations for filming

Responsibility: Wicklow County Council/ Industry partners/ Fáilte Ireland

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

2

Develop a network of innovative co-working spaces

CONTEXT

In towns and villages across the Mid-East there is evidence of a considerable number of people commuting on a daily basis out of the region to their place of work. Census 2016 showed that three quarters of all commuters into Dublin city and suburbs came from the top four Local Authority areas of Fingal, Kildare, Meath and Wicklow.

From Kildare, over 28,000 workers in 2016 were commuting to work in Dublin City and Suburbs; with over 21,000 commuting from Meath, and over 19,000 from Wicklow. Trends also indicate that there has been an increase in the numbers of workers who are looking for more flexibility in work practices. In its 'The Year in Job Search' report, job site Indeed revealed that the number of Irish people searching for jobs using the term 'remote' working surged 171 percent in 2017.

Implications arising from extended periods of commuting include:

- The negative impact on the quality of life of the workforce and their families
- The impact on public infrastructure such as transport systems
- The cost implications for companies in the capital such as potential costs of staff replacement if commuting becomes unsustainable
- The loss of this creative, technical and managerial brainpower from the Mid-East

Kells Technology Hub and MERITS Think space in Naas are providing an initial response to this issue. The Kells Technology Hub, funded by Meath Local Authority and REDZ, is currently open for business, and will house more than 60 workers and provide spaces for start-ups and training and development. The MERITS think space in Naas, funded by the Kildare Local Authority and the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF), will house more than 100 tech workers when it opens in 2020. It will also be an advanced Landing Zone for FDI and will work closely with MaynoothWorks to extend and enhance the technology ecosystem in the region.

MERITS will be a new, purpose built, 'co-working' incubation and accelerator space in Naas, for technology entrepreneurs and technology businesses, specifically those involved in the digital economy, internationally traded services, and high-tech manufacturing. Clients will get access to MaynoothWorks' considerable experience and expertise in building and supporting high tech companies as well as the many other benefits available to existing MaynoothWorks clients.

The long-term ambition of this objective is to create at least 10 more of these spaces in the Mid-East region; connected in a network and housing over 1,000 tech workers, centrally directed but locally managed and driven by a range of stakeholders.

Open workspaces build real ecosystems. They serve as places for peer-to-peer interaction, which would otherwise not be possible. These collaborative opportunities lead to, and feed from, new ideas, new networks and new audiences. Ultimately they create more jobs, but the community is about much

more than that. It makes the neighbourhood and the city more attractive to residents and businesses alike – old, new and potential.

Such work spaces will provide desk and office space, a co-working community, the supports and networks that technology entrepreneurs and businesses need to start, internationalise, and grow their businesses, and access to shared co-working space 'innovation tools'. Such innovative spaces are also a resource to existing companies who need to place projects in innovative, creative work environments. Building ten flexible work spaces can and will involve a myriad of stakeholders, funding sources and areas of focus from Creative, Film and AV Content to Food and ICT.

VISION TO 2020

In the next 5 years, the vision is to see more than 1,000 people working in 10 or more distributed flexible workspaces throughout the Mid-East, no longer having to commute outside the region.

KEY ACTIONS TO 2020

Action 1:

Develop and operate the Mid-East Regional Think Space (MERITS) in Naas County Kildare

MERITS' vision is to serve the emerging technology sector by connecting organisations and people, and acting as a centre of excellence in supporting innovative companies across the region. MERITS will offer a dynamic workspace with state of the art digital and tech facilities, but perhaps more importantly it will facilitate access to real business opportunities and to the region's research and innovation system of Universities, R&D centres, etc.

MERITS will comprise/deliver:

- Incubation space for indigenous enterprise and companies graduating from MaynoothWorks (MW).
- Acting as a soft-landing space for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)
- Think Space for existing companies seeking an offsite venue for ideation
- Added benefit to clients through networking and access to research in Maynooth University in addition to providing Design Thinking and Innovation Consulting services and training
- With a staff of 3 the industry-led approach will facilitate the delivery of tailored solutions to address specific new product development needs of industry partners

Timeframe for delivery: Q3 2020

How will delivery be measured?

- Completion of 1300m² building in Naas
- Creation of a best practice model of service from the MERITS building

Responsibility: Kildare County Council (Enterprise Ireland; Kildare, Meath & Wicklow LEOs; Maynooth University; Kildare County Chamber; KWETB; Skillnet Ireland; other industry representatives)

Action 2:

Develop 10 flexible working spaces to facilitate remote workers and drive entrepreneurship in the region based on the MERITS model

Where possible the project will build on existing resources and infrastructure across the region to create 10 collaborative spaces with a common working agreement.

Timeframe for delivery: Q3 2020

How will delivery be measured?

- Identification of co-working office resources and office space business hubs that are available throughout the region and compliment tech working.
- Development of partnership agreements with suitable spaces
- Sourcing of funding where locations aren't identified
- Roll out of best practice model of service from the MERITS Building

Responsibility: Regional Enterprise Plan Committee (with other stakeholders)

Action 3:

Provision of a support structure for the development of the Talent Pool for technology startup and expansion businesses in the Mid-East.

The vision is to support this activity in collaboration with Maynooth University, to see the tech ecosystem grow on regional level, and with positioning in the global marketplace.

The pillars of MERITS include:

- Supporting emerging tech companies to start and grow internationally
- Collaboration with external providers (MaynoothWorks, consultants, etc) to grow regional strengths and global positioning
- Networking and connectivity amongst emerging tech companies across the region
- Creating an environment for critical thinking in order to stimulate innovation and enterprise
- Up-skilling regional companies with the provision of on-site training in innovative thinking and processes

Timeframe for delivery: Q3 2020

How will delivery be measured?

Development of skills/training support structure for technology businesses in the region

Responsibility: Kildare County Council (Maynooth University)

Action 4:

Branding and Promotion - establish the MERITS initiative as the premier tech location in Ireland and continue to provide assistance to tech workers

One of the biggest challenges for co-working spaces, also one of the biggest opportunities, is knowing how to extract co-workers' talent, experiences and stories and turn them into a source to attract new members, encourage the community to grow and provide added value to existing members.

Furthermore, given the recognised 'quality of life' and 'affordability' of the region, the Think Spaces aim to be an attractive location for enterprise development for entrepreneurs outside the region (inward 'migrating' entrepreneurs) – particularly from Dublin.

Timeframe for delivery: July 2020

How will delivery be measured?

- Delivery of an effective marketing and communication strategy
- Creation of a central website and blog
- Delivery of regional networking and training events

Responsibility: Kildare County Council (Enterprise Ireland; Kildare, Meath & Wicklow LEOs; Maynooth University; Kildare County Chamber; KWETB; Skillnet Ireland; other industry representatives)

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

3

Build an ecosystem framework to support the agri-food sector in the Boyne Valley

CONTEXT

The agri-food sector makes a powerful contribution to the economy of the Mid-East and North-East regions. The Boyne Valley has been synonymous with food production and trade dating as far back as 10,000 years ago. The region typifies the ambition of the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine's ten year strategy for the agri-food sector Food Wise 2025 - 'Local Roots Global Reach' and acts as a base for some of Ireland's leading indigenous and high growth food businesses including Largo Foods, Dawn Farms, Meade Potato Company, Kerry Foods, Lir Chocolates, Epicom, and others. They are joined by a growing group of micro food businesses blazing a trail to market through the efforts and support of Local Enterprise Offices across the Mid-East and North-East.

Since 2015, Boyne Valley Food Innovation District has been building an ecosystem framework that joins the forces of these leading-edge companies, leveraging cooperation amongst them and uniting with public sector drivers for food, innovation, regional development and education at national and regional level.

The Boyne Valley Food Hub will go a considerable way in addressing the shortage of food incubators in Ireland. A 2016 study highlighted that there is a gap in infrastructural resources for food entrepreneurship and this is particularly acute in the Dublin area.

Boyne Valley Food Hub transforms 790m² of enterprise space in Navan Enterprise Centre into food grade facilities with 9 units available for start-up and scaling food businesses, a timeshare development kitchen and a food specific co-working and knowledge lab to create higher levels of connectivity, collaboration and innovation in the food and drink sector. The project is greatly shaped and influenced by Food Wise 2025 which projects significant growth for the agri-food sector over the coming years, with a target of 85 percent exports growth to €19 billion by 2025, as well as an increase of 23,000 jobs over the period.

A recognised lack of easy-to-access food grade facilities is seen as a serious barrier to the establishment and growth potential of artisan food producers who struggle to support the capital requirements of setting up a production facility.

As a now proven response in rural Ireland, timeshare community kitchens can act as a very tangible incubator of emerging artisan food producers in an area. The community kitchen concept first emerged in the US as a unique way to provide aspiring entrepreneurs with time-share access to value added production facilities and the opportunity to start and expand specialty food and catering businesses without the prohibitive cost. The Boyne Valley Food Hub incorporates a well-equipped kitchen space available to rent on a timeshare basis for low risk and eligible food production and proof of concept innovation projects.

Having secured funding of over €1.5 million under the second call of the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF), work can begin to bring this ambition to life.

VISION TO 2020

Increasing access to international markets through smarter, greener growth over the next decade. In-keeping with the vision for Boyne Valley Food Innovation District, it foresees a sector that acts more strategically and achieves a competitive critical mass in the international marketplace while targeting more quality-conscious consumers who will recognise and reward Ireland's food producers for their sustainable production and high-quality produce.

KEY ACTIONS TO 2020

Action 1:

Hub development – deliver 9 units available for start-up and scaling food businesses

Project manage design, planning and construction of new units and associated works. (Commencing January 2019): development of 9 individual food units and production labs in a continuum of sizes from 22.5m² to 110m². This involves reconfiguration of 792m² of space within Meath Enterprise Centre and a second step in the vision to dedicate the entire centre 7,879sm² to food by 2022.

Timeframe for delivery: April 2020

How will delivery be measured?

9 Units ready for occupation

Responsibility: Meath Enterprise manager

(Monthly reporting to REP Steering Committee by Project Manager)

Action 2:

Development and delivery of 'knowledge centre' training activities

Boyne Valley Food Innovation District is a smart specialisation collaborative for the Mid and North East regions that nurtures food and drink SMEs and talent to achieve their commercialisation and scaling potential. It is a leading- edge cluster that is fuelled by collaboration with the unique potential to spur productive and sustainable regional economic development, leveraging the power of intercompany linkages to drive innovation and sales growth nationally and internationally.

Networks fuel innovation because they strengthen trust and collaboration within and across companies and industry clusters, provide information for new discoveries and help firms acquire resources and enter new markets. The Boyne Valley Food Hub provides the physical environment to choreograph opportunities for food entrepreneurs and their staff to interact with each other; facilitating relationships and creating critical mass between businesses and institutions to generate, sharpen and accelerate the advancement of ideas. Peer to peer learning is fundamental to the district. The co-working and networking hub will facilitate 50 SMEs and emerging food entrepreneurs to immerse themselves in a stimulating food sector environment.

Timeframe for delivery: September 2019

How will delivery be measured?

Recruitment and appointment of Business Development Manager and Innovation Specialist
Development and delivery of 'knowledge centre' training activities

Responsibility:Meath Enterprise manager with project partners.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

4

Ensure the availability of Skills and Talent to realise the Region's future economic potential and address upskilling requirements

CONTEXT

Talent is the key business differentiator and asset for the twenty-first century and the global competition for talent is becoming more apparent. The Mid-East region's ability to continue to grow and attract investment will be dependent on readily available talent and highly skilled workers. The National Skills Strategy 2025 sets out an ambitious plan to ensure the development of a skills supply that is responsive to the changing and diverse needs of our people, society and the economy. The skills supply needs to be appropriately configured so that it can be responsive and adaptable to the needs of enterprise in the Mid-East Region. Considerable work is ongoing to address these needs, in particular through the Mid-East Regional Skills Forum. The Mid-East Regional Enterprise Plan will support and add-value to work that is currently ongoing while also seeking to identify and drive new initiatives through increased collaboration.

Sustained access to the right talent and skills is crucial for the region to attract and retain investment. Skills demand has intensified in sectors such as construction, the digital economy, and manufacturing as well as others. It is crucial that anticipated shortages and/or upskilling requirements are identified well in advance so that a response can be developed and mobilised to ensure that businesses in the Mid-East region can continue to perform and grow.

Funded by the Department of Education and Skills, the network of nine 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.

VISION TO 2020

Present a clear picture of the wealth of talent that exists in the Mid-East that is available and willing to work within the region, and thereby serving as a very useful element in showing the attractiveness of investment in the Mid-East by indigenous or foreign sources.

KEY ACTIONS TO 2020

Action 1:

As part of the Skills for Growth initiative the RSF 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:

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, RSF

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:

Support all actions in the Regional Enterprise Plan where linkages to Education and Training Providers are required.

Timeframe for delivery: Ongoing

How will delivery be measured: Customer feedback

Responsibility: RSF

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.

3 Enterprise Agency and LEO activities in the Mid-East 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 Mid-East Region are set alongside and complement the core activities of the Enterprise Agencies and 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 Mid-East Region 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 Mid-East Region 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 loses 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 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 Mid-East Region

- In 2018, 20,266 people were employed in 481 Enterprise Ireland supported companies in the Mid-East region.
- EI supports all sectors with success in the food, electronics and manufacturing sectors.
- Enterprise Ireland has co-funded, with local enterprise development groups, 157 Community Enterprise Centres across the country including 8 in the Mid-East.
- The Technology Centre Programme is a joint initiative between Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland allowing Irish companies and multinationals to work together in these centres. Technology Centres are collaborative entities established and led by industry. These centres are resourced by highly qualified researchers associated with research institutions who are empowered to undertake market focused strategic R&D for the benefit of industry. The Innovation Value Institute Technology Centre is located in Maynooth University.
- Enterprise Ireland has funded the establishment of a national network of business innovation centres and specialist bio-incubation facilities across the higher education sector including MaynoothWorks located in the region.
- EI supports and collaborates with HEIs in the region including Maynooth University 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 Mid-East is served by its Local Enterprise Offices in Kildare, Louth, Meath and Wicklow which are co-located with the Local Authorities. In 2017, the LEOs operating the Mid-East supported an additional 460 jobs from 2016 (total of 5,457 jobs) and the establishment of 24 new companies, bringing the total number of companies supported by the LEOs in the Mid-East Region to 1,002.

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 Irelands 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's 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 Mid-East Region

The IDA Mid-East region includes the counties of Kildare, Meath and Wicklow. The region is home to 66 IDA supported companies recording employment of 13,0881 for 2018, an increase of 7% on employment growth since 2017.

The Mid-East region has been successful over a number of years in mobilising inward foreign direct investment (FDI) with employment levels in IDA client companies maintaining an upward trajectory since 2009.

There is a significant ecosystem of well-established ICT, Pharmaceutical, International Financial Services and Engineering companies including Intel, Celestica, MGS, HPE, Facebook, P&G, Pfizer, Takeda, Elavon, Nypro, Coca Cola and IFS State Street in the Region. Many of these companies have maintained a long standing presence in the region, such as, Intel, Tegral, Crown Packaging, Generali, Pfizer, Servier, Welch Allyn, Sigma Aldrich, P&G and in addition more recent arrivals include Facebook, Takeda (Shire), Endress and Hauser and INIT.

Intel's operation in Leixlip will celebrate its 30th anniversary this year. The highly skilled staff, along with Intel's over \$13 billion investment, have kept the Leixlip operation at the forefront of leading edge industrial technology. Intel's track record, along with the many other leading companies in the region, is testament to the people, skills and locations across the region.

So far in IDA's current strategy Winning FDI 2015-2019, the Mid-East region has had a number

of significant announcements including PCI Pharma Services (Stamullen), INIT (Maynooth), Takeda (Shire) (Dunboyne), Facebook (Clonee) and Endress & Hauser (Kill). The region has also won significant investment in both the Food sector and the Film sector which supports the promotion of the region for FDI. IDA will continue to focus on investment opportunities arising in Global Business Services, High Tech Manufacturing and Research, Development & Innovation.

The region is strongly supported by third level education providers. Maynooth University has over 11,000 students with 1,600 international students from 95 countries. With courses in Science & Engineering, Design Innovation, Life Sciences, Business and Law, Maynooth University supplies and pipeline of highly skilled graduates to the region. Maynooth University is renowned for its Research Institutes. The Hamilton Institute is a multidisciplinary research centre that builds bridges between mathematics and its applications in ICT and Biology. Areas of focus include Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, Drone Centre of Excellence and the first 5G Test Bed in Europe. Other Research Institutes include Institute of Immunology, the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis and the National Centre for Geo computation. IT Carlow has a satellite campus located on the Wicklow County Campus in Rathnew where it provides Life Long Learning Programmes in areas including International Financial Services, Supply Chain Management and Digital Media Design. Dunboyne College of Further Education provides access to higher education in areas including Business & Administration and is a well-established route for many students to advance to University.

To support the delivery of IDA's current strategy Winning FDI 2015-2019, IDA has a number of flagship Business Parks in key locations across the region; Navan, Drogheda, Greystones and Arklow. Private developments such as Millennium Park in Naas, Liffey Business Campus in Leixlip and City North in Stamullen provide a range of strategic property solutions helping to attract FDI into 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 Mid-East region 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. 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.

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 Mid-East 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)³, the rate of growth and unemployment rates achieved for the Mid-East region during the 2015-2017 lifetime of the original Regional Action Plans up to Q3 2018 is outlined in Table 1 (overleaf).

The Mid-East recorded a strong rate of employment growth over the period of the RAPJ to Q1 2018 and if it continues at this rate the region will exceed the employment growth target by 2020. The unemployment rate in the region has since moved up to 5.8 percent but remains lower than the State average. For a more detailed statistical analysis of the region's performance, please see Appendix 2.

The focus for the Mid-East over the period to 2020 is to maintain the momentum of employment growth achieved since 2015 and do so in a sustainable way. 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.

A further important consideration for the Mid-East region over the period to 2020 is to focus on parts of the region where the momentum around job creation regionally has not been felt at a local level. In addition, latest figures on commuting from the Mid-East (Census 2016) suggests that 68,000 people are commuting to work in Dublin City and Suburbs. This indicates that there is capacity for increased investment and economic activity in the Mid-East that has the potential to reduce levels of longer distance commuting and also relieve congestion within the Dublin city region.

3 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
Mid-East	294,900	327,100	32,200	10.9%	9.6%	5.8%
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 Mid-East Steering Committee⁵

Chair of the Mid-East Committee:

Eamonn Sinnott,
Vice President, Technology & Manufacturing Group
General Manager, Intel Ireland

Membership of the Committee:

Enterprise Champions	InterTrade Ireland
Kildare County Council	Ibec
Meath County Council	Skillnet Ireland
Wicklow County Council	Maynooth University
Kildare Local Enterprise Office	IT Carlow
Meath Local Enterprise Office	Newbridge Chamber
Wicklow Local Enterprise Office	North Kildare Chamber
Enterprise Ireland	Kells & District Chamber
IDA Ireland	Bray & District Chamber
Eastern & Midlands Regional Assembly	Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation
Regional Skills Forum: Mid-East Region	Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
Kildare & Wicklow Education & Training Board	Department of Rural and Community Development
Louth & Meath Education & Training Board	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Fáilte Ireland	

Secretariat/Programme Management:

Conor Sweeney

⁵ The existing Implementation Committees will be renamed 'Steering Committees'

Appendix 2: Brief profile and statistical snapshot - Mid-East

Constituent counties	Kildare, Meath and Wicklow	
Regional Population & change (1996-2016)	347,407 (1996): 559,973 (2016) increase of 212,566	
GVA ⁶ per person 2000 and 2015	€21,637: €36,091	
Total in employment	327,100*	
Labour Force Participation rate	63%*	
Unemployment rate	5.8*	
Unemployment blackspots ⁷	3 ⁸	
Percentage employed in Manufacturing: Services: Public sector	12%: 27%: 26%	
Educated to third level in Mid-East: State	47%: 45%	
Number of enterprises ⁹ (micro: small: medium: large) (2016)	25,666: 1,671: 236: 37	
Number of Enterprise Ireland High Potential Start-Ups ¹⁰ (HPSUs) Mid-East: State (2017)	7: 90	
EI supported employment & no. client Companies 2016 - 2017	2016	2017
	Jobs: 19,743 Companies: 517	Jobs: 20,568 Companies: 523
IDA supported employment & no. client companies (2017)	2016	2017
	Jobs: 13,678 Companies: 56	Jobs: 13,037 Companies: 63
LEO supported employment & no. client companies (2017) -excluding Louth	2016	2017
	Jobs: 2,507 Companies: 475	Jobs: 2,811 Companies: 540
Number of LEO Priming Grants ¹¹ Mid-East: State (2017)	33: 294	

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

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

8 Unemployment blackspots in the Region: Kildare (1), Meath (1) & Wicklow (1)

9 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

10 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.

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

**CSO Labour Force Survey Q3 2018, Mid-East Region

The Mid-East has key areas of strength and areas of strong potential that offer opportunity for further enterprise development and economic growth:

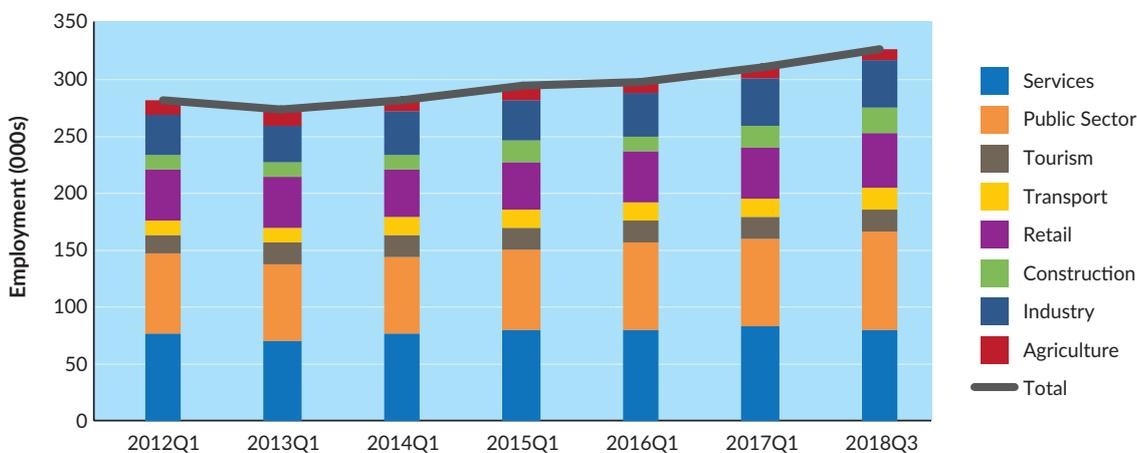
- Well-established and growing concentrations of activity among multinational and indigenous companies in sectors such as Internationally Traded Services and High-Tech Manufacturing
- A competitive advantage in its excellent connectivity and access - an asset for enterprise development as well as facilitating tourism and infrastructure-dependent sectors such as distribution and logistics
- A strong and diverse agri-food sector encompassing microenterprises, companies of significant scale, in addition to food technology and innovation facilities
- Proximity to many of the State's major Universities and Institutes of Technology, as well as its own Maynooth University, which has a strong track record in facilitating and prioritising research commercialisation
- Strong assets to support tourism, leisure and recreation, including some of the country's most significant heritage assets and an internationally-renowned horse sport tradition
- A reputation as a hub for the film industry; the region has excellent capacity for large-scale film production, hosting two state-of-the-art film studios facilitating both indigenous and international productions

The Mid-East region as a whole is well served by high quality road networks. Motorway corridors radiating out from Dublin to the rest of the country traverse the Mid-East Region, providing fast access to Dublin city centre in addition to other urban centres such as Galway, Limerick, Drogheda, Cork and Waterford.

Employment trends

In Q3 2018 there were 327,100 people employed in the Mid-East region. Over the period Q1 2015 to Q3 2018, employment overall has grown by 11 percent with 32,200 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. Mid-East region employment growth (CSO)



Services

Employment in the Services sector, including the Public Sector, has increased significantly from 219,900 in 2012 to 251,500 in Q3 2018 and the Sector currently accounts for 76 percent of all employment in the Mid-East region. This highlights the contribution to employment in the Mid-East region. There are currently 251,500 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 86,200 of those employed in the Mid-East region which represents 34 percent of all Services employment and 26 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 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. 45,900 people are employed in the sector in the Mid-East region.

Industry/Manufacturing

Employment in the Industry/Manufacturing sector has increased slightly over the period Q1 2012 to Q3 2018 with 4,600 more employed in the Sector. Employment in this sector accounts for 13 percent of employment in the region which is just above the national figure of 12.5 percent.

Construction

The Construction sector employed 13,900 in Q1 2012 and this number has increased significantly to 22,700 in Q3 2018, accounting for 7 percent of the total employment which is similar to the national trend.

Agriculture

The Agricultural sector employed 10,900 in Q1 2012 and is now 10,800 in Q3 2018.

Tourism

CSO figures indicate that the Tourism sector employed 20,800 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 call under the REDF, the Mid-East region secured funding of nearly €3.5 million across two projects:

Call	Project	Description
1	County Kildare Community Network	Co-working space and advance landing zone for FDI (MERITS) located in Naas
2	Boyne Valley Food Innovation District	Food enterprise incubation centre located in Navan

The Mid-East 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: Other State Agencies and Bodies supporting Regional Economic 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 Agriculture, Food, 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.

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.

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.

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.

Appendix 5: Project Ireland 2040

The National Planning Framework (NPF), as part of 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 and the National Development Plan have been developed in conjunction to link spatial planning policy and infrastructure capital investment to support the potential in each region.

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 focussed 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 Funding

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 was 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 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.

What do we mean by Disruptive Technologies Innovation?

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 Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) was established on 1st January 2015. The Region covers nine counties containing twelve Local Authorities namely – Longford, Westmeath, Offaly, Laois, Louth, Meath, Kildare, Wicklow, Fingal, South Dublin and Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Councils and Dublin City Council.

EMRA's responsibilities include:

- European functions; Manage EU Regional Operational Programmes and provide support to the EU Committee of the Regions through the Irish Regions European Office in Brussels
- Planning and Economic Development; Promote and co-ordinate strategic planning and sustainable development of the region, which includes the implementation of the Regional Planning Guidelines, to be replaced by the new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies
- Promote effectiveness in local government; Promote the effective delivery of public services in the region in conjunction with the National Oversight & Audit Commission.

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

One of the principal statutory functions of the Assembly is the delivery of a Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), to support the implementation of *Project Ireland 2040* and the economic policies and objectives of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the development of the Regions.

The RSES includes a:

- **Spatial Strategy** – to manage future growth and ensure the creation of healthy and attractive places to live, work, study, visit and invest in.
- **Economic Strategy** – that builds on our strengths to sustain a strong economy and support the creation of quality jobs that ensure a good living standard for all.
- **Metropolitan Plan** – to ensure a supply of strategic development areas for the sustainable growth and continued success and competitiveness of the Dublin metropolitan area.
- **Investment Framework** – to prioritise the delivery of key enabling infrastructure and services by government and state agencies.
- **Climate Action Strategy** – to accelerate climate action, ensure a clean and healthy environment and to promote sustainable transport and strategic green infrastructure.

Economic Strategy

This is the first time that Irish planning is required to deliver an economic strategy as part of a regional spatial plan, which identifies regional assets, opportunities and pressures along with funding and investment priorities for the region. The RSES seeks to promote smart specialisation and clustering underpinned by an orderly settlement strategy and investment in 'placemaking'. The RSES Also sets out Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) to provide a competitive and resilient economic base and develop our skills, innovation and technology capacity, recognising the key roles played by the enterprise agencies (IDA, EI, LEOs, SFI) and to support the implementation of Regional Action Plans for Jobs (RAPJs) and Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs).

Implementation

The RSES will be implemented through the review of all Local Authorities Development Plans and LECPS after the adoption of this Strategy. Key state agencies and sectoral bodies will also have to consider their strategies and investment plans in light of the adoption of the RSES. The RSES will be realised by the delivery of European and National funding that will achieve the Regional Strategic Outcomes expressed in the Strategy. These funds will focus on the priorities and key aspects of the RSES to sustainably grow the Region to 2031 and beyond.

An Roinn Gnó, Fiontar agus Nuálaíochta
Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation

23 Sráid Chill Dara, Baile Átha Cliath 2, D02 TD30
23 Kildare Street, Dublin 2, D02 TD30

T +353 (0)1 631 2121, 1890 220 222

www.dbei.gov.ie

www.gov.ie

info@dbei.gov.ie

