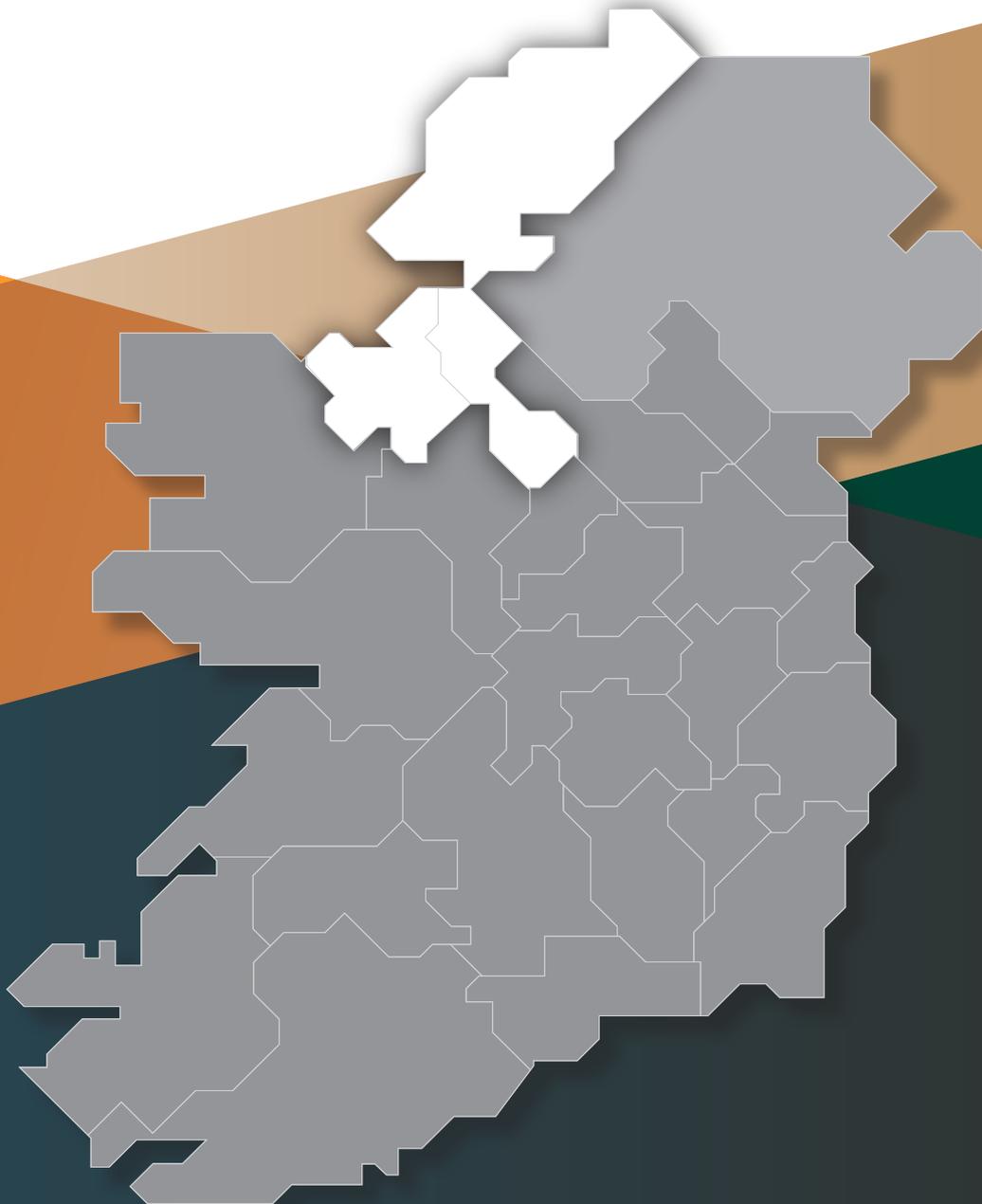




Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

# Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020

## NORTH-WEST



An initiative of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation

# **Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020**

## **NORTH-WEST**



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# Minister's Foreword

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

In the North-East/North-West Region, the 2015-2017 Regional Action Plan for Jobs (RAPJ) set out 153 actions to support job creation and accelerated economic recovery. At the end of that period and more than 8,800 jobs have been created in the region and with an unemployment rate, currently at 5.1 percent much has been achieved.

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

I have been very pleased to note that in preparing this REP, the North-West Regional Implementation Committee (along with the other eight Regional Committees nationally) has engaged in a regionally co-ordinated manner on important considerations

to do with strengthening productivity, driving job creation, and supporting enterprise resilience in their region. These include: diversifying the regional economy, building on place-specific strengths, regional brand development, business clustering and ecosystem strengthening initiatives to support new business creation and investment.

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

As we look towards 2020, it is clear that the context for enterprise development in Ireland has changed. Unemployment levels in all regions are now at more stable levels, but we have some new challenges; the forthcoming departure of the UK from the European Union will have far reaching impacts as yet not fully known especially in the Border Region; 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 North-West Regional Enterprise Plan, one of nine regional plans, sees the RAPJs evolve to a more strategic, focused approach, in line with and complementing these policy developments at the national level. Through the established mechanism of the Regional Steering Committee, these Plans will be maintained as “live” agendas so that new ideas and collaborative initiative can be propagated and national policy initiatives can be effectively translated into regional impact; for example, in areas such as climate action and the digital economy.

Under my Department’s €60 million competitive Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) the North-West has already secured more than €5.2 million across four projects that will enhance the region’s potential for enterprise growth and job creation. Guided by this new Regional Enterprise Plan, the region is well positioned to compete for further competitive calls, including the REDF, on a rolling basis, as part of the further roll-out of *Project Ireland 2040*.

I want to commend the work of the Implementation Committee under the chairmanship of Conor Murphy, Site Director, Abbott Diagnostics Division for their work on the roll out of the first RAPJ for the North-West Region. I welcome the new focus and energy embodied in this refreshed Regional Enterprise Plan for the region and recognise the extensive collective reflection and effort that has gone in to its production.

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



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

**Heather Humphreys TD**

*Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation  
February 2019*

# Chair's Introduction

The Regional Enterprise Plan for the North-West, including the counties of Donegal, Sligo and Leitrim, aims to build on the unique strengths of the region to support business to start-up, grow and generate exports, through collaboration between state agencies, the private sector and other stakeholders. The North-East/North-West Regional Action Plan for Jobs (2015- 2017) identified 152 action items and at the end of that period and more than 8,800 jobs have been created in the region. The North-West region has also secured funding of over €5.2 million across four projects under Calls 1 and 2 of the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF).

Multi-national Companies such as Pramerica, Optum, Zeus, Abbott and AbbVie continue to invest and expand employment in the region. Over the last number of years, these established companies have been joined by companies like Overstock, E3, LiveTiles, Abtran and Phibro on the back of the expanding MedTech, FinTech and Artificial Intelligence strongholds in the region. The Atlantic MedTech cluster is an outstanding example of collaboration between indigenous and foreign owned companies within the region. The expansion of indigenous companies like E&I Engineering, Cora Systems, SL Controls and Seaquest, demonstrates that we can create world class companies with global ambition in the North-West.

How does the region build on this success as we still have a long way to go to catch up with some of the other regions in Ireland? After several workshops and stakeholder meetings the North-West Enterprise Plan has identified some focussed priorities to support the ongoing development

of the North-West economy. With increased employment and continued growth in the economy expected, the following are critical to the long-term success of the region.

- Increased work force participation, to avail of growth opportunities in the North-West.
- Increasing the skills sets across the region. Technological University status for the Connacht-Ulster Alliance is a critical objective for the region.
- Maximise the tourism revenue from the 'real' Wild Atlantic Way in the North West, with a focus on high value tourism.
- Creation of a marine cluster in Killybegs, similar to the Atlantic MedTech cluster.

The North West is a unique place to work and live, let's make sure we continue to work together and build on our recent successes across the region.



**Conor Murphy**  
Site Director  
Abbott Diagnostics Division

*Chair*  
*North-West Regional Enterprise Plan*

# 1 Policy Context

The North-West Regional Enterprise Plan (REP) is one of nine such Plans that have emerged from a process to refresh and refocus the Regional Action Plan for Jobs (RAPJ) initiative which originally focused on the 2015-2017/8 period. The purpose of the refresh and refocus was to further build on the positive regional collaboration fostered by the RAPJs over the period to 2020, taking account of the changed and improved economic circumstances nationally, the emergence of new challenges to enterprise development and competitiveness both domestically and internationally in origin, including Brexit, and the persistence of uneven economic progress across the regions in Ireland - as of Q3 2018 there were three regions<sup>1</sup> 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 impact<sup>2</sup>. 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 and national policy initiatives can be effectively translated into regional impact; for example, in areas such as climate action and the digital economy.

The REPs are an integral part of the broader policy system aimed at driving economic growth and sustaining better standards of living throughout Ireland. As a 'bottom-up' initiative, the Plans complement national level policies and programmes emanating from 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 North-West

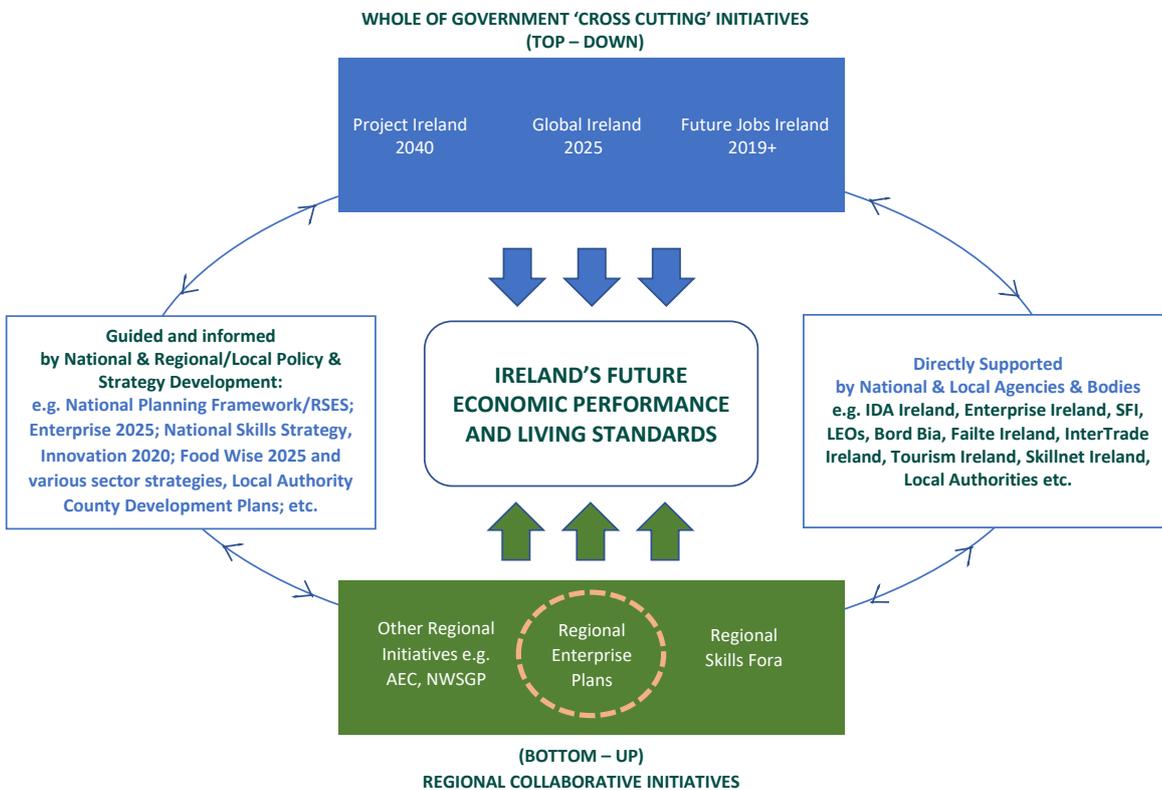
- realising the full potential of our regions – developing places that are attractive for business investment and for people to live and work; and
- raising Ireland’s visibility internationally, protecting Ireland’s reputation, and providing opportunities for our enterprises supported by the Global Footprint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

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

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

The REPs also have a strong role to play in the context of *Project Ireland 2040*, and more specifically in the implementation of the National Planning Framework and its constituent Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSESs) 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 RSESs 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.

Figure 1





# 2 North-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1:

Identify and enhance the visibility of skills available to employers and potential investors in the North-West



### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2:

Achieve a step-change in the level of entrepreneurship in the North-West



### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3:

Harness the potential of the blue economy and the North-West coastline as a source of new employment generation



### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4:

Maximise the potential of the Wild Atlantic Way and tourism for the region



### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5:

Develop a regional network of landing spaces to support co-working



### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 6:

Support the digitalisation of SMEs in the North-West

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

## 1

## Identify and enhance the visibility of skills available to employers and potential investors in the North-West

### 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 North-West'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 North-West. Considerable work is ongoing to address these needs, in particular through the North-West Regional Skills Forum. The North-West 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 hospitality. 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 North-West can continue to perform and grow.

Today's highly competitive marketplace requires that businesses can be flexible and agile. In a similar way, the direction and success of individual career paths is determined by an ability to develop and maintain relevant skills and expertise, and an ability to overcome disruptions (such as business restructuring or closure/downsizing). It is also the case that information on potential career paths and ongoing educational opportunities can be difficult to source and gather.

Skills and Talent is one of the key themes under *Future Jobs Ireland*, the Government's new plan to guide the next phase of Ireland's economic development. By placing this objective at the heart of the Regional Enterprise Plan, the North-West region can be both reactive and proactive in creating sustainable jobs that can deal with new challenges and embrace modern technologies.

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.

By commissioning a definitive Skills Register across Donegal, Sligo and Leitrim, the region will be able to present clear data on the wealth of talent that exists in the North-West 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 North-West by indigenous or foreign sources.

## VISION TO 2020

Through increased collaboration between the North-West Regional Skills Forum and members of the North-West Regional Enterprise Committee, a more comprehensive picture of skills will be established which will be focused on linking enterprises and education providers.

## KEY ACTIONS TO 2020

### Action 1:

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

**Timeframe for delivery:** Q4 2019

**How will delivery be measured:**  
Number of enterprises audited.

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

### Action 2:

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

**Timeframe for delivery:** Q4 2019

**How will delivery be measured:**  
Number of participants

**Responsibility:** ETB, Regional Skills Forum.

### Action 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 the 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.

#### Action 6:

Complete an audit of available skills across the North-West using AIRO methodology. This Regional Skills Register will be used to market the skills available in the region to potential foreign and indigenous investors.

**Timeframe for delivery:** Q4 2019

**How will delivery be measured:**

- Completion of audit/study
- Use of the information by relevant/ interested stakeholders

**Responsibility:**  
LEOs, Local Authorities, IDA Ireland, ÚnaG, WDC

#### Action 7:

Promote the Regional Skills Register to the Diaspora to inform them about skills needs and vacancies.

**Timeframe for delivery:**

**How will delivery be measured:**

**Responsibility:** LEOs, Local Authorities, IDA Ireland, ÚnaG, WDC

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

## 2

## Achieve a step-change in the level of entrepreneurship in the North-West

## CONTEXT

Traditionally, the North-West has possessed a strong entrepreneurial spirit and a desire to develop home-grown, local businesses into successful internationally trading enterprises. A key part of the Government's plan for growth and job-creation is focused on building a strong base of indigenous enterprises in all regions. In the last number of years, there has been considerable progress made on supporting entrepreneurs, enterprises and SMEs including through the LEOs, Enterprise Ireland, and Údarás na Gaeltachta. These include New Frontiers programmes, training programmes, and financial supports.

It is also important to ensure that the supports available are not solely aimed at businesses, but also to the people behind these enterprises. Enhanced mentoring, networks, and peer learning will benefit in preserving an entrepreneurial spirit in the North-West. Utilising success stories also brings a clearer understanding of the key drivers to commercialise and obstacles faced which in turn leads to better and more sustainable start-ups. Further progress needs to be seen in terms of the supports to encourage diversity in entrepreneurship in the North-West – particularly among female entrepreneurs and non-Irish nationals.

## VISION TO 2020

Achieve an increase in the numbers of people engaged in entrepreneurial activities in the North-West through a greater focus on how existing supports and measures can be leveraged to greater effect, thereby boosting the entrepreneurial potential and mindset of people.

## KEY ACTIONS TO 2020

**Action 1:**

Examine the existing and new models of peer to peer mentoring programmes in the region that will result in an increased entrepreneurial outlook in the region, while also examining how to best leverage existing programmes for peer learning.

**Timeframe for delivery:** 2019 - 2020

**How will delivery be measured:**

- Models identified and assessed for impact in the North-West context
- Feasibility on introducing new programmes completed

**Responsibility:** LEOs, Údarás, EI

**Action 2:**

Commission a research project to identify the drivers and barriers to entrepreneurialism and start-ups within the region to include a comparative study with national trends.

**Timeframe for delivery:** Q4 2019

**How will delivery be measured:**

- Funding secured & research commissioned
- Research complete, recommendations considered for action

**Responsibility:** LEOs, Enterprise Ireland, Údarás, Connacht Ulster Alliance partners

**Action 3:**

Develop and implement marketing and communication plans to promote, encourage and celebrate entrepreneurs in the region.

**Timeframe for delivery:** 2019 - 2020

**How will delivery be measured:**

- Content developed
- Programme of communication in place and underway

**Responsibility:** LEOs, Enterprise Ireland, Údarás

**Action 4:**

Develop more opportunities between LEO, EI and IDA clients with Enterprise Ireland/IDA Ireland Global Sourcing Events.

**Timeframe for delivery:** 2019 - 2020

**How will delivery be measured:**

Measurable increase in attendance at events along with increase in contracts.

**Responsibility:** EI, IDA, LEOs

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

## 3

## Harness the potential of the blue economy and the North-West coastline as a source of new employment generation

### CONTEXT

Killybegs is Ireland's primary national fishing port. Its long maritime tradition and natural geographic advantages have been instrumental in it becoming the largest of the six harbours located in Ireland. Its strategic location along the Atlantic and natural deep-water harbour facilities, have enabled it to evolve a state-of-the-art catching and processing sector. The Killybegs Harbour Centre was opened in 2004 and caters for vessels up to 300 metres in length and 40,000 tonnes dead weight with a maximum draft of 12 metres at low water level. In recent years, it has evolved from primarily a fishing port into a multifunctional port supporting food processing, renewable energy production and tourism.

From an enterprise perspective, Killybegs has the largest share of fish landings in Ireland; contributing 80 percent to the national €250 million turnover in seafood. 40 out of the 170 seafood companies in Ireland are located within a 30- mile radius of Killybegs.

There is already a high degree of cooperation between companies located in Killybegs which employ 1,100 people. Further supports and assistance in creating an effective cluster of companies is required and this REP will contribute to the realisation of this goal.

Under *Project Ireland 2040*, a €180 million investment is also planned in Ireland's six fishery harbour centres, including major development projects in Killybegs. This will encompass ongoing safety and maintenance and necessary new developments and is set out for commencement up to 2022.

### VISION TO 2020

To harness the full potential of the blue economy in the North-West by fostering collaboration, training initiatives, tourism potential and enterprise.

### KEY ACTIONS TO 2020

#### Action 1:

Support and grow the collaborative potential of the existing informal network of companies in Killybegs Harbour by establishing a formal network that can avail of existing LEO and EI supports.

**Timeframe for delivery:** Q4 2019

#### How will delivery be measured:

- Network of companies established

**Responsibility:** LEO Donegal, EI

**Action 2:**

Examine the feasibility of developing a marine focused New Frontiers Programme, working in conjunction with the industry to explore bespoke options.

**Timeframe for delivery:** 2019

**How will delivery be measured:**

- Feasibility assessment complete
- Action plan in place to deliver (subject to feasibility)

**Responsibility:** LEO Donegal, EI, LYIT, Sligo IT

**Action 3:**

A working group will be formed to explore future development and potential leveraging of funding supports under *Project Ireland 2040* funding streams. The Steering Group will be comprised of representatives of LEO Donegal, Killybegs businesses, Enterprise Ireland, LYIT and others as appropriate.

**Timeframe for delivery:** 2019

**How will delivery be measured:**

- Working Group in place
- Projects identified and proposals under development

**Responsibility:** LEO Donegal, EI, LYIT, Donegal Local Authority

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

## 4

## Maximise the potential of the Wild Atlantic Way and tourism for the region

### CONTEXT

Tourism into and around the North-West region is a key driver of revenue and employment. Alignment of regional tourism initiatives with the established Fáilte Ireland brands of the Wild Atlantic Way and Irelands Hidden Heartlands are vital to the success of tourism potential.

Tourism will continue to be one of the key sectors in the future economic development of the region and offers significant potential for the creation of new jobs across the three counties in the region. There is strong potential to develop tourism products, such as cultural tourism, which harness existing linkages across the region with regard to history, geography, economic development, folk tradition, language and musical heritage as well as activity based and marine tourism.

The Wild Atlantic Way is an established route and is growing in recognition on the overseas markets. Visitor numbers are increasing year on year and is a key driver of renewal and development of communities and villages along the route in Donegal and Sligo while Irelands Hidden Heartlands is new and has the potential to deliver bed-nights to Leitrim.

In a region with a high proportion of people employed in the Accommodation and Food Services sector (nine percent of all people employed)

### VISION TO 2020

The North-West will work collaboratively internally and with other regions, including through the Atlantic Economic Corridor, to maximise the potential of the Wild Atlantic Way, including the opportunities present by business tourism.

### KEY ACTIONS TO 2020

#### Action 1:

Fáilte Ireland will continue to offer training programmes which specifically assist businesses in the North-West winning more international business. Fáilte Ireland will also continue to offer programmes to help businesses to develop their experiences and explore the financials of extending the tourism season. In addition, Fáilte Ireland will offer the following business supports in 2019/2020.

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

**Timeframe for Delivery:** 2019 / 2020

**How will Delivery be Measured?**

Net Promotor Score

**Responsibility:** Fáilte Ireland

**Action 2:**

Fáilte Ireland will develop a sustainable management development model to oversee marketing.

**Timeframe for delivery:** 2019

**How will delivery be measured:**

Increase in marketing campaign in the region

**Responsibility:** Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland and Regional Stakeholders

**Action 3:**

Implement a series of Visitor Experience Development Plans and other developmental plans aligned to the Wild Atlantic Way. These are 3 to 5-year commercial development plans for an area, which will unlock the economic growth potential.

**Timeframe for delivery:** 2019 to 2020

**How will delivery be measured:**

Increase in revenue and employment

**Responsibility:** Fáilte Ireland, Local Authorities

**Action 4:**

Fáilte Ireland will rollout nationally a Large Capital Grants Scheme in order to develop brilliant visitor experiences and enhance the visitor experience around the country. These developments will be in line with 4 experience brands.

**Timeframe for delivery:** 2019

**How will delivery be measured:**

Number of new investments delivering employment increases & visitor numbers to a region

**Person/organisation responsible:** Failte Ireland lead agency with other partners

**Action 5:**

Rollout a range of supports to be available to businesses to help them to develop their digital skills with a focus on the effective use of social media for business and website optimisation and working effectively with OTAs (online tour operators). Fáilte Ireland will also continue to offer Grow Digital programmes which provide a practical approach to help owners/operators develop a more effective online profile, for their business

**Timeframe for Delivery:** 2019 / 2020

**How will Delivery be Measured?**

Net Promotor Score

**Responsibility:** Fáilte Ireland

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

## 5

## Develop a regional network of landing spaces to support co-working

**CONTEXT**

The availability of high-quality suitable property for enterprise start-ups as well as fast-landing spaces is a key competitiveness factor for the North-West region. Sustained enterprise growth and job creation is maximised where a full landscape of required enterprise space is available to meet the needs of companies as they develop and scale.

An integrated region-wide offering will make it easier for entrepreneurs and start-ups to access the resources they need in timely manner and provide immediate access to a peer network. There is potential for greater levels of efficiency and economies of scale in the delivery of enterprise spaces that have a networked and collaborative approach.

An audit of existing available enterprise space across the region will enable the identification of facilities that are currently under-utilised to assess future needs.

The region can also examine how to build on the momentum of successful funding applications projects in the North-West under the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF). These include the funding for the creation of an innovation ecosystem in Inishowen, Donegal, funding to develop a network of digital and innovation hubs in Leitrim, Cavan, and Longford, support for the clustering of food companies in Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal, and a new initiative in Sligo to become the leading location in the region for entrepreneurs in digital gaming.

A recent space utilisation review being undertaken by the Atlantic Economic Corridor Taskforce can be used as a valuable source of data and basis of research to be published online.

**VISION TO 2020**

To publish a comprehensive list of all available enterprise spaces and their facilities so as to support and enable future provision needs in the region.

**KEY ACTIONS TO 2020****Action 1:**

Through engaging with the work of the Atlantic Economic Corridor, develop and publish a central list of information on enterprise space availability in the region. The results will be published on the Local Authorities' websites and information will be updated quarterly.

**Timeframe for delivery:** 2019

**How will delivery be measured:**

- Enterprise space availability in the North-West on all Local Authority websites

**Responsibility:** Local Authorities, LEOs, ÚnaG

**Action 2:**

Work with enterprise centre owner/managers to enhance the standard of provision, facilities and services available and maximise opportunities for economies of scale through sharing of best practice, networking and join initiatives.

**Timeframe for delivery:** 2019 - 2020

**How will delivery be measured:**

- Common standard framework agreed, and gaps addressed

**Responsibility:** Local Authorities, LEOs, ÚnaG, Centre Owner/Managers

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

## 6

## Support the digitalisation of SMEs in the North-West

**CONTEXT**

Digitalisation is a major driver of productivity growth for small businesses through the improvement of process efficiency and product quality. Digitalisation also provides SMEs with greater access to new geographical markets, talent and financing.

There is a significant difference between large and small firms in how they take advantage of digital technologies and opportunities. SMEs face several barriers to adopting digital technologies as they often do not know how to translate the use of such technologies into economic impact and how to build a new incremental business.

In particular, SMEs have difficulties deciding when to invest, up to what level and in which innovative field; and banks are often reluctant to provide loans for investments in digital technologies.

These market failures provide the rationale for European, national and local interventions in assisting SMEs adopt and embrace digital technologies.

DEVISE, co-funded by the European Union through the Interreg Europe programme, is a 4-year project led by ERNACT (with Northern and Western Regional Assembly as Irish partner) bringing together institutions from Ireland, Romania, Spain, Bulgaria, Finland, United Kingdom, France and Belgium. The project aims to respond to the current challenge that these European regions are facing, in terms of unlocking and exploiting the potential that digital tech SMEs have as enabler for the competitiveness of SMEs in other sectors.

The DEVISE project commenced in June 2018 and Irish partners ERNACT and Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) are currently working with stakeholders in the region to carry out a mapping to exercise to identify what are the sectors in the region that could increase their competitiveness by utilising digital services offered by SMEs and start-ups in the region.

DEVISE's main objective is to, by 2021, increase by 15 percent the number of digital tech SMEs enabling competitiveness in other regional strategic sectors through improved supporting policy instruments.

The North-West Regional Enterprise Plan will support the work of the NWRA in its endeavours as part of DEVISE.

**VISION TO 2020**

By 2021, increase by 15 percent the number of digital tech SMEs enabling competitiveness in other sectors through partnering and the availability of improved supporting policy instruments.

## KEY ACTIONS TO 2020

### Action 1:

Provide support, where possible, to the NWRA in their development and implementation of a project plan to incentivise SMEs to adopt digital solutions and that will result in increased competitiveness and increase efficiency, as part of the DEVISE project.

**Timeframe for delivery:** Plan to be developed June 2019 – November 2020.

**How will delivery be measured:**

- Engagement (by NWRA) with the REP Steering Committee
- Actions defined and agreed
- Plan complete

**Responsibility:** Northern and Western Regional Assembly and project stakeholders

### Action 2:

Undertake a supply and demand analysis which will map the sectors that could increase their competitiveness by utilising digital services offered by SMEs and start-ups in the region.

**Timeframe for delivery:** Q3 2019

**How will delivery be measured:**

The supply and demand analysis will be assessed by the project stakeholders in the region to ensure the sectors and companies identified meet the needs of the project.

**Responsibility:** Northern & Western Regional Assembly with support from EI, LEOs, Údarás na Gaeltachta and other relevant partners in the North-West

### Action 3:

Identify good practices case studies in the North-West or support mechanisms which enable businesses to adopt digital technologies to increase their competitiveness.

**Timeframe for delivery:** Q3 2019

**How will delivery be measured:**

Identify a minimum of 4 good practices (20 in the project)

**Responsibility:** Northern and Western Regional Assembly and project stakeholders

### 3 Enterprise Agency and LEO activities in the North-West to 2020

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

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

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

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

#### Enterprise Ireland

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Enterprise Ireland's Regional Plan 2019 builds on this Strategy. It is a plan which identifies "National Initiatives" that are impactful and will develop regions of scale.

The plan entails a vision that is ambitious and proposes a number of new initiatives which will have significant impact on economic development in the regions. The plan is founded on four core objectives:

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

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

### Enterprise Ireland in the North-West

In 2018, the North-West Region supports 210 Enterprise Ireland client companies, employing 6,341 people.

Supporting regional enterprise development and working with businesses to achieve their global ambition is a key focus of Enterprise Ireland. Enterprise Ireland's strategy for 2017-2020 aims to create a further 60,000 jobs, while sustaining existing ones, which will make an important contribution to jobs and economic growth across all regions, including the North-West region.

Enterprise Ireland Regional Directors are working closely with the North-West Steering Committee to assist in implementing the actions set out in this plan. In addition, in line with a renewed strategic focus on regional development in 2019, and complementary to the delivery of national-level initiatives, Regional Directors will also be working on local initiatives tailored to address specific gaps and issues identified for each region.

### North-West focus for Enterprise Ireland:

Entrepreneurship - want to work with stakeholders to get more quality entrepreneurs and successful start-ups in the region. Key initiative is to understand the drivers and types of individuals that are most likely to develop successful start-ups from the region to better target supports and programmes to assist this cohort.

Resilience - Focus on promoting core offers around innovation, competitiveness and diversification. Adding a local lens or regional focus should assist companies engage and increase engagement. Developing and supporting key cluster initiatives will help promote peer learning and opportunities. Central to promoting competitiveness is assisting

peer learning Networks such as the West/North West Lean Network.

Placemaking - North-West offers a unique place to live and work. IDA companies such as Abbvie and Pramerica promote this to attract and retain talent. Enterprise Ireland with a focused second site location agenda could drive more companies to establish and move to the Region. Working with stakeholders Enterprise Ireland will aim to develop propositions to help attract such opportunities to the Region.

Marine - the coastal communities, such as Killybegs and Strandhill along the region have been very resilient and resourceful in how they harness the natural environment. There is an opportunity to further develop and help these coastal economies further diversify, compete internationally and innovate to establish new products, innovations and enterprise. Enterprise Ireland are working closely with stakeholders and clients to do just that.

## Údarás na Gaeltachta

For nearly 40 years, Údarás na Gaeltachta has been creating employment in the Gaeltacht and supporting the linguistic, economic, community and social development of the Gaeltacht. There are over 7,500 people in fulltime employment in companies supported by An tÚdarás.

Innovation & Enterprise and the Irish Language are the two over-arching themes that underpin and guide the Údarás na Gaeltachta 2018-2020 Strategic Plan. The plan outlines the organisations' approach to the development of a vibrant, successful, sustainable Gaeltacht community and economy, thereby ensuring the position of the Irish language as the primary community language of the Gaeltacht.

Among the main objectives outlined by the organisation for the next three years ahead are:

- Approval of 1,500 new jobs over the lifetime of this strategy;
- Support 8,000 full-time jobs created and retained in client companies;

- To preserve and develop the enterprise base, by supporting new and established companies so that they may grow and strengthen their business
  - o Increase the number of client companies engaged in exports by 10 percent;
  - o 20 percent increase in client company exports and sales;
  - o 15 percent increase in client company Research and Development expenditure;
- Support the preparation of and commence implementation of 29 Language Plans
- Support 31 Gaeltacht community organisations through a continuous objective led funding programme;
- To develop skills and employability in the Gaeltacht by supporting training, education and modern apprenticeship programmes as well as fostering links with third level institutions;

## Údarás na Gaeltachta – North-West (Co. Donegal Gaeltacht)

The Donegal Gaeltacht area represents an area of 1,502 km<sup>2</sup> which is approximately c.26 percent of the total Gaeltacht area country wide and approximately 30 percent of the area of County Donegal. It also represents 14 percent of the population of County Donegal and some of the most picturesque areas in the world. In contrast, some areas in the Donegal Gaeltacht are remote and have been recognised as areas of disadvantage and are in need of support and revitalisation.

Údarás na Gaeltachta has placed a particular focus on Donegal in recent years, due to the large number of jobs lost in the county in 2014 and, for the most part, the results of that investment are now evident in certain parts of the county. Over the past three years 242 additional people have been working in Údarás-supported jobs in the county

243 new jobs were created in the Donegal Gaeltacht in 2017. When job losses are taken into

consideration, there was a significant net increase of 103, which means that by year end there were 2,193 jobs in Údarás na Gaeltachta client companies. This is the highest number of jobs since 2009.

gteic – Gréasán Digiteach na Gaeltachta has an important role in Údarás na Gaeltachta's Strategic Plan for 2018 – 2020. The provision of innovation units with highspeed broadband connectivity giving new technology companies an opportunity to establish or locate themselves in the rural areas which encompass the Gaeltacht.

gteic@Gaoth Dobhair is a digital and innovation hub which it is hoped it will have a positive impact on potential further employment opportunities on the Gaoth Dobhair Business Park. 20 hot desks and shared spaces for remote working and e-workers have been developed in gteic@Gaoth Dobhair with an opportunity for future expansion also. Up to 26 fully fitted office spaces and incubation units have been developed for start-up or expanding businesses. Underpinning this development is access to high-speed internet with a capacity for gigabit broadband.

There are 6 gteic hubs proposed for the Donegal Gaeltacht including two on Árainn Mhór and Toraigh islands.

### 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 Border Region is served by its Local Enterprise Offices in Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Monaghan and Sligo which are co-located with the Local Authorities. In 2017, the LEOs operating the Border Region supported an additional 432 jobs from 2016 (total of 4,920 jobs) and the establishment of 6 new companies, bringing the total number of companies supported by the LEOs in the Border Region to 944.

### 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 percent 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 percent of the €5.7bn in annual capital expenditure by IDA client companies occurs outside of Dublin. These investments have been won despite the demographical challenges that exist and international trends of greater urbanisation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### IDA in the North-West

The IDA North-West region consists of the counties of Donegal, Sligo and Leitrim. IDA Ireland, via its offices in Letterkenny and Sligo, supports 40 companies employing 6,724 people in the region across a range of business sectors and activities. The FDI performance in the region has been strong in recent years with employment in IDA Ireland supported companies increasing by 13% since 2015.

The region continues to grow and diversify its FDI footprint. In recent years, the regions' traditional strengths in sectors such as Engineering and Medical Devices have been complemented with new investments from the Technology, Financial Services and Life Sciences sectors, providing a broad range of employment and career opportunities for people living in and moving to the region. Established employers in the region include global leaders such as Abbott, Bruss, MCI, Optum, Pramerica and Zeus Industrial Products many of whom are located on local IDA business parks.

IDA Ireland continues to market and position the North West region to potential investors from across the globe, particularly in the areas of Manufacturing, Software Engineering, and Global Business Services. This continues through familiarisation programmes, direct to client promotion and tailored value propositions and itineraries. The diversity of sectors and activities as well as the quality of jobs and investments in the North West region has been enhanced by existing companies scaling their operations and new investors choosing to locate in the region for the first time.

These investments include LiveTiles locating its design and artificial intelligence centre in Sligo; Phibro Animal Health establishing a new biotech facility in Sligo which will create 150 new jobs and Pramerica opening its new €42 Million campus for its 1,500 employees based in Letterkenny. Recent

expansions of scale from existing companies in the region including Abbot in Donegal and Overstock in Sligo make significant contributions to job creation in the region as well as positively impacting construction related employment. Access to first class talent, excellent infrastructure and a premium quality of life are just some of reasons cited by companies of why they find success in the region.

IDA partners with local stakeholders across the region in areas of education, infrastructure and Placemaking ensuring the region is an attractive location to work, live and learn. IDA, in collaboration with IT Sligo and Sligo County Council recently launched the "The Landing Space" in Sligo. The Landing Space is a 'fast landing solution' for companies considering the North West. In addition IDA Ireland has partnered with and supported Sligo County Council to develop the Western Distributor Road which will open up the 85 acres and bank at Oakfield – work has commenced on site. Companies such as Pramerica, Optum, and Overstock collaborate with Sligo and Letterkenny Institutes of Technology on trainee, graduate and research programmes.

IDA's focus over the coming period is to build on the strengths and competencies of the region with a particular focus on opportunities arising in Life Sciences, Technology and Services sectors. New and emerging technology opportunities will create new opportunities in areas of data analytics, artificial intelligence, smart manufacturing, global business services and new approaches to work such as home and hub working. 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.

Enhanced collaboration will be needed to align the efforts of all stakeholders and service providers to ensure that the North West continues to meet the needs of FDI companies. The delivery of necessary infrastructure and property solutions, fostering the continued development and growth of a skilled workforce and the continued development of the place-making of the region are pre-requisites to winning continued FDI investment. The region is very well positioned to continue to attract new FDI investment and grow employment in existing

companies and IDA Ireland will continue to collaborate with all stakeholders and parties in the region to achieve this objective under the Regional Enterprise Plan.

## 4 Implementation of the Regional Enterprise Plan

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Final Progress Reports for the Regional Action Plans for Jobs 2015-2017/8 provide a closing status in relation to all actions in these original reports and can be found on the Department's website at [www.dbei.ie](http://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 North-West Region to 2020

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

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

The North-West region is comprised of Donegal, Sligo and Leitrim. For labour force data purposes, the North-West is part of the Border region along with Cavan and Monaghan. Utilising new data from the CSO Labour Force Survey (LFS)<sup>3</sup>, the rate of growth and unemployment rates achieved for the Border region during the 2015-2017 lifetime of the original Regional Action Plans and up to Q3 2018 are outlined in Table 1, overleaf.

It is encouraging that the unemployment rate in the Border region at the end of the RAPJ period (Q1 2018) was the lowest of all the regions. Latest figures on unemployment show that the unemployment rate of the Border region was 5.1 percent in Q3 2018. The region currently has the second lowest unemployment rate. Under the new Labour Force Survey (LFS), unemployment numbers for the Border region have tended to fluctuate from quarter to quarter so it would be prudent to monitor the data over a longer period to discern any dominant pattern<sup>4</sup>. For a further statistical analysis of the regions performance see Appendix 2.

The focus for the North-West over the period to 2020 will be to maintain an emphasis on employment growth, aiming to out-perform the rate of growth achieved since 2015 to date and to ensure that sustainable, quality jobs are created and maintained the Region. 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> Note: Regional LFS employment data is not seasonally adjusted.

**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
<b>Border</b>	169,500	178,300	8,800	5.2%	8.6%	5.1%
<b>State</b>	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 North-West Steering Committee<sup>5</sup>

#### Chair of the North-West Committee

Conor Murphy  
Site Director, Abbott Diagnostics Division

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#### Membership of the Committee:

Enterprise Champions	Donegal ETB
Donegal County Council	Mayo, Sligo & Leitrim ETB
Sligo County Council	Údarás na Gaeltachta
Leitrim County Council	Waterways Ireland
IDA Ireland	Bord Iascaigh Mhara
Enterprise Ireland	InterTradeIreland
Donegal Local Enterprise Office	Teagasc
Sligo Local Enterprise Office	Failte Ireland
Leitrim Local Enterprise Office	SEUPB
Northern & Western Regional Assembly	IBEC
Western Development Commission	Cora Systems
Letterkenny Chamber	Seaquest
Carrick-on-Shannon Chamber	Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation
Sligo Chamber	Department of Environment, Community & Local Government
North-West Regional Skills Forum	Department of Social Protection
Letterkenny Institute of Technology	Department of Arts and Heritage
Institute of Technology Sligo	Department of Rural and Community Development
St. Angela's College Sligo	

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#### Secretariat/Programme Management

Ronan Denny

<sup>5</sup> The existing Implementation Committees will be renamed 'Steering Committees'

## Appendix 2: Brief profile and statistical snapshot - North-West

Constituent counties	Donegal, Sligo and Leitrim	
Regional Population & change (1996-2016)	210,872 (1996): 256,771 (2016) increase of 45,889	
GVA <sup>6</sup> per person 2000 and 2015	€16,147: €19,060	
Total in employment	178,300*	
Labour Force Participation rate	59.3%*	
Unemployment rate	5.1%*	
Unemployment blackspots <sup>7</sup>	6 <sup>8</sup>	
Percentage employed in Manufacturing: Services: Public sector	16%: 16%: 26%	
Educated to third level in North-West: State	36%: 45%	
Third Level Students (full-time & part-time)	4,970 <sup>9</sup>	
Number of enterprises <sup>10</sup> (micro: small: medium: large) (2016)	11,612: 790: 117: 8	
Number of Enterprise Ireland High Potential Start-Ups <sup>11</sup> (HPSUs) North-West: State (2017)	3: 90	
EI supported employment & no. client Companies 2016 - 2017	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
	Jobs: 6,049	Jobs: 5,844
	Companies: 237	Companies: 219
IDA supported employment & no. client companies (2017)	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
	Jobs: 5,742	Jobs: 6,462
	Companies: 39	Companies: 40
LEO supported employment & no. client companies (2017)	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
	Jobs: 2,875	Jobs: 2,616
	Companies: 560	Companies: 586
ÚnaG supported employment & no. client Companies 2016 - 2017	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
	Jobs: 2,081	Jobs: 2,193
	Companies: 272	Companies: 266
Number of LEO Priming Grants <sup>12</sup> North- West: State (2017)	23: 294	

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

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

3 Unemployment blackspots in the Region: Donegal (6)

4 Institute of Technology Sligo (3,698) & St. Angela's College, Co. Sligo (1,272)

5 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

6 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.

7 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, Border Region

In the North-West, manufacturing of both discrete products such as medical Devices, pharmaceuticals and automotive components is a long-standing activity, strongly linked to the area's heritage in precision engineering. ICT services, including software development and deployment for Financial Services/ Insurance, has also been a very strong growth sector for the North-West.

Two Institutes of Technology in the region, in Letterkenny and Sligo, are key resources in terms of skills development, research and industry-academic linkages. The campus incubation facilities within these Institutes also provide valuable supports to prospective entrepreneurs and small businesses.

Significant tourism and cultural assets, including the Wild Atlantic Way, the Shannon River and Lakelands in the North-West which offer strong potential for employment growth across the entire region.

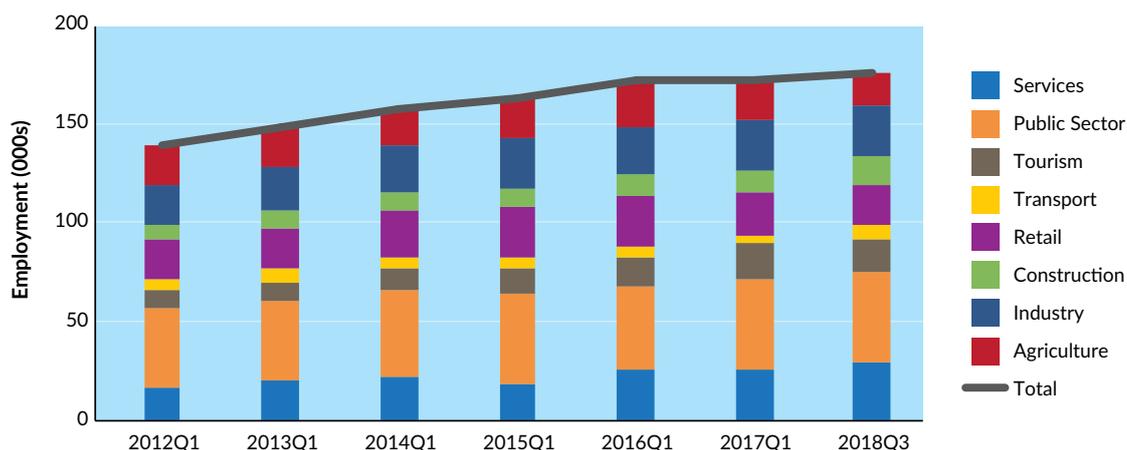
Sligo, with its, regional hospital, Institute of Technology, rail-link and port serves as the commercial and administrative centre for the sub-region of counties Leitrim, Sligo and South Donegal. Letterkenny is the gateway for the north-west sub-region, with its regional hospital services and Institute of Technology.

Brexit presents unprecedented challenges for Ireland given our economic, political and historical relationship with the UK. For the North-West and the rest of the Border region, the affects of Brexit will be most acutely felt.

### Employment trends

In Q3 2018 there were 178,300 people employed in the Border Region. Over the period Q1 2015 to Q3 2018, employment overall has grown by 5 percent with 8,800 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. Border Region Employment Growth 2012 - 2018 (CSO)



### Services

Employment in the Services sector, including the Public Sector, has increased significantly from 98,200 in 2012 to 122,000 in Q3 2018 and the sector currently accounts for 68 percent of all employment in the Border Region. This highlights the contribution to employment in the Border Region. There are currently 122,000 people working in the Services Sector and within the broad Services sector, the combined areas

of Public Administration/Defence, Human Health/Social Work and the Education sector account for 45,200 of those employed in the Border Region which represents 37 percent of all Services employment and 25 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, 20,700 people are employed in the sector in the North-East/North-West region.

### **Industry/Manufacturing**

Employment in the Industry/Manufacturing sector has increased over the period Q1 2012 to Q3 2018 with 4,100 more employed in the Sector. Employment in this sector counts for 13 percent of employment in the region which is above the national figure of 12.5 percent.

### **Construction**

The construction sector employed 7,800 in Q1 2012 and this numbers has increased to 14,900 in Q3 2018, accounting for 8 percent of the total employment which is similar to the national trend.

### **Agriculture**

The Agricultural sector employed 19,100 in Q1 2012 and had grown to a high of over 23,000 in 2016 but has since fallen to 16,800 in Q3 2018.

### **Tourism**

The Tourism sector employed 16,900 in Q3 2018, these figures are conservative as they are from the CSO which covers employment in accommodation and food services. The actual figure maybe somewhat higher if other "Services" employment for example in visitor attractions is included.

## Appendix 3: Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF)

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

Over the first and second calls under the REDF, North-West secured funding of over €5.2 million across four projects:

Call	Project	Description
1	Donegal Digital Innovation CLG	Innovation Ecosystem/Enterprise Capacity Building Programme
1	Leitrim County Enterprise Fund	3 Digital and Innovation Hubs (Leitrim, Cavan & Longford)
2	Leitrim Food Enterprise Zone CLG	Development of a Food Enterprise Zone
2	Sligo County Enterprise Fund CLG	Campus for Digital Gaming and Associated Tech

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

## Appendix 4: Other State Agencies Supporting Enterprise Development

### Local Authorities

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

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

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

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

### Bord Bia

Bord Bia, the Irish Food Board, is responsible for the development of new markets and the promotion of Irish food, drink and horticulture, reporting to the Department of 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.

## Regional Skills Fora

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

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

## Skillnet Ireland

Skillnet Ireland was established in 1999 and is funded from the National Training Fund through the Department of Education and Skills. The primary objective of Skillnet Ireland is to increase participation in enterprise training by companies. Skillnet Ireland fosters an enterprise led approach to workforce development. The process of determining training needs and coordinating the delivery of training, is primarily owned by the enterprise groups engaged with Skillnet Ireland. Skillnet Ireland operates under a joint investment model, part-funded by matching contributions from participating businesses in our learning networks. Encouraging enterprise to lead the process in this way helps ensure that programmes delivered through Skillnet Ireland are highly relevant to the needs of industry. This approach also enables cohesive enterprise networking and the flexibility to respond to ever-changing skills demands through both formal and informal learning. Through 65 plus Skillnet Learning Networks, Skillnet Ireland allocates funding to groups of companies in the same industry sector (or region) and with similar training needs, so they can deliver subsidised training for their teams. Skillnet Ireland also plays a key role in supporting and enabling Skillnet funded groups to reach their full potential.

## Science Foundation Ireland (SFI)

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

## Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI)

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

## Waterways Ireland

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

## Department of Rural and Community Development

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

## Western Development Commission

The Western Development Commission (WDC) was established under statute in 1998 to help tackle population decline in the West of Ireland. Its remit covers seven counties: Roscommon, Mayo, Galway, Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, and Clare. The WDC works to ensure that economic and social policy and practice meet the development needs of the Western Region effectively. Activities include conducting research on regional and rural issues, promoting specific initiatives including sectoral opportunities, and managing and administering the WDC Investment Fund (WIF). This dedicated fund provides risk capital on a commercial basis to projects and businesses through equity and loans.

## Third Level Institutes

Institute of Technology Sligo

St. Angela's College, Co. Sligo

Letterkenny Institute of Technology, Co. Donegal

## Appendix 5: Project Ireland 2040

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

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

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

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

The North West City Region is the 3rd largest urban agglomeration within the National Planning Framework (after Cork) and is referenced throughout the NPF. The North West Strategic Growth Partnership, working with both Governments, local communities and the private sector, promotes regional cooperation on planning, environmental protection and management, public services and infrastructural investment.

Jointly led by Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council, the Partnership has been endorsed by both governments through the North South Ministerial Council and is made up of senior officials from all departments in Ireland and Northern Ireland, working together to collectively resource the region's key priorities for growth and development with a commitment to building a more resilient economy in the North West City Region.

### Project Ireland 2040 Funds

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

### Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF)

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

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

### Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF)

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

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

### Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund

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

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

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

## Climate Action Fund

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

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

## Regional Spatial & Economic Strategies

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Atlantic Economic Corridor

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

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

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

### North West Strategic Growth Partnership

The development of the North-West city region, focused on Derry City, Letterkenny and Strabane, is essential to achieving the potential of the North West and maximising its contribution to regional and all-island economic growth. With Government support in Ireland and Northern Ireland, new cross-border collaborative arrangements have been developed to provide strategic leadership in the development of the region.

The North West Strategic Growth Partnership, working with both Governments, local communities and the private sector, promotes regional cooperation on planning, environmental protection and management, public services and infrastructural investment, including: Building up the critical mass of key urban centres in the wider region; Promotion of trade and tourism, innovation, human capital, life-long learning and business development; Improving inter-urban transport infrastructure; and better co-ordination of public services such as health and education facilities.

Jointly led by Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council, the Partnership has been endorsed by both governments through the North South Ministerial Council and is made up of senior government officials from all Government departments in Ireland and Northern Ireland, working together to collectively resource the region's key priorities for growth and development with a commitment to building a more resilient economy in the North West City Region.

**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 (01) 631 2121, 1890 220 222

[www.dbei.gov.ie](http://www.dbei.gov.ie)

[www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie)

[info@dbei.gov.ie](mailto:info@dbei.gov.ie)

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Business, Enterprise and Innovation  
[gov.ie](http://gov.ie)



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