An Roinn Fiontar,
Turasóireachta agus Fostaíochta
Department of Enterprise,
Tourism and Employment

# WEST

## Regional Enterprise Plan 2022-2025

Final Progress Report



Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment
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# Minister's Foreword

I am pleased to present this Final Progress Report on the implementation of the West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2025. Since its launch in 2022, the Plan has sought to drive economic growth, innovation and sustainable enterprise development across the region.

Since the Plan's inception, work has focused on unleashing the potential of the West region, covering counties Galway, Mayo and Roscommon, ensuring that it prospers economically and also plays a vital role in the overall Irish economy.

The Regional Enterprise Plans are bottom-up initiatives, developed and led by regional stakeholders, which focus on collaborative initiatives to strengthen the enterprise environment in each region. Each Regional Enterprise Plan is tailored to reflect regional strengths and opportunities and are aligned to the National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027 and national enterprise policy priorities such as decarbonisation and digitalisation.

To support balanced regional development and the implementation of the Regional Enterprise Plans, my Department, through Enterprise Ireland, has made available over €150 million in regional enterprise development funding since 2017. Schemes such as the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) have seen substantial investment in enterprise centres and hubs around the country, delivering supports to businesses in line with regional strengths. In the West, over €19 million was allocated for eight projects through the REDF. This funding was complemented by the Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme, launched in 2023.

Strategic sectors such as advanced manufacturing, med-tech, agri-food, renewable energy and life sciences have been supported through targeted investment, collaborative initiatives, and innovative programmes. A defining feature of this Plan has been the spirit of collaboration. Government agencies, local authorities, educational institutions, business representative bodies and local industry have worked together to address challenges and seize opportunities, ensuring the West is well positioned to compete nationally and internationally.

Over the lifetime of the Plan, the region has supported women entrepreneurs, strengthened industry-aligned skills development through the West Regional Skills Forum, advanced renewable energy leadership through cross-regional collaboration and strategic studies, and expanded innovation and entrepreneurship capacity, with Platform94 driving significant enterprise growth across the West and North-West.

Together these achievements highlight the West's resilience, ambition, and growing capacity for innovation-led growth.

While challenges remain, the achievements documented in this report reflect the dedication and vision of all stakeholders. I have been heartened by the collaboration on display and encourage all stakeholders to continue to work together to deliver real results for the West.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Chairperson Evelyn O'Toole and Interim Chairperson Elaine Murphy, for their leadership and drive; they made a significant impact bringing their wealth of experience to bear in this voluntary role. I would also like to thank Programme Manager Kenny Deery and his predecessor's Helena Deane and Roger Sweetman, the members of the Steering Committee and all regional partners whose commitment has been instrumental in delivering on the actions in the Regional Enterprise Plan.

My Department commissioned an independent review of the Regional Enterprise Plan initiative in 2025, which consulted widely with regional stakeholders and provided an opportunity to take stock of our approach. Taking on board the findings of the review, we will continue to build on what has been achieved and strengthen our support for regional enterprise development into the future.



**Alan Dillon TD**
Minister of State for Employment, Small Business and Retail

# Chairperson's Introduction

As we conclude the West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 - extended to end 2025 - I look back with immense pride at the significant collective progress made across Galway, Mayo, and Roscommon. When this roadmap was launched in 2022, the vision was to create a resilient, innovation led economy by capitalising on our unique regional strengths. Today, the evidence of our shared success is undeniable.

Our innovation ecosystem has matured into one of global significance. We have solidified the West's reputation as an incredibly attractive place to land Foreign Direct Investment, while simultaneously providing the fertile ground necessary for our domestic businesses to establish, grow, and prosper globally from a home base in the West. This dual focus has been the primary driver in creating more high value, sustainable jobs that allow our talent and their families to thrive within their own communities.

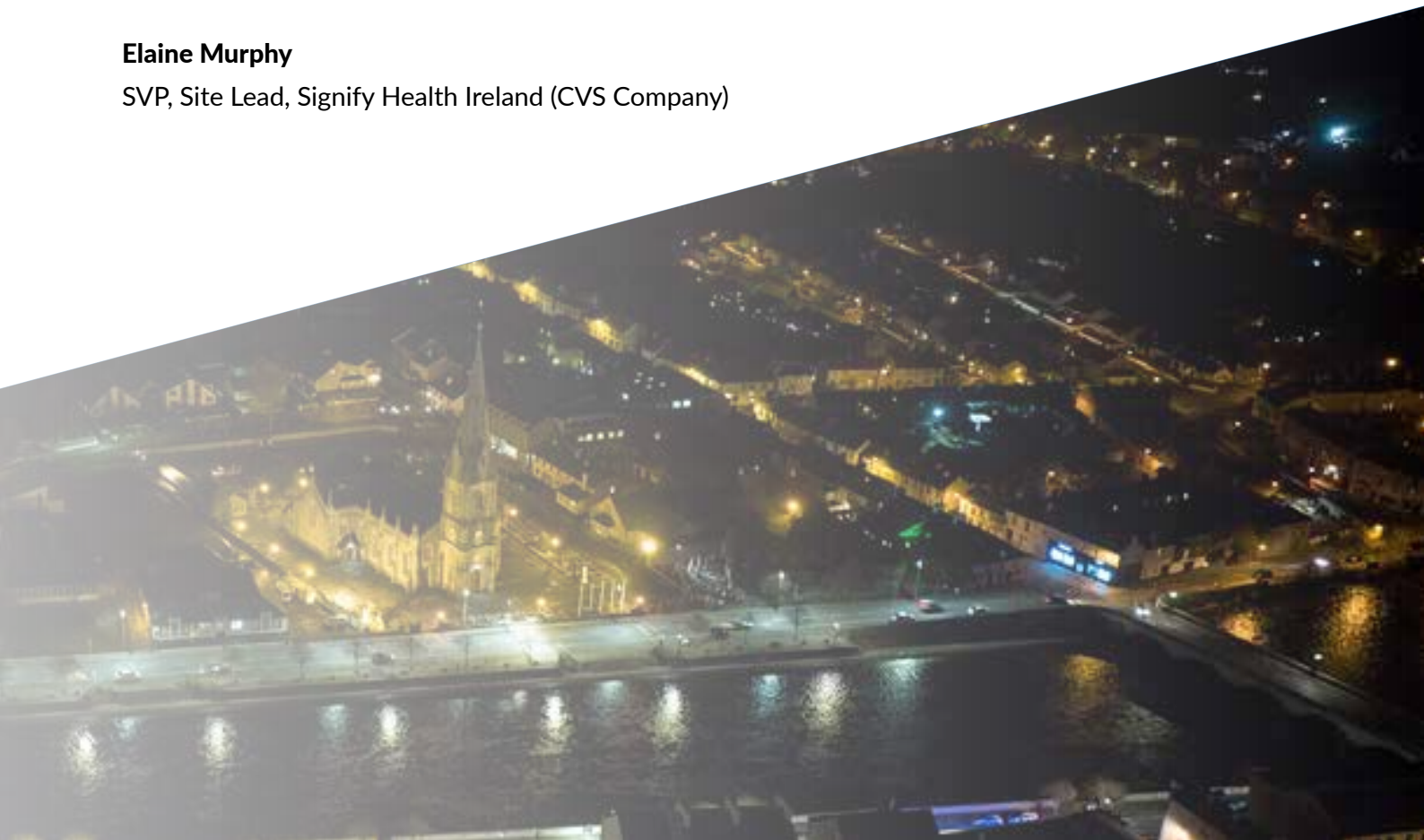
The cornerstone of this achievement has been our academic collaborations. By aligning the research excellence of Atlantic Technological University (ATU) and University of Galway with industry needs, we have secured a talent pipeline that supports both indigenous startups and multinational innovators. The West Regional Skills Forum and the Innovation Technology AtlanTec Gateway (ITAG) have been central in driving this collaboration. This synergy has turned academic insights into commercial realities, further strengthening the West's reputation on the global stage. None of this progress would have been possible without the unwavering support of our state agencies, local authorities and industry partners. The seamless coordination between Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Údarás na Gaeltachta and the Western Development Commission has transformed strategic objectives into meaningful project delivery. From the beacon that is PorterShed, to rural digital hubs, to regional innovation systems, these projects have enhanced the very fabric of our enterprise infrastructure.



I was privileged to take up the role of Interim Chair of this plan following Kenny Deery's appointment as Programme Manager in April 2025. I wish to acknowledge the significant contributions of my predecessor, Evelyn O'Toole, as well as the dedication and leadership of Helena Deane during her time as Programme Manager. I also want to express my sincere thanks to the more than 100 stakeholders whose insights and commitment have shaped the West REP journey. Together we have demonstrated that the West is an outstanding place to nurture and attract talent, and a powerful base from which to grow and prosper. We now leave behind an integrated and supportive environment where businesses of all sizes can truly compete on the global stage with confidence and pride.



**Elaine Murphy**
SVP, Site Lead, Signify Health Ireland (CVS Company)



# West Regional Enterprise Plan Final Progress Report

This progress report documents overall implementation of the West Regional Enterprise Plan to end of 2025, building on the information in the West mid-term progress report published in April 2024. The progress report has been prepared and signed off by the West Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee.

## West Highlights

In line with Action 1.6, championing gender equality, inclusivity and diversity in innovation and entrepreneurship the EMPOWER Cumasú initiative, led by Atlantic Technological University and the Innovation Hub in Mayo, has made significant progress in supporting women in enterprise across the Gaeltacht regions of the West. To date, with facilitation from the WREP Programme Manager 115 female entrepreneurs have taken part in the programme, which provides tailored mentoring, training and practical guidance to help participants develop, grow and scale their businesses. The initiative has created a strong pipeline of new and expanding women-led enterprises by offering a supportive learning environment and access to experienced business mentors.

In line with Action 1.3 and through the REP Working Group for Skills, the West Regional Skills Forum has strengthened enterprise growth by aligning industry needs with targeted education and training pathways. Engaging over 2,000 business leaders, through digital platforms and in-person events, the Forum helped companies pinpoint the supports needed to meet fast-evolving skills demands. Key outputs included Powered by Artificial Intelligence: Unlocking Small and Medium-sized Enterprise Growth in the West, developed in partnership with Atlantic Technological University and a national space sector skills assessment, both highlighting digital, automation and emerging technology gaps. Practical impacts ranged from addressing civil engineering shortages to supporting new programmes such as green hydrogen microcredentials and robotics training facilities.

The West Regional Enterprise Plan is advancing its ambition to position the Atlantic West Region as a national leader in renewable energy with strengthened interregional collaboration and alignment of offshore wind strategy with enterprise needs supporting Strategic Objective 3. To assess future potential, the West–North-West Renewable Energy Working Group has commissioned an energy-constraints study, is due to be published H1 2026, which will inform requirements for innovations such as Green Energy Parks. In parallel, PorterShed has secured €200k in Smart Regions priming funding to support early-stage development of a proposed renewable energy hub at the Port of Galway, with a significant stream one funding application planned for 2026.

Under the West Regional Enterprise Plan Strategic Objective to advance the regional entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem Platform94 has become a key enabler by expanding incubation, acceleration, and sector-specific supports across the West. As regional partner for the Skillnet Innovation Exchange since 2023, it connects growing local businesses with corporates seeking innovative tech solutions, opening real commercial opportunities. Through initiatives such as Pathway to Innovate clinics and B2B sales masterclasses, Platform94 builds enterprise capability and readiness for major procurement. With an estimated €66.8 million economic impact in 2024 and an expanding regional reach, it is driving digital transformation, scaling, and job creation across the West and North-West region.



# Case Studies from the West Regional Enterprise Plan

## 1. Bia Innovator Campus – Transforming the West's Agri-Food Ecosystem




Caroline McDonough, Head of Local Enterprise Office Galway; Minister Alan Dillon; Louise Ward, Head of Local Enterprise Office Roscommon; John Magee, Head of Local Enterprise Office Mayo with Kenny Deery, West Regional Enterprise Plan Programme Manager

The West of Ireland has long been a hub for agri-food, yet small scale producers traditionally struggled with barriers such as high production costs, limited access to specialised facilities and challenges to scaling beyond micro-enterprise level. To address these constraints, the Bia Innovator Campus was established in Athenry, providing a transformative solution to support food entrepreneurship and strengthen the regional food economy.

Developed within the strategic framework of the West Regional Enterprise Plan (WREP), the Campus functions as a not-for-profit entity co-located on the Teagasc Mellows Campus, aligning directly with the WREP's priorities of cluster development, green transition, and regional resilience through innovation.

Bia's core mission is to accelerate food innovation and commercial scalability for start-ups, micro-businesses, and SMEs by providing state of the art own door manufacturing units and pay-per-use kitchens to lower entry barriers. The campus aims to facilitate knowledge transfer and skills training through intensive industry academia collaboration while connecting local enterprises to international growth opportunities via EU-funded initiatives.

The establishment and ongoing success of the campus is supported by a strong collaborative funding model, with total capital investment exceeding €8.2 million. Enterprise Ireland was a cornerstone funder, contributing €4.3 million through the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) and Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme (RETS). The Rural Regeneration Development Fund (RRDF) added a further €2.9 million for infrastructure, while the Western Development Commission invested €1 million. Galway County Council and Teagasc continue to provide annual support, including staffing such as two full-time food technologists from Teagasc.

Bia operates within a *triple helix* model involving government, academia and industry. Collaboration with agencies including Teagasc, Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM), Bord Bia, and the Western Development Commission is facilitated through the WREP's working group. Academic and training partnerships with Atlantic Technological University and the GRETB ensure that programmes remain closely aligned to industry needs. Galway County Council also led the successful INTERREG EUROPE Food Incubators Transforming Regions + application, positioning local enterprises into the global stage. Resident companies are further participating in pilot trials with Teagasc Ashtown via the HUB4FOOD Interreg EU Project.

Since opening in 2024, the 2,300 m² facility has delivered measurable economic impact. It has supported the creation of 36 jobs within tenant businesses, achieved full occupancy of all starter units, doubled utilisation of its pay-per-use kitchen in 2025 compared to 2024. At present, 24 SMEs are operating on-site across ten long-term units and four commercial kitchens. In less than two years, Bia has engaged with over 800 food and drink SMEs, delivered 34 practical workshops, and completed 41 self-funded technical projects.

Looking ahead, Bia plans to double its technical projects and training programmes within the next two years. By bridging the gap between culinary innovation and commercial manufacturing, the campus is ensuring that the West of Ireland remains at the forefront of food innovation, providing a scalable model for regional enterprise development that blends local heritage with global ambition.

## 2. The CREW (Creative Enterprise West) project




Winners of the 2024 showcase Creative Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Development (CEED)

The CREW (Creative Enterprise West) project stands as a central driver of the West's creative economy, successfully evolving from a development initiative into a fully operational hub-and-spoke ecosystem. Identified as a priority under Strategic Objective 2 of the West Regional Enterprise Plan (WREP), CREW was strategically scaled through targeted investment from the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF). The €3.4 million REDF allocation provided both capital and programme needed to launch the CREW Enterprise and Innovation Hub in Galway in April 2024. Today, the hub acts as an anchor for the wider regional network that extends enterprise supports to 11 counties. This model has proven highly effective in bridging the gap between urban innovation and rural accessibility, with over 35% of all programme participants now based outside the Galway city region. CREW also functions as an important foundation for developing future centres of excellence, such as the emerging An Bealach initiative in Roscommon.

A core strength of CREW is its comprehensive portfolio of specialised programmes designed in partnership with academic institutions and national bodies. Its collaboration with Atlantic Technological University (ATU) has delivered high-impact education pathways, including the Postgraduate Certificate in Creative Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Development and extensive undergraduate discovery sessions that have engaged hundreds of learners. These initiatives support talent pipelines and help embed innovation within the wider creative industries.

Alongside education, CREW's incubation and enterprise development supports, delivered with Enterprise Ireland and the Local Enterprise Offices, have proven highly effective, with more than one hundred start-ups progressing through this structured development pipeline. To strengthen niche subsectors, CREW has formed strategic partnerships with IMIRT (The Irish Game Makers Association) and Screen Ireland, supporting dedicated games incubation and digital media incubation programmes that ensure the region remains competitive in merging creative technologies.

The organisation has also significantly expanded its international reach. By leveraging major European funding mechanisms – including Horizon SPECTRA, EIT TRI CREATES, and Interreg Europe DIGI CONTENT – has connected Irish creative SMEs with global expertise, best-practice models, and investor networks. Nationally, CREW serves as the Irish partner for the Creative Business Cup, supported by the Western Development Commission, and leads cross-border collaboration through the Shared Island ARCC Project. Ongoing partnerships with the Western Development Commission, Údarás na Gaeltachta, and the Connected Hubs network reinforce resilience and scalability of its regional delivery model.

This coordinated ecosystem has generated measurable impact. CREW has moved 18 growth-stage companies through intensive support programmes and engaged nearly 1,000 participants across its various entrepreneurship and innovation initiatives. Through the integration of infrastructure, skills development, incubation and internationalisation, CREW has successfully scaled the creative sector into a nationally significant cluster that defines the modern industrial landscape of the West of Ireland.

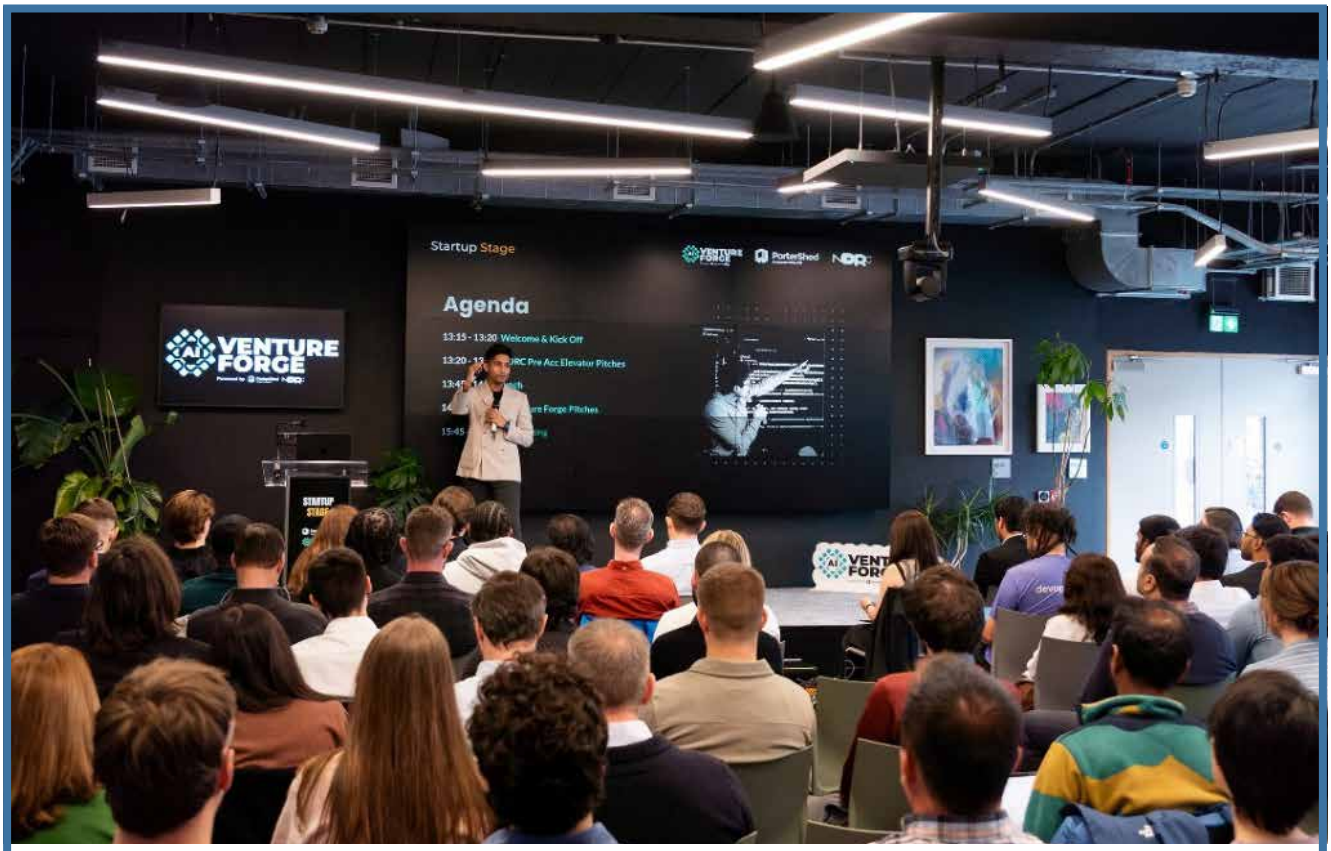
The culmination of CREW's work to date will be showcased at *Edge 26*, a national creative conference scheduled for May 2026, highlighting the region's leadership in creative enterprise and its expanding global connections.

## 3. PorterShed – Building a Sector-Specific Innovation Powerhouse that drives the Region (2022–2025)

Since 2022, the West of Ireland has faced the dual challenge of transitioning to a digital first economy while meeting ambitious national climate targets. The WREP has been a critical driver for the growth of PorterShed, positioning it within the wider regional hub network and strengthening its ability to secure strategic funding. The Plan also supported collaboration with the West Regional Skills Forum to identify critical skills needs, bringing together enterprise and agencies to develop targeted programmes and new collaborative initiatives aligned with industry demand. PorterShed addressed these challenges by evolving from a technology innovation hub and coworking space to a specialised hub for high growth clusters and technology accelerator programmes. This evolution aligns directly with Regional Enterprise Plan objectives to accelerate digitalisation, foster the green transition, and strengthen regional resilience through cluster development.



Minister Peter Burke; Minister Hildegarde Naughton with Margaret Monaghan of MartEye




Dushyant Singh, Programme Manager of the AI Venture Forge addressing a cohort of participants on the Accelerator

The primary goals were to expand physical capacity to house scaling technology startups, deliver sector specific accelerators in Artificial Intelligence, deliver Early-Stage Technology initiatives and establish a dedicated infrastructure for renewable energy innovation. The ambition has always been to provide more than an "office space".

The physical foundation was solidified in 2022 with the opening of PorterShed a hAon (Bowling Green) and PorterShed a Dó (Market Street), funded by nearly €4.2 million under the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF). These facilities, connected by the GigaBitHub 1Gb initiative, now support over 350 innovators within the PorterShed Campus and have an alumni of in excess of 900, attributing to high value jobs across the West, centred in Galway City.

Collaboration is central to PorterShed's model. In 2025, PorterShed secured a €166,109 Priming Grant from the Enterprise Ireland under the Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Fund (SREIS) to scope a Renewable Energy Innovation Hub.




Kevin Sherry, Enterprise Ireland and Minister Peter Burke with PorterShed member company City Swift founders Brian O'Rourke & Alan Farrelly

The AI Venture Forge (2025) accelerator, funded via the National Digital Research Centre (NDRC) Realisation Fund, partnered with the Irish Centre for High-End Computing (ICHEC) to provide 10 *AI-native* startups with supercomputing power and fundraising immersive missions to Paris and San Francisco.

The impact of these coordinated actions is evident across multiple metrics:
*Job Creation & Retention*: Since 2022, PorterShed has supported companies that have created hundreds of high-value jobs in the region.

*Sectoral Leadership*: Through several international relationships and sector specific programmes such as collaborating with NorthWell Health (2022–Ongoing) and quarterly Investor Readiness Programmes and pitches, regional MedTech startups achieved direct commercialisation pathways into the U.S. market.

*Ecosystem Integration*: Initiatives like the i2i Project (2022–2023) with local and International Higher Education Institutes and the Innovative Cities project with Galway City Council have bridged the gap between student talent and industry needs.

*Future Resilience*: The delivery of the Annual Leaving Cert Computer Science Hackathon and Girls in STEM TY programmes in 2025 ensures a robust future talent pipeline.

Today, PorterShed serves as a best-in-class national model for regional innovation. By successfully blending capital investment for physical infrastructure with high-level, sector specific programming.

# Overview of the Regional Enterprise Plans

Balanced regional enterprise development is a Government priority; the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment and its agencies contribute to this agenda in several ways, including through the nine Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs).

The Regional Enterprise Plans 2022-2025 were bottom-up plans developed and led by regional stakeholders, which focused on collaborative initiatives to strengthen the enterprise ecosystem in each region. They were considered complementary to the ongoing work of key enterprise stakeholders including IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland. The REPs aimed to help drive economic growth and sustain better standards of living throughout Ireland. Each plan was underpinned by an understanding of the unique local strengths and assets in that region.

The REPs were aligned to national policy priorities including the National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027, green growth and digitalisation. Each plan included several strategic objectives and actions under each of these. Some REP actions focused on delivery of enterprise centres and hubs in the regions and associated programmatic supports to businesses. Since 2017, the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment has allocated over €150 million to regional enterprise development through a range of schemes administered by Enterprise Ireland, some of which have funded key REP projects.



The nine REP regions are the North-East (Cavan, Monaghan, Louth), North-West (Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim), West (Galway, Mayo, Roscommon), Mid-West (Limerick, Clare, Tipperary), South-West (Cork, Kerry), South-East (Carlow, Kilkenny, Waterford and Wexford), Midlands (Laois, Offaly, Longford, Westmeath), Mid-East (Meath, Kildare, Wicklow) and Dublin.

The REPs evolved from the Regional Action Plans for Jobs in place from 2015 to 2017. The first set of REPs launched in 2018 and covered the period to 2020.

The latest plans launched in 2022 and were originally to run until the end of 2024; following a one-year extension to support implementation and enable an independent review of the REP initiative, the plans came to an end in December 2025. Mid-term progress reports for each of the REPs were published in April 2024 and are available on the Department's website.

At regional level, each REP is implemented by a Steering Committee made up of regional stakeholders and chaired by an enterprise champion, typically a senior private sector businessperson. A full-time REP Programme Manager, hosted in a local authority, drives implementation on the ground. The Department oversees implementation of the REP initiative at the national level; this includes hosting the REP National Oversight Group (NOG), co-chaired by the Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, and Ministers of State. The NOG provides overall strategic direction for the REP initiative and typically met twice annually to review progress, share insights and guide future planning.



# Smart Specialisation

In July 2022, the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment (DETE) published Ireland's National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022–2027 (S3). Its goal is to drive innovation-led and sustainable regional growth by leveraging local sectoral strengths and emerging opportunities through collaboration among businesses, research institutions, public authorities, and civil society. S3 links DETE's Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs) and the Regional Assemblies' Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSESs) with national innovation strategies, ensuring alignment in Research, Development and Innovation (RD&I) policy and planning both regionally and nationally.

Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy fulfils a European Commission requirement for Ireland to access structural funding under European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Policy Objective 1: A Smarter Europe. The preparation of the strategy itself represents a key strategic outcome under Ireland's ERDF Programmes 2021-2027.

Launched in November 2022, the Regional Development Monitor (RDM) is a joint initiative of Ireland's three Regional Assemblies and the All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO). The RDM provides an online mapping viewer with socio-economic and environmental indicators, enabling stakeholders to track progress under themes such as:

- Green Region
- Liveable Region
- Creative and Innovative Region

This tool supports evidence-based decision-making and promotes transparency in regional development. The Regional Development Monitor also includes a Smart Specialisation dashboard to enable better monitoring of progress.

The first progress report on Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy was published in March 2025 and progress under the eight goals of the strategy were highlighted.

- Goal 1: Linking national and regional enterprise and innovation policy
- Goal 2: Enabling "A Smarter Europe"
- Goal 3: Improving research and innovation capacity in Ireland's regions
- Goal 4: Encouraging more regionally dispersed RD&I
- Goal 5: Advancing the twin green and digital transformation
- Goal 6: Skills for innovation
- Goal 7: Reinforcing sectoral strengths
- Goal 8: Monitoring progress on regional innovation, and building international connections

Each of the Regional Assemblies sit on the National Smart Specialisation Implementation Group which has overall responsibility for the delivery of the Strategy's national and regional strategic priorities. In ensuring delivery of regional priorities, the Regional Assemblies also sit on the steering committees for the REPs. Working with the REPs is an important vehicle in translating S3 into regional and local impact.



## Smart Specialisation in the West Region:

Smart Specialisation in the West Region is supported and underpinned by Ireland's National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027 (S3), with a particular focus on enhancing regional innovation capabilities, adding value to embedded industrial specialisms and developing globally competitive clusters. In the context of the West Region, the implementation of Ireland's S3 is supported by the priorities under Policy Objective 1 of the Northern and Western Regional Programme, which is co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and managed by the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA). During the lifetime of the West Regional Enterprise Plan, a wide range of high-value schemes have been developed and implemented which have supported the implementation of Ireland's S3 in the West Region. These include investments in:

- The TU Research and Innovation Supporting Enterprise (RISE) Scheme, which has supported the Atlantic Technological University (ATU) in recruiting PHD students to support regional enterprises.
- The Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme, which is delivering investments in innovation assets in the region.
- The Technology Gateway Programme which supports three Technology Gateways across the ATU's campuses to deliver expertise and practical solutions for industry in the region.
- The Accelerating Research to Commercialisation (ARC) Hub investment to establish a regional Health-Tech translational and commercialisation hub in Galway.



# Strategic Objective 1: Advance the development of the regional Entrepreneurship and Innovation Ecosystem

## Expand availability of incubation, acceleration, and sector-specific start-up infrastructure and programmes

**Action Leader:** University of Galway and Enterprise Ireland
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action complete

**Action Update:**
In 2025, the Western Enterprise Ecosystem, comprising chief executive officers and senior team members of innovation hubs supporting entrepreneurs and start-ups across multiple sectors, met four times to build on collaboration and knowledge sharing with Enterprise Ireland. These engagements reinforced the region's commitment to fostering a connected and supportive environment for enterprise development.

Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Údarás na Gaeltachta, and the Western Regional Enterprise Plan Programme Manager convened a roundtable with MedTech and Life Sciences companies to understand sectoral needs. This discussion reaffirmed priorities identified in the Regional Enterprise Innovation and Smart Specialisation (REISS) feasibility study and evolved into a shared vision for a Life Sciences and HealthTech campus in the region. The Life Sciences Working Group met in October 2025 and agreed

actions to progress this vision, including a submission to the consultation process for the National Life Sciences Strategy in December 2025. At the end of the plan an application for support through the Smart Regions funding was being prepared to develop a roadmap for realising the Life Sciences and HealthTech campus. This activity also aligns with Strategic Objective 4, Action 4.2.

Further progress was achieved through targeted supports for sectoral innovation hubs. The CREW Digital Hub (Q2 2025) and BIA Innovator Hub (Q4 2024, continuing into 2025) successfully secured Stream 3 Smart Regions funding to deliver additional programmes, training, and education for entrepreneurs, start-ups, and small and medium-sized enterprises in the creative and food sectors. Both projects include sector-specific accelerator programmes designed to enable ambitious start-ups to grow and scale.

Platform94 advanced its *SCALE by Platform94* programme, funded through Smart Regions Stream 2, into a thriving cluster of close to 100 international scaling technology companies. In addition, the New Frontiers Entrepreneurship Programme continued throughout 2025, supporting entrepreneurs in the region to de-risk and develop their business propositions.

## Action 1.2: Expand access to early stage and scaling capital

**Action Leader:** WestBIC
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action Complete

**Action Update:**
Enterprises at different stages of development require a broad and flexible range of finance options to sustain innovation, support startups, and enable SMEs to scale. The West region identified the need to attract additional angel and international venture capital investment, strengthen domestic venture capital availability, and better leverage regional alumni networks. This action also sought to address knowledge asymmetry among entrepreneurs by clarifying pathways for innovation and growth finance and improving awareness of underused instruments such as IPOs. The action built on existing regional strengths, including the HBAN West by North-West syndicate, the Western Development Commission's Western Investment Fund, InterTradeIreland supports, and the NDRC preaccelerator delivered locally through the Galway City Innovation District at PorterShed.

This action has been fully delivered by WestBIC and was resourced through the EU funded Interreg Unicorn Quest initiative. The initiative gave access to international expertise and European good practice in supporting regional ecosystems for high-growth and scaling enterprises. An initial European-level analysis

examined the unicorn and high-growth startup landscape, identifying transferable insights relevant to Ireland and specifically the Western region. Findings were presented to the West Regional Enterprise Plan (WREP) Strategic Objective 1 subgroup in June 2024 and circulated for wider feedback in August 2024.

A more detailed regional study followed, focusing on local barriers, opportunities and structural challenges. To deepen the evidence base, a case study approach was adopted. Galway-based CitySwift provided practical insights into accessing growth capital, attracting specialists' talent and navigating international competition. These findings informed WREP discussions on regional scaling conditions and ecosystem gaps.

Delivery was strengthened by strong stakeholder engagement through the WREP structure. Regular updates were provided at WREP Steering Committee and working group meetings. Stakeholders, including Údarás na Gaeltachta, Atlantic Technological University, the Western Development Commission, Platform94, the University of Galway, Galway Chamber and Enterprise Ireland contributed insights and provided feedback. This collaborative approach improved knowledge exchange and strengthened alignment across regional enterprise actors.

Several recommendations emerged from this piece of work, including the need to strengthen milestone-driven investor readiness supports; develop a regional co-investment fund capable of supporting follow-on investments of between €1 million and €2 million; explore alternative and innovative financing tools such as revenue-based financing; a pilot equity crowdfunding platform; and an intellectual property commercialisation and financing initiative.

WestBIC organised three major regional events on accessing startup and scaling capital, which involved nearly 300 participants. These events helped inform the research studies and increased awareness of funding pathways among regional enterprises.

The work completed now provides a solid foundation for future initiatives to strengthen investor readiness, increase access to scaling capital, and attract further investment into the West region.

## Action 1.3: Drive forward the development of People and Skills

**Action Leader:** West Regional Skills Forum
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action Complete

**Action Update:**
The West Regional Skills Forum and its members, on an ongoing basis, have engaged directly with companies to identify enterprise skills needs and signpost them to suitable further and higher education provision. The West Regional Enterprise Plan (WREP) working group for skills was established to coincide with the Regional Skills Forum, to help identify these enterprise skills and key-skills bottlenecks.

Identifying enterprise skill needs has been achieved through one-to-one stakeholder meetings and industry-focused events, reaching hundreds of companies across the West.

Sector-specific working groups across as sales, food and drink manufacturing, cybersecurity, and advanced manufacturing have played a key role in helping enterprises identify skills gaps and access appropriate training supports. One of the most effective examples has been the civil engineering working group, where structured engagement between employers, education and training providers, and public bodies enabled a clear assessment of the sector's priority skills needs. These needs were mapped against existing funded training programmes – many of which companies had not previously been aware of – resulting in the uptake of relevant training. Remaining gaps were addressed through the development of new training targeted training responses. With its objectives successfully met and participating companies satisfied with the outcomes, the working group has now concluded.

A core strand of activity involved the systematic identification of enterprise skills requirements across both sectoral and cross-sectoral levels. This was achieved through extensive employer engagement, regional surveys, workshops, and targeted working groups. Collectively, these efforts produced several major skills intelligence outputs. These included the *2022 Appetite for Growth: Insights into the Skills Needs of Food and Drink Manufacturers in the West* report produced with BIA Innovator in 2022; the *Industry 4.0 Readiness in SMEs* report for manufacturing sector developed with the University of Galway in 2023; and the *Powered by Artificial Intelligence: Unlocking Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise Growth in the West* report delivered with Atlantic Technological University in 2025.

At national level, in 2025 the West Regional Skills Forum led the development of *Beyond the Horizon: Building Ireland's Space Workforce*, the first comprehensive skills assessment of Ireland's emerging space sector. Although national in its reach, the report was initiated and driven by the West and demonstrated how regional intelligence can shape workforce planning for strategically important future growth industries.

Critically, identified needs were translated into new or enhanced education and training responses that linked employers directly with education and training providers. This resulted in the development of a sales apprenticeship with Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board; a bakery traineeship delivered by Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board; a tailored suite of programmes for clients of BIA Innovator; and a green hydrogen micro-credential at the University of Galway aligned with clean energy priorities of civil engineering companies. Additional examples include a cooperative business model suite of workshops for independent game developers delivered through CREW Digital, and a suite of robotics and automation programmes at Atlantic Technological University.

## Action 1.4: Harness the Connected Hubs and Grow Remote initiatives to assist Placemaking and Talent Retention

**Action Leader:** Western Development Commission
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action Partially Complete (Ongoing)

**Action Update:**
The partnership work to strengthen placemaking through the Connected Hubs initiative and promotional activity has continued throughout the lifetime of the Regional Enterprise Plan. The Western Development Commission has developed and delivered annual national marketing campaigns designed to raise awareness of the hub network and highlight the role of hubs in supporting placemaking. The WREP brought together key regional stakeholders through a series of events and workshops to gain insights and opinions helpful in informing this work. During 2025, the Western Development Commission promoted towns and villages with hubs as attractive locations in which to live and work, emphasising the benefits of high-quality digital infrastructure and community-centred workspaces.

A significant milestone was the decision to bring the *2025 National Hub Summit* to Ballinasloe. This national gathering brings together hub managers, hub teams, policy partners and local development stakeholders for a day of knowledge sharing and collaboration. The event provides an opportunity for leaders in the sector to share insights, explore emerging trends and identify priorities for the development of the national hub network.

Across the Western region, hubs have continued to evolve beyond their original purpose as remote working spaces. Many now function as multi-purpose community assets offering programmes, events and activities that support learning, enterprise development and cultural participation. Initiatives such as *Art in the Hubs* demonstrate the potential of hub spaces to reflect and strengthen local creative activity, while informal networking and community-led events help reduce isolation for remote and hybrid workers.

The Connected Hubs platform provides an important framework to support this evolution by enabling hubs to expand their role in talent development, lifelong learning and community resilience. The platform also strengthens collaboration between hubs across the region by supporting shared services, joint promotion and coordinated training activities.

This work is complemented by a separate initiative involving regional stakeholders such as members of the Regional Skills Forum, representatives of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly and organisations within the enterprise ecosystem. These groups have participated in three inter-regional learning events where they shared regional challenges, examined innovative approaches to talent attraction and retention and presented examples of good practice from the Western region. A further three inter-regional learning events will take place during the remainder of the project, with the next event scheduled to be hosted in the region in June 2026.

## Action 1.5: Advance the Enterprise Strategy for the Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) at the Ireland West Airport Knock

**Action Leader:** Mayo County Council and Ireland West Airport Knock
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action Partially Complete (Ongoing)

**Action Update:**
A feasibility study examining the potential for a circular economy innovation hub at Ireland West Airport Knock was completed in 2024. The study was carried out by Urban Foresight and funded through the Regional Enterprise Innovation Scoping Scheme (REISS). In parallel with this work, a preliminary building concept design for the proposed innovation hub was developed. This design was funded by the Horan Trust CLG with additional support from Mayo County Council and the Western Development Commission. The concept design is located within the Ireland West Airport Knock Strategic Development Zone and was progressed in tandem with the feasibility study to provide an integrated basis for future planning.

The feasibility study identified substantial economic opportunities associated with the transition to a circular economy, particularly in the aviation, automotive and renewable energy sectors. These findings demonstrate the potential for the region to become a leader in circular innovation, underpinned by technical expertise, established regional assets and the strategic location of the airport. Based on this work, additional funding is now being sought under the Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Fund to support the development of capital, operational and financial plans, as well as a planning application for the proposed hub. The initiative currently has the working title of the Aviation Circular Economy Hub, previously referred to as the Infinity Hub.

Supported by the WREP, a funding application has been submitted to progress the proposed development of the Aviation Circular Economy Hub.

The Government, through the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, has allocated two years of funding to Mayo County Council to fund a Project Manager to develop a roadmap for the delivery of the Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) at Ireland West Airport Knock. This funding supports the appointment of a dedicated Project Manager and the procurement of external expertise required to prepare a detailed development roadmap. Development of the roadmap is being overseen by a Steering Committee comprising representatives from Mayo County Council, Ireland West Airport, Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Western Development Commission, Northern and Western Regional Assembly, Atlantic Technological University, an independent representative from the financial services sector and the West Regional Enterprise Plan Programme Manager.

A stakeholder group has also been established, and work is underway to develop a project funding, phasing and implementation strategy.

These elements form part of the wider Strategic Development Zone development roadmap, which is scheduled for completion in August 2026.

Through these coordinated efforts, the region has made significant progress in advancing the planning, design and strategic foundations of a potential circular economy hub. Collaboration between national agencies, local authorities and regional development bodies is contributing to the development of a roadmap, due in August, which will inform future decision-making.

## Action 1.6: Continue to champion gender equality, inclusivity, and diversity in innovation and entrepreneurship

**Action Leader:** ATU (Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology), iHub Mayo
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action Complete

**Action Update:**
EMPOWER Cumasú is a free entrepreneurship programme for women living in Gaeltacht areas of Mayo, Galway, Donegal, Kerry, Cork, Meath, and Waterford. The programme is funded by Údarás na Gaeltachta and delivered by Atlantic Technological University Innovation Hubs and the Rubicon Centre at Munster Technological University.

Launched in An Spidéal in May 2024, EMPOWER Cumasú is designed to promote and fast-track women in business and has attracted significant interest. To date, 115 women have completed the programme. EMPOWER Cumasú offers two distinct pathways: *Cumasú Tús (START)*, for women with early-stage ideas (less than 18 months), delivered online once a week over 12 weeks; and *Cumasú Fás (GROWTH)*, for established businesswomen (18+ months) seeking to scale, delivered once a month over ten months in a blended format. Optional online Irish language classes are also available to all participants.

The programme provides tailored support, mentorship, and resources to help participants overcome challenges and grow their ventures. By fostering a dynamic network of aspiring female business leaders, EMPOWER Cumasú aims to break down barriers and create opportunities for women to succeed in the competitive entrepreneurial landscape. Recruitment for the 2026 programmes will begin in late January, with intakes scheduled for spring and autumn.



## Strategic Objective 2:
## Strengthen and harness the Cultural and Creative Sector to attract new investment, commercialisation, and collaboration opportunities

### Action 2.1: Build-up and scale the activities of CREW Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) project, to act as hub and spoke across the region, developing creative centres of excellence such as An Bealach, Roscommon

**Action Leader:** CREW
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action Complete

**Action Update:**
This action has focused on establishing and scaling CREW as a regional hub and spoke model for creative enterprise development across the West and North-West. Between 2022 and 2025, the action progressed as planned, moving CREW from an early-stage concept to an operational and regionally embedded creative enterprise ecosystem with national relevance.

Supported by €3.4 million in funding through Enterprise Ireland Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF), CREW benefited from the WREP's support in convening regional stakeholders, fostering collaboration and ensuring alignment with wider regional enterprise priorities.

CREW was developed to improve coordination, increase scale and enhance regional accessibility to enterprise supports for the creative industries. Funding provided through the REDF, together with national, regional and European programmes, enabled CREW to introduce an integrated delivery model combining infrastructure, enterprise development supports, skills provision and structured industry engagement.

A key milestone was achieved in April 2024 with the opening of the CREW Enterprise and Innovation Hub in Galway. The Hub provides dedicated workspace, and specialised enterprise supports for creative businesses working in film, animation, game development, immersive technologies, digital media and digital design. It now serves as the central anchor for CREW's hub-and-spoke model, supporting programme delivery, collaborative activity and regional engagement.

Programme delivery has achieved wide regional reach. Participants from eleven counties have taken part in CREW activities. Between 2023 and 2025, a total of 105 early-stage creative enterprises completed incubation programmes, with some progressing to national enterprise initiatives such as New Frontiers and Acorns. During the period 2024 to 2025, eighteen growth-stage companies received targeted support through advanced enterprise interventions. Across the same period, 825 participants engaged in CREW's entrepreneurship programmes, excluding undergraduate provision.

CREW has also strengthened the early-stage pipeline for creative enterprise by engaging 253 undergraduate students through Creative Entrepreneurship discovery sessions designed to support progression into startup and incubation programmes.

Delivery has been structured through a hub-and-spoke model to ensure strong regional accessibility. CREW has worked closely with Atlantic Technological University, Connected Hubs, Údarás na Gaeltachta, the Western Development Commission, local authorities and Local Enterprise Offices to reach enterprises across urban, rural and Gaeltacht communities. Since 2023, 35 percent of programme participants have been located outside the Galway city region, illustrating balanced regional reach.

In 2025, CREW placed a strong emphasis on collaboration and capacity building. During this year, CREW worked with more than 30 mentors and established 23 strategic partnerships across 11 national and international projects. These partnerships enhanced programme quality, strengthened alignment with industry needs and expanded access to international best practice. CREW also worked with representative bodies including IMIRT, Eirmersive and the Institute of Designers in Ireland, ensuring programme content reflected current talent and skills requirements.

Overall, delivery of this action has improved coordination of creative enterprise supports, strengthened regional capacity, increased policy visibility for the sector and established a delivery model capable of supporting future investment in the region.

## Action 2.2: Develop clustering of the Creative and Cultural Sector, by creating new linkages and new collaborative opportunities and expand creative assets (e.g., film studio, production facilities) and capitalise on emerging development in immersive technology and animation

**Action Leader:** Western Development Commission
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action Partially Complete (Ongoing)

**Action Update:**
The region has strengthened its creative enterprise ecosystem through two significant initiatives supported by the Western Development Commission. In 2023 the Irish Creative Business Cup secured a three-year pilot and was delivered locally by CREW. The competition has attracted strong regional participation, with two entrants already performing exceptionally well on the international stage, including Starilum, which placed third in the global finals in 2025. The competition will run again in 2026, further raising the profile of creative entrepreneurship in the West.

A second development in the West region is the Landing Studio at CREW; a pilot project created in partnership with the AIM Centre in Sligo. The Studio is designed as a shared innovation space where creative startups and small businesses can access specialist support for artificial intelligence projects. Applications opened in November 2025, and the Studio is expected to become operational in early 2026.

## Action 2.3: Further the collaboration between industry, academia, and researchers, thereby assisting the development and commercial exploitation of creative and cultural intellectual property

**Action Leader:** ATU (Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology)
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action Complete

**Action Update:**
Atlantic Technological University (ATU) has made significant progress in integrating creative innovation with industry engagement, using the WREP as a key enabler in facilitating learning and dialogue with key regional stakeholders. Work-integrated learning is being delivered through undergraduate programmes in Product Design, Textile and Fashion Design, Graphic Design and Illustration, Interior Design, Furniture Design and Manufacture, and Architectural Woodworking. ATU also offers a structured, industry-focused Master of Arts research programme in Creative Practice, with pathways expanding in 2026 to include Creative Technologies, Design Practice, and Documentary Making.

ATU provides individual industry-focused research options at PhD, MFA, MA, and MSc levels, in both practice-based and traditional academic modes. A progressive research strategy has been developed to suit creative small and medium-sized enterprises, beginning with low-risk applied research projects and building towards larger-scale collaborations.

Infrastructure development includes the establishment of a small entry-level virtual production studio for education and applied research, co-funded by NTUTOR. ATU is conducting a PhD research project titled *Design and Innovation in SMEs*, funded by the Design and Crafts Council of Ireland, and hosts annual industry days to connect enterprises with students and staff. Plans are underway to develop a medium-sized virtual production research and development studio in partnership with CREW ATU and CREW are also collaborating on several EU-funded research, innovation, and industry development projects.
ATU delivers an accredited Level 9 Postgraduate Certificate in Creative Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Development (CEED) annually in partnership with CREW, co-funded by Galway Local Enterprise Office and Greasan na Meán. A Level 8 Certificate in Media Practice, focused on Irish language media production companies, is also delivered in partnership with CREW and Greasan na Meán, co-funded by Údarás na Gaeltachta and TG4.

Phase two of the CEED programme—a Level 9 Postgraduate Diploma for start-ups and founders further along in their development—is planned for 2026. ATU will also host an annual industry forum from 2026 to address sectoral issues, share insights, and bring international expertise to the region. In addition, ATU is advancing international collaboration through the development of an accredited Diploma in International Professional Development, a "boomerang" programme placing graduates with international hosts in film, television, animation, games, and content creation sectors. Returning graduates will receive start-up or soft-landing support coordinated by CREW.

In 2023 the feasibility study for the Atlantic Region of Creative Content (ARCC) was completed in partnership with ATU, CREW, Galway Culture Company, Galway City Council, Ulster University, Derry City and Strabane District Council, and the Western Development Commission. The study recommends leveraging partner expertise to develop an all-island Creative Industries Cluster, facilitated through virtual production spaces and clustering initiatives.

ATU has also established a new School of Creative Industries spanning the West and North-West regions, incorporating creative departments and programmes across Galway, Connemara, Sligo, and Donegal campuses. Positioned within the Faculty of Design, Education, and Social Science, this multi-campus school increases critical mass and opens new opportunities for cross-border collaboration, research, and innovation projects.



# Strategic Objective 3:
# Realise the Atlantic West Region's potential for enterprise and job creation in the Renewable Energy sector

## Action 3.1: Engage in inter-regional collaboration for development of the supply-chain and upskilling programmes, in particular in offshore remewable energy

**Action Leader:** West Regional Enterprise Plan Programme Manager
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action Partially Complete (Ongoing)

**Action Update:**
This strategic objective to realise the Atlantic West Region's potential for renewable energy enterprise, has progressed significantly. This has been achieved through a coordinated interregional approach to supply chain development and workforce upskilling. The work undertaken has allowed the region to move from broad policy alignment to the delivery of applied economic analysis, integrating offshore wind strategy with onshore conditions and future development opportunities.

A core driver of progress has been the formal establishment of the Joint West and North-West Regional Enterprise Plans Working Group. Chaired by the Chief Executive of Údarás na Gaeltachta, this collaborative structure has created an effective forum linking public enterprise bodies, universities, local

authorities, and national economic development agencies. Through consistent engagement, the group has aligned regional ambitions with the *Powering Prosperity – Ireland's Offshore Wind Industrial Strategy*, ensuring that the region speaks with a unified voice regarding the infrastructure, skills and supply chain supports required to develop a strong green economy. Since September 2024, the Department of Enterprise Tourism and Employment's (DETE) Green Tech Unit (formerly Offshore Wind Strategy Unit) has also held quarterly meetings with the Chairs and Programme Managers of each regions' Offshore Wind Partnership / Working Group. These have enabled the regional groups to work collaboratively and recognise the vast shared opportunity that offshore wind energy represents.

In November 2025, DETE also led a delegation on a visit to Denmark to GreenLab, with a representative from the Western Development Commission in attendance - a leading example of a Green Energy Park that co-locates renewable energy production with industrial energy demand. GreenLab was identified as a particularly well-developed application of the green energy park concept in the economic assessment of the potential for green energy parks carried out by Gavin and Doherty Geosolutions on behalf of the DETE (Action 37).

A key milestone has been the commissioning of a comprehensive *Economic Opportunity Assessment*. The assessment acknowledges that although the region hosts almost a quarter of Ireland's installed wind energy capacity, significant grid constraints remain. In response, the action leader reframed the challenge of constrained energy as an opportunity to develop a network of Green Energy Parks. These parks would aim to co-locate energy-intensive enterprise activities, such as smart data research, hydrogen production and advanced manufacturing, directly alongside renewable energy sources.

The interregional partnership has enabled detailed mapping of energy supply and demand using geographic information system tools. This analysis has supported the design of targeted upskilling programmes that reflect the technical needs of future Green Energy Parks. The group has also examined international models and assessed the potential application of private wire legislation to strengthen investment certainty for both foreign direct investment and indigenous enterprise.

A strong focus has been placed on community-based opportunities and the development of smart data test beds, helping to ensure that the benefits of the renewable energy transition are felt locally. This approach responds to the long-term economic underperformance experienced in parts of the region and seeks to reposition the West at the forefront for green energy capable of generating sustainable, high-value employment.

Specific progress is evident in County Mayo, which has grown in renewable energy development. The County Development Plan 2022 to 2028 established a minimum renewable energy generation target of six hundred megawatts, representing a significant expansion from previous output levels. Innovation is being advanced through the €200 million Firlough project, which integrates onshore wind capacity with eighty megawatts of green hydrogen production. County Mayo now hosts approximately fifteen wind farms, generating around six percent of Ireland's wind energy. The Killala Community Wind Farm, with a capacity of seventeen megawatts, illustrates the growing role of local ownership models. Policy updates adopted during 2025 further strengthened the county's position by supporting new development zones for offshore and wave energy research. Mayo County Council has also participated in the Energy Constraints Study, which is due for publication in March 2026.

## Action 3.2: Develop smart specialisation of the region in the field of renewable energy, linked to natural and physical assets, e.g., Atlantic Marine Energy Test Site (AMETS) while identifying suitable locations and investment opportunities for further development, including green hydrogen

**Action Leader:** West Regional Enterprise Plan Programme Manager
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action Partially Complete (Ongoing)

**Action Update:**
In County Mayo, the Atlantic Marine Energy Test Site, located off the Mullet Peninsula, was developed as a nationally significant facility for final precommercial testing of floating offshore wind and wave energy technologies. Although the project has not progressed as originally anticipated, the West Regional Enterprise Plan (WREP) Manager supported the project by convening stakeholders through a series of partner meetings to help shape its proposed direction. The long-term ambition for the site includes full grid connectivity, supported by plans for new onshore substation infrastructure and cable routes. These developments aim to create a seamless pathway from research to commercial deployment, strengthening the region's contribution to Ireland's renewable energy sector.

This activity is complemented by major private-sector investment across North Mayo. Notable initiatives include the €200 million green hydrogen production facility at Firlough and the redevelopment of sites in Killala to establish new green gas centres. Leveraging the county's strong wind resource, these projects are expected to produce an estimated 4.5 million kilograms of green hydrogen annually. Together, they place Mayo in good position in Ireland's emerging green gas economy and contribute to the wider regional objective of building a resilient, low-carbon industrial base.

In County Galway the SH2AMROCK project directly advances the region's ambition to lead in renewable energy and green technology. This €54 million initiative, launched in 2024, is developing Ireland's first Green Hydrogen Valley by integrating a 4 MW electrolyser at Mount Lucas with a multi-modal transport hub at Galway Port.

The WREP has played an important enabling role by providing the collaborative environment needed to unite 28 partners across academia and industry. Through alignment with the WREP's *Smart Specialisation priorities*, SH2AMROCK targets the decarbonisation of hard-to-abate sectors, including hydrogen-fuelled freight, intercity coaches, and pioneering zero-emission flight trials in Connemara. This alignment has secured vital EU funding, positioning the West as a living lab for energy innovation. Ultimately, SH2AMROCK is delivering on the WREP's vision for a sustainable, high-value economy, strengthens the region as a primary exporter of green energy expertise.

Research activity at the University of Galway underpins these advancements. The university is developing digital modelling tools that map renewable energy potential and optimise hydrogen production costs for local communities. This research deepens the region's evidence base and supports informed decision-making across enterprise, infrastructure and energy planning.

As part of the revised Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, County Roscommon is now integrated into a coordinated energy framework that supports regional collaboration. Local authorities across the Western region are jointly identifying large-scale renewable energy sites capable of contributing to the national grid and attracting high-value enterprise. This Smart Specialisation approach ensures that Roscommon's inland renewable resources are directly linked with the coastal hydrogen hubs developing in Mayo and Galway. By aligning their physical, industrial and research strengths, the Western counties are creating a cohesive renewable energy ecosystem with the potential to deliver long-term economic growth and climate resilience.

## Action 3.3: Form a task force with the goal of enabling development and removing barriers to progress of critical infrastructure

**Action Leader:** Western Development Commission
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2024
**Final Status:** Action Discontinued

**Action Update:**
The original intent of this objective was to establish a regional task force to focus on infrastructure priorities across the West. However, in parallel with the development of this action, the Accelerating Infrastructure Taskforce was formally established by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in May 2025 to address systemic barriers in the delivery of critical housing, energy and transport infrastructure at national level. The primary output of this taskforce was the publication of the *Accelerating Infrastructure – Report and Action Plan* on 3 December 2025. The report identified 12 significant barriers to infrastructure delivery and proposed 30 specific and timebound actions to support a more efficient national development pipeline.

Throughout this period, the Steering Committee of the West Regional Enterprise Plan continued to support the work of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly and the Western Development Commission on infrastructure matters. The committee recognised the importance of coordinated action to ensure that the region retains the capacity to attract investment and support enterprise development. Overall, although the original scope of this action evolved in line with emerging national policy structures, the Western region played an active and constructive role in shaping the national infrastructure reform agenda. The contributions of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly, the Western Development Commission and industry partners have reinforced the case for improved regional alignment, accelerated delivery and a more balanced national approach to infrastructure planning.



# Strategic Objective 4:
# Drive the Global Competitiveness of the Life Sciences sector underpinned by an expanded regional footprint and coordination

## Action 4.1: Further develop coordination activities and integration of the diverse elements and actors in the ecosystem

**Action Leader:** Enterprise Ireland and Private Sector Lead
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action Partially Complete (Ongoing)

**Action Update:**

To further elevate Ireland's status as a premier global leader in MedTech—a sector projected to reach €1.5 billion by 2029—Galway County Council and the life sciences working group of the West Regional Enterprise Plan are advancing an Industry led Enterprise Ireland Smart Regions feasibility study for the Lifescience and Health Tech Centre of Excellence. This initiative, known as the Health Tech Campus, is designed to harness the region's existing success by creating a high performance, integrated ecosystem. By developing sophisticated coordination activities that align the region's diverse actors, the project aims to secure Galway's position as a global reference point for innovation while anchoring high value intellectual property and talent within the West of Ireland.

A cornerstone of this ambition is the deep integration of the region's academic powerhouses, specifically the University of Galway and Atlantic Technological University. These institutions serve as the primary engines of innovation, exemplified by the BioInnovate programme, which has already generated over 30 startups and €300 million in follow on funding and the MET Gateway. The Health Tech Campus will act as a vital bridge between this academic research and commercial application, providing a dedicated environment where the next generation of entrepreneurial scientists can transition novel research into market ready technologies. By closely aligning with the ARC Hub for MedTech and connected health, the campus ensures that cutting edge university research is immediately supported by the infrastructure and industry expertise necessary for global scaling.

The proposed Health Tech Campus seeks to build on this momentum by providing a world class collision space where high potential university spinouts and established multinationals co-innovate. Following an extensive consultation process in 2025, this project emphasises the creation of flexible, future proof infrastructure that supports the entire lifecycle of a company. An initial Smart Regions Stream 4 Feasibility application is being prepared for submission by Galway County Council in Q1 2026. The aim of this application is to provide a structured roadmap to guide the potential development and delivery of the Campus under the WREP framework.This will build on the excellent work undertaken by the Medlink Cluster.

This physical expansion proposes to be underpinned by a robust multi agency collaboration involving Galway County Council, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, and Údarás na Gaeltachta supported by the Western Development Commission. This partnership ensures that the campus acts as a central hub for shared specialised equipment, academic expertise, and sub supplier networks. By integrating wrap around services, such as regulatory, clinical, and commercialisation expertise directly into the ecosystem, the campus provides a seamless pathway for companies to transition from university labs to global market leadership.

The driving force of this initiative is the deliberate coordination of ecosystem actors through a unified delivery roadmap. This involves utilising the MedLink Galway cluster as a strategic connector and facilitating high level knowledge transfer between global industry giants, academic researchers, and scaling indigenous firms.

## Action 4.2: Scale and diversify sector specialisms and specialism – specific initiatives across the region, including access to necessary infrastructure in liaison with Strategic Objective 1

**Action Leader:** Údarás na Gaeltachta
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action Partially Complete (Ongoing)

**Action Update:**
Following the identification of a significant need for additional life sciences incubation and innovation space within the region, the Board of Údarás na Gaeltachta approved funding to progress the design and scoping of an extension to *gteic@Na Forbacha*. This extension will be specifically tailored to meet the requirements of the Life Sciences sector, providing state-of-the-art facilities that foster research, development, and collaboration. Planning permission for the development has been secured, and the next phase will involve issuing tenders to advance the proposed works. Through the West Regional Enterprise Plan a series of multi-agency workshops have been facilitated, bringing national and regional partners together to help influence this project.

In parallel, Údarás na Gaeltachta is reviewing previously approved planning permission for a facility originally intended for a single MedTech client, which is no longer required. The footprint of this facility in An Spidéal is substantial, and a feasibility study is currently underway to determine the most effective way to repurpose the space. Consideration is being given to segmenting the building into multiple smaller units, creating flexible accommodation options for a range of Life Sciences and MedTech enterprises. This approach aims to maximise utilisation of existing resources while supporting the growth and diversification of the sector within the Gaeltacht region.



# Strategic Objective 5:
# Grow the AgTech and Food sector in the West, underpinned by an integrated innovation network, facilitating the transition towards a sustainable Bioeconomy

## Action 5.1: Utilising the BIA Innovator Campus as a central engine for development of Agri-food and Ag-Tech, develop an integrated regional platform for innovation in conjunction with national and regional partners, ensuring proactive, joined-up approaches to identify and address ecosystem needs

**Action Leader:** BIA Innovator Campus
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action Complete

**Action Update:**

The BIA Innovator Campus is a not-for-profit company co-located on the Teagasc Mellows Campus in Athenry, County Galway. The 2,300 m² facility provides specialised technical and business supports, as well as on-site manufacturing solutions, to accelerate food innovation and growth for start-ups, micro businesses, and small and medium-sized enterprises.

The WREP has played a central role in this development by providing support with the framework for capital investment, facilitating stakeholder events and workshops and building regional collaboration, particularly with An Chistin in Co. Roscommon. The campus was established with a capital investment exceeding €8 million, sourced from multiple public and regional stakeholders. The primary funding contribution came from Enterprise Ireland, which allocated €4.3 million through the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) and Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme (RETS). Additional capital support was provided by the Department of Rural and Community Development, Galway County Council, Teagasc, Galway Rural Development (LEADER), and the Western Development Commission.

Beyond capital investment, the campus leverages European Union funding streams, actively coordinating seven Erasmus+ projects and two Interreg programmes that support research, innovation, and skills development.

Since its establishment, BIA has delivered significant impact. 36 jobs have been created across new tenant businesses on campus, with all starter units occupied and partial occupancy of growth units achieved. Additional employment has been generated indirectly through the provision of technical services. In 2025, pay-per-use kitchen utilisation doubled in monthly usage hours compared to 2024.

In less than two years of operation, BIA has engaged with over 800 food and drink small and medium-sized enterprises through skills training and knowledge transfer, delivered more than 34 practical workshops and knowledge-sharing events, and completed 41 self-funded technical projects. The campus has facilitated 24 small and medium-sized enterprises operating food manufacturing businesses on-site through its own-door food production units, with 10 of 12 units leased on a long-term basis, and four pay-per-use commercial kitchens and pilot plants fully equipped to accommodate a variety of production processes. 16 companies have operated from these facilities.

BIA has advised over 80 food start-ups and small and medium-sized enterprises on technical aspects of starting or growing a food business and has enabled access to EU funding and learning opportunities through Erasmus+, Interreg, and Atlantic Interreg projects. Two resident companies are currently receiving pilot trials in partnership with Teagasc Ashtown via the HUB4FOOD Interreg EU Project.

The campus's impact is underpinned by collaborative partnerships with Teagasc, Bord Iascaigh Mhara, Bord Bia, Safefood, Atlantic Technological University, Lidl, Enterprise Ireland, Local Enterprise Offices, Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board, Galway Rural Development, and the Western Development Commission. These partnerships enable the delivery of specialist training, innovation, business development, hospitality, and community employment services.

## Action 5.2: Encourage Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the sector to enable clustering and intra-company collaboration

**Action Leader:** Enterprise Ireland
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action Partially Complete (Ongoing)

**Action Update:**
The Enterprise Ireland Food Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) team is actively promoting the BIA Innovator Campus and its capabilities to support the development of the food and associated sectors. This engagement aims to ensure balanced regional development and position the campus as a key resource for food sector start-ups and small and medium-sized enterprises.

In mid-2024, the Agri-Tech Regional Enterprise Innovation and Smart Specialisation (REISS) study, completed by BIA Innovator Campus, concluded that there is an organic cluster of Agri-tech companies in the region. However, the study found no current need or interest in formalising this cluster. Regarding the establishment of an incubator for Agri-tech start-ups, the decision was made to prioritise full operationalisation of incubation and associated supports for food sector enterprises at BIA. Additionally, University College Dublin had recently launched an incubator for Agri-tech start-ups and an Innovators Initiative programme, making it strategically prudent to defer similar activity in the West at that time. With the introduction of the new veterinary course at Atlantic Technological University, there may be an opportunity to revisit Agri-tech incubation in the future.

## Action 5.3: Expand the innovation, educational and entrepreneurial opportunities for AgTech

**Action Leader:** West Regional LEOs
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action Complete

**Action Update:**
Significant progress has been made in strengthening the agriculture and food technology sector across Galway, Mayo and Roscommon during the period of this plan. A central element of this progress has been the development of the BIA Innovator Campus in Athenry, which opened in early 2024 and reached full operational capacity during 2025. The WREP provided a strategic framework that helped bring stakeholders together, supporting the volunteer board in delivering the facility and in building the wider

enterprise ecosystem that underpins its success. The campus now functions as a National Centre of Excellence, offering specialised infrastructure to more than 40 businesses, including innovation kitchens dedicated to meat, dairy and seafood product development.

The campus's establishment and ongoing operations are supported by a strong collaborative funding model, securing over €8.2 million in capital investment. Enterprise Ireland provided €4.3 million through the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) and the Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme (RETS), where the WREP support played a central role. A further €2.9 million was secured from the Rural Regeneration Development Fund (RRDF) for critical infrastructure, complemented by a €1 million investment from the Western Development Commission. Galway County Council and Teagasc continue to provide annual resource and capacity-building support, including Teagasc providing two full time food technologists.

Further entrepreneurial opportunities have been supported through the combined work of the Local Enterprise Offices in Galway, Mayo and Roscommon. To build the capacity of emerging businesses, the Agri Technology Management Development Programme was delivered during the plan period. This programme utilised the expertise of the Design and Technology Gateway at South Eastern Technological University (SETU) to provide high-level business support and technical mentoring to enterprises across the region.

A dedicated agriculture and food technology scoping study, commissioned through the BIA Innovator Campus and completed during 2025, mapped the regional ecosystem in a structured manner for the first time. It identified specialist sub-suppliers, skills needs, and networking gaps, and found that approximately five hundred people are currently employed in the sector across the three counties. This work is now informing efforts to establish a specialised regional cluster that can support a more collaborative and higher-growth enterprise environment.

Research and educational capability in the Western region has expanded during the plan. Atlantic Technological University has become a key contributor to enterprise planning and has increased its research activity in agriculture and food technology. By 2025, ATU had deepened its work in the circular bioeconomy and in the application of artificial intelligence in agriculture, aligning with the Western Development Commission's *Unlocking Potential* strategy.

Further investment was secured through the Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme and the Horticulture Innovation and Diversification Scheme, supporting specialised equipment, feasibility studies and early-stage product development across the sector.

## Action 5.4: Develop industry-Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) collaboration and research further to facilitate transition to circular Bioeconomy, championing cross- sectoral, low-carbon and smart approaches

**Action Leader:** Atlantic Technological University (Mountbellew)
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action Complete

**Action Update:**
Atlantic Technological University (ATU) Mountbellew has established itself as a pivotal leader in the transition to a circular bioeconomy, the university has successfully bridged the gap between academic research and industrial application, championing smart, low carbon, and cross sectoral strategies.

Central to this effort is ATU's integration into BiOrbic, the SFI Bioeconomy Research Centre. Through this partnership, ATU Mountbellew collaborates with UCD and Teagasc on the Climate Neutral Plant Protein Challenge. This initiative is vital to Ireland's climate targets, as it explores sustainable, high-value protein alternatives that reduce the carbon footprint of the agri-food sector.

ATU's commitment to "smart" agriculture is further evidenced by the Smart-Dairy project. A collaborative effort between the Galway City and Mountbellew campuses, this project modernises dairy practices by integrating technology driven solutions that optimise resource efficiency. Complementing this is the Aphid Integrated Pest Management initiative, funded under the European Innovation Partnership, which provides farmers with ecologically sound strategies to manage pests, reducing chemical dependency across the region.

Recognising that the transition to a circular economy must be socially equitable, ATU has taken a lead role in the Just Transition initiative. This work has become essential in providing socio economic support and frameworks for regional communities most impacted by the shift toward a climate neutral economy. ATU's influence has expanded through the Science Foundation Ireland Centre for Climate, Biodiversity, and Water, where it now holds a fully funded investigator position, driving transboundary research across Ireland and the UK.

Through these combined efforts—ranging from specialised postgraduate leadership programmes to cutting edge field research ATU Mountbellew is not merely participating in the bioeconomy; it is actively driving a resilient, low-carbon industrial future for the region. By fostering deep industry HEI collaboration, the university ensures that scientific innovation is rapidly translated into practical, sustainable business models for the Irish Agri-sector.

## Action 5.5: Further the development of enterprise and innovation in the Blue Bioeconomy

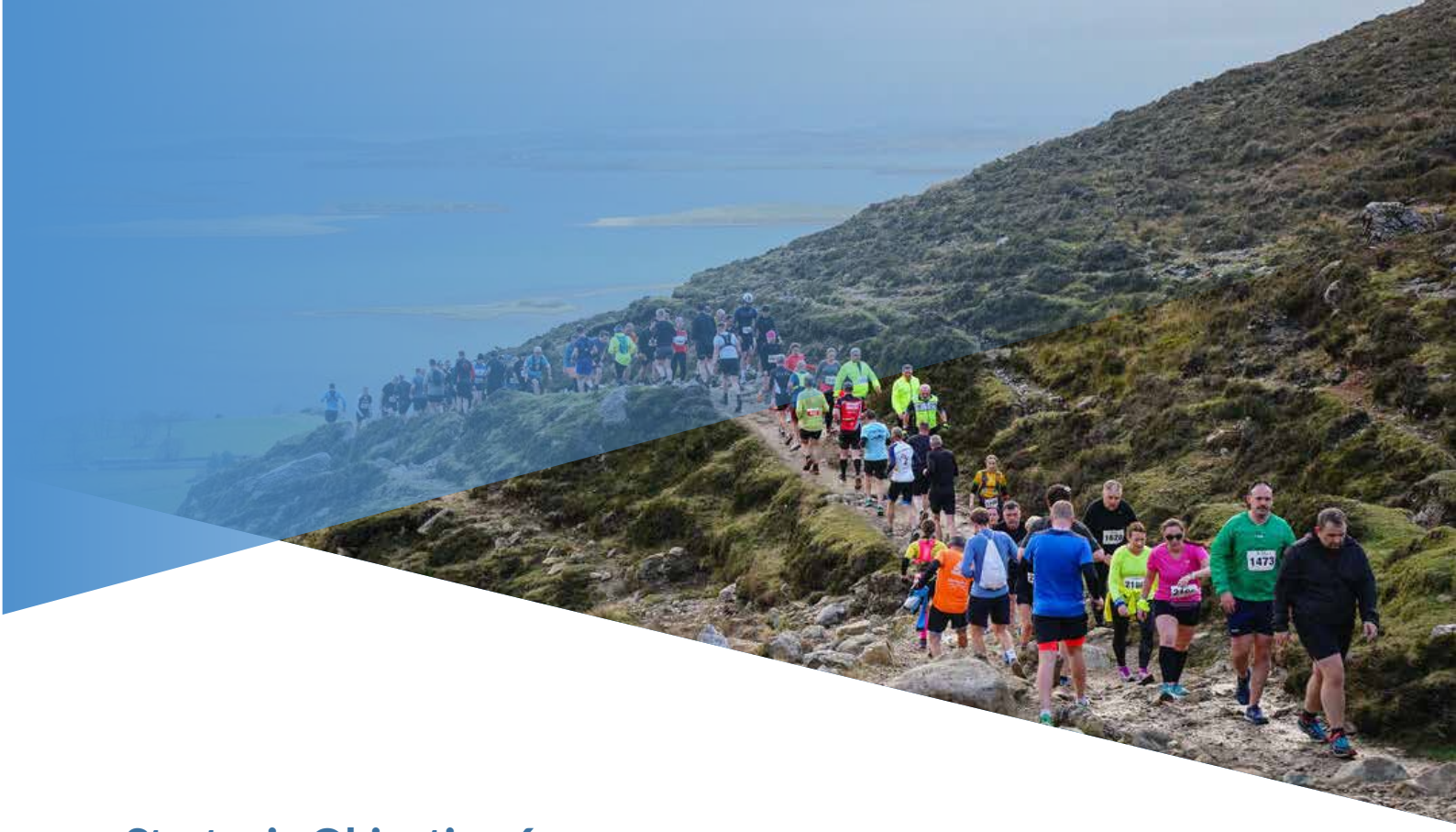
**Action Leader:** Marine Incubation and Development Centre
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action Partially Complete (Ongoing)

**Action Update:**
Significant progress has been achieved in establishing the Marine Incubation and Development Centre, now operating under the brand *Nua Mara – Ireland's Marine Innovation and Development Centre*.

Nua Mara has strengthened its enterprise development and international profile. In 2025, the centre presented at Aquaculture Europe in Valencia to an audience of over 3,000 attendees, alongside Bord Iascaigh Mhara and Atlantic Technological University. Two client companies, *Sea & Believe* and *Sea Me Grow*, were selected as winners of the Narwhal Challenge maritime business development programme in Brest, France.

Stakeholder engagement has been a key focus. In February 2025, Nua Mara co-organised *Mná na Mara* at the Connemara Coast Hotel, a conference celebrating women's leadership in Ireland's maritime sector. The Minister of State for Marine, Timmy Dooley, described MIDC Páirc na Mara as "a model of partnership between industry, academia, and government". In October 2025, Nua Mara hosted *Todhchaí Gorm – Blue Future: Shaping Ireland's Marine Bioeconomy* in Carna, welcoming over 100 marine sector stakeholders. Supported by the Marine Institute, this event contributed directly to national policy discussions on the Blue Bioeconomy Strategy and marked the 50th anniversary of Carna Research Station.

Training and skills development initiatives are progressing in collaboration with the Education and Training Board, focusing on shipwright training and recirculating aquaculture systems programmes to address marine sector skills needs. The centre's new website, nuamara.com, will go live in early 2026, and a Call for Challenges and Expertise has been launched to invite industry collaboration, positioning Nua Mara as a key connector between marine enterprises and research capability.



# Strategic Objective 6:
# Expand prospects for sustainable entrepreneurship, employment and upskilling in Tourism

## Action 6.1: Develop a pilot accelerator programme based around the experience economy, underpinning companies with sector-specific assistance and growth funding

**Action Leader:** Regional Chambers, led by Galway Chamber of Commerce
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action could not be completed

**Action Update:**
The focus of the activity on this action was driving higher value and more sustainable tourism projects, partially in response to the fall out of COVID-19 and the detrimental impact it had on Tourism. A proposal was developed recommending a tourism hackathon be delivered and budget to fund a tourism accelerator in the region of €1 million was sought.

Despite efforts to secure resources from both public and private sectors, no viable funding model was identified. The Steering Committee had agreed that this action could not be delivered as originally envisaged.

## Action 6.2: Build out integrated, networked approaches for smarter, greener, connected, and a more sustainable tourism offering

**Action Leader:** Fáilte Ireland
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action Partially Complete (Ongoing)

**Action Update:**
This action remains in progress. Destination Experience Development Plans (DEDP) have been activated in six destinations within the West Regional Enterprise Plan area, with new plans in development for Inland Mayo, East Galway, and Connemara and Islands. The Galway City DEDP 2025–2030 was launched in October 2025 at the Mick Lally Theatre and will be overseen by the Galway City Tourism Forum. The Connemara Coast and Islands Visitor Experience Development Plan, published in 2018, continues under the guidance of an Implementation Group of more than twenty stakeholders, with over 90 percent of actions achieved or underway as of the November 2021 progress review. The Clew Bay DEDP 2022–2026 is now in its fourth year of implementation, supported by the Clew Bay Tourism Network of businesses, councils, and agencies. The North Mayo DEDP was launched in late 2025, covering the area of Foxford to Blacksod, with desk-based planning complete and community consultations planned. North Roscommon is now incorporated into the Upper Shannon, Shannon-Erne and Border DEDP, launched in January 2025 with implementation structures in place. South Roscommon is supported through the Mid Shannon and Midlands DEDP, where an interim action plan is operational pending full development in 2025.

Sustainable regional tourism development continues across all destinations. In Galway City, strategic projects include exploring a year-round indoor food market, enhancing Galway City Museum, establishing a new cultural events venue, creating Irish language tourism itineraries and Urban Gaeltacht weekends, and improving neighbourhood connectivity. The plan aims to strengthen Galway as a vibrant, cultural, bilingual coastal city, dispersing visitor spending beyond the core and boosting family and all-weather tourism.

In Connemara and the Islands, strong collaboration across agencies, local groups, and businesses has extended the tourism season through enterprise readiness and promotional actions. Significant investment has been made in Connemara National Park and Kylemore Abbey, with major progress on the Connemara Greenway, now a notable regional asset. A new DEDP for Connemara is currently in development.

In Clew Bay, hundreds of actions are underway via the Network, including event development support such as the Mayo Dark Skies Festival and Sea2Summit, alongside enhancements to trails, cultural attractions, and digital promotion. In North Mayo, a consultant has been appointed, the plan's draft is expected by 2026, and work is underway to extend the tourism season and widen visitor distribution to rural areas.

For the Upper Shannon, Shannon-Erne and Border DEDP and the Mid Shannon and Midlands DEDP, implementation structures are established across both plans, with stakeholder representation from councils, Waterways Ireland, and tourism businesses. Local enhancements include Boyle Town receiving €470,715 in grant funding under the Destination Towns Scheme, with public realm improvements completed in December 2024 at King House laneway. Other achievements include promoting the Beara Breifne Way, leveraging Shannon waterways and famine heritage assets, and extending visitor stays to broaden the tourism season.



# Strategic Objective 7: Facilitate an equitable digital and green transformation in the West

## Action 7.1: Leverage the European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH) ecosystem to progress adaptation of the artificial intelligence, High Performance Computing (HPC) and cybersecurity technologies by the industry and public sector

**Action Leader:** Western Development Commission
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action Partially Complete (Ongoing)

**Action Update:**
Significant progress has been achieved in advancing an equitable digital and green transformation across the Western region. This work has been led by the Data to Sustain European Digital Innovation Hub, delivered by Atlantic Technological University in partnership with a wide network of regional actors driven through the work of the West Regional Enterprise Plan. The initiative has played a central role in strengthening digital capability among small and medium-sized enterprises and public sector organisations, while also supporting the region's transition to a low-carbon and circular economy.

A key milestone during this period was the progression of the Data to Sustain initiative into Phase Two of the European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH) programme for the period 2026 to 2029. This phase is supported by a combined investment of €23 million from the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and

Employment, Enterprise Ireland and the European Commission. The funding enables the expansion of the hub's regional footprint and ensures that businesses and public bodies have access to advanced digital expertise within their own communities. The initiative operates as a one-stop-shop, designed to reduce the barriers that often prevent smaller organisations from accessing complex digital tools.

Through the *Test Before Invest* service, enterprises across the region have piloted the use of high-performance computing for predictive modelling, explored advanced data analytics and used dedicated facilities to test the resilience of their cybersecurity systems. The EmbrAIsme initiative, delivered in partnership with the Western Development Commission, has further strengthened capacity by developing policy frameworks that help smaller enterprises adopt artificial intelligence technologies without the financial burden typically associated with research and development activity.

The integration of digital tools with the region's green transition has also continued to advance. Data to Sustain has supported several initiatives aimed at helping enterprises apply data-driven solutions to improve resource efficiency. For example, the hub has facilitated work in sustainable tourism by supporting regional operators to use digital systems to manage visitor flows and reduce carbon emissions, illustrating how digitalisation can support climate-focused innovation.

The region is now fully embedded within a broader pan-European network of more than two hundred digital innovation hubs. Participation in this network enables businesses in the West of Ireland to access specialised expertise, including robotics, digital manufacturing and blockchain technologies. This strengthens the region's ability to remain competitive internationally and ensures that startups and scaling companies can draw on leadingedge knowledge regardless of location. In doing so, the Western region is fostering a circular, digitally enabled economy that supports sustainable growth and long-term resilience.

Overall, the work delivered through Data to Sustain has expanded the availability of advanced digital supports, strengthened collaboration between regional partners and embedded the Western region within Europe's wider digital innovation landscape. This provides a strong foundation for continued progress in the region.

## Action 7.2: Develop initiative to encourage emergence of 'born sustainable, born circular' start-ups

**Action Leader:** West Regional LEOs
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action Complete

**Action Update:**
The Local Enterprise Offices in the Western region have undertaken substantial work to advance this action. The Local Enterprise Offices in Galway, Mayo and Roscommon meet regularly as a regional group, together with Enterprise Ireland and the West Regional Enterprise Programme Manager, and progress on this action is a standing agenda item at these meetings. This coordinated approach ensures consistent delivery of supports for early-stage sustainable and circular enterprises.

Support for new ventures is provided through a structured pathway of grants, mentoring and technical consultancy. The Green for Business scheme remains the primary entry point for startups by offering free expert audits that help new businesses reduce waste and optimise resource use from the earliest stages of development. Once a sustainability plan is established, eligible enterprises can apply for the Energy Efficiency Grant, which provides funding of up to €10,000 to cover 75 percent of the cost of installing sustainable technologies or energy-efficient equipment. The Local Enterprise Offices have also incorporated sustainability principles and best practice guidance into their Start Your Own Business training programmes.

The Western region benefits from specialised infrastructure that strengthens early-stage enterprise development in this area. The BIA Innovator Campus in Athenry has become a central hub for supporting "born sustainable, born circular" businesses. As a National Centre of Excellence, the campus provides startups in agriculture and food technology with specialised pay-as-you-go innovation kitchens and production units. These facilities allow new enterprises to embed circular models from the outset. One example is the Waste to Worth initiative, which focuses on transforming residual materials from food processing into high-value ingredients.

Further technical capacity is available through the Data to Sustain European Digital Innovation Hub, which provides digital tools to support circularity. These tools include data-driven systems for tracking product lifecycles and monitoring resource efficiency. Financial and technical supports are complemented by the Accelerate Green programme, an accelerator dedicated to environmentally focused enterprises and designed to help startups scale sustainable business models through specialised mentorship.

A key achievement under this action has been the strong collaboration between industry, Local Enterprise Offices, Enterprise Ireland and regional partners. This joined-up approach ensures that new sustainable enterprises receive comprehensive support, from early-stage feasibility through to scaling, and aligns with the region's broader ambition to embed circular economy principles within its enterprise ecosystem.

## Action 7.3: Develop further capacity to stimulate circular economy adaptation by enterprise in collaboration with the public bodies, industry and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)

**Action Leader:** University of Galway
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action Complete

**Action Update:**
Significant progress has been made in advancing circular economy capability across the Western region through coordinated work led by the University of Galway and the Western Development Commission. This action has been informed by the recommendations of the *Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development Circular Economy Review of the West of Ireland 2025*, which identified several structural challenges that required a coordinated regional response.

The OECD Review found that although the region generated less waste per capita than the national average, circularity remained limited because activity was concentrated at the end-of-life stage rather than in earlier stages such as product design, reuse and waste prevention.

In response, the region has developed an integrated suite of initiatives linking academic research, enterprise development and policy leadership. A central development is the Landing Studio at CREW in Galway. This facility provides creative and technology-focused enterprises with advisory supports to help redesign products and services for circularity. Through this model, small and medium-sized enterprises can access university-led expertise in lifecycle assessment and digital resource management.

Within the marine sector, the University of Galway has expanded its work through Blue Circular Economy initiatives involving fishing communities and marine industries in the repurposing of waste fishing gear and plastics into high-value secondary materials. This work is complemented by the THREADS project, which has established a network of social enterprises and textile manufacturers focused on developing closed

loop production systems. These initiatives are supported by the University of Galway's Sustainability Engagement Fund 2025 to 2026, which uses the university campus as a "Living Lab" to demonstrate scalable waste management systems, circular product design and low-carbon energy solutions.

The J.E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics will host its 2026 Business Summit with a focus on the *Business of Artificial Intelligence* and resilient enterprise models. This summit will provide a platform for public bodies and private organisations to align strategic aims and explore how circularity and artificial intelligence can support long-term competitiveness. New degree programmes in Environmental Leadership and Sustainability have also been introduced to address skills gaps identified in the OECD Review.

The Western Development Commission has strengthened regional capability through the launch of its *Western Development Commission Strategy 2025 to 2029*. The strategy allocates targeted investment from the Western Investment Fund for enterprises demonstrating circular innovation, helping accelerate the adoption of new business models.

Through these coordinated activities, the region has shifted from planning to implementation. The University of Galway now provides the technical evidence base; the Western Development Commission supplies the financial and policy framework and regional enterprises act as innovation testbeds. Collectively, these efforts have established a scalable and integrated approach to building a circular economy across the West.

## Action 7.4: Develop the region as a 'Living Lab' to help address challenges associated with the Digital and Green Transformation

**Action Leader:** Western Development Commission
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action Complete

**Action Update:**
The Living Lab concept is based on a user co-creation approach integrating research and innovation processes to achieve a solution to specific challenges. Activities include exploration, experimentation and evaluation of innovative ideas, scenarios, concepts and related technological tools and systems, in real life use cases. Western Development Commission (WDC) is seeking to assess living lab funded

opportunities in areas of regional strength and opportunity - non-invasive medical device prototype testing, Island vocational skills development programmes (OVERSEEs EU project application in 2024) and potentially female entrepreneurial acceleration initiatives (GRANDIS).

The WDC continues their work with the award-winning CivTech Alliance Global Scale-Up Programme. This programme draws together leading GovTech and CivTech innovation programmes from around the world to deliver a global platform for fast-growth companies to access policymakers, procurers and investors across regional ecosystems, to solve challenges, such as, greater adaptation of green procurement at scale. Additionally, the WDC secured membership of the European Network of Living Labs (ENoLL) and will assess in 2025 regional opportunities, such as funded living lab initiatives.

## Action 7.5: Develop a shared regional enterprise strategy to harness the potential of Decarbonising Zones

**Action Leader:** Climate Action Regional Office (CARO)
**Timeframe for delivery**: Q4 2025
**Final Status:** Action Partially Complete (Ongoing)

**Action Update:**
The Climate Action Regional Office for the Atlantic Seaboard North, hosted by Mayo County Council, has completed the action to develop a regional framework for Decarbonising Zones. This has been achieved by integrating the framework into the fiveyear Local Authority Climate Action Plans for Mayo, Roscommon, Galway City and Galway County. This coordinated regional approach ensures that the enterprise potential within Decarbonising Zones is embedded as a practical and measurable component of local and regional economic development, rather than remaining a theoretical concept.

In Galway City, the designated Decarbonising Zone is located in the Westside area. Galway City Council is focusing on the zone's high concentration of energy users and its strong public transport network to trial innovative low-carbon enterprise models. The zone serves as a demonstrator area where community groups, businesses and public bodies collaborate to identify the partners, skills and infrastructure needed to support a low carbon economy.

Galway County Council has identified the Aran Islands as its primary Decarbonising Zone. In 2025, the council established a dedicated Decarbonising Zone Climate Action Fund to support local businesses, cooperatives and community groups.

In County Mayo, the regional strategy is centred on the Mulranny Decarbonising Zone, which was launched as an exemplar of community-led decarbonisation. Mayo County Council has expanded this work by creating the Mayo Decarbonising Communities Network, which now connects ten communities, representing almost one fifth of the county's population. The network enables communities to share knowledge, technical guidance and practical experience in emissions reduction and climate adaptation. Roscommon County Council has embedded its Decarbonising Zone objectives within the County Roscommon Climate Action Plan 2024 to 2029. The council has placed particular emphasis on supporting a Just Transition, ensuring that local enterprise and rural communities are protected and supported as the county moves towards carbon neutrality.

To underpin regional delivery, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly has established a new Decarbonising Zones Scheme, offering 100 percent grant funding for eligible projects located within designated zones. The scheme supports the development of green infrastructure, nature-based solutions and community-driven climate innovation. This level of regional coordination ensures that the western counties act collectively as a testbed for climate action, directly contributing to the wider ambition of positioning the West as a leading region for growth in the green economy.

## Action Status Key

***Action complete:*** *The Steering Committee has deemed that these actions have been fully completed.*

***Action discontinued:*** *The Steering Committee has agreed that these actions are no longer being pursued.*

***Action partially complete:*** *The Steering Committee notes that this action is partially completed; work may continue to progress beyond the finalisation of current plans.*

***Action could not be completed:*** *The Steering Committee has determined that this action could not be delivered as originally envisaged.*

*This final progress report documents implementation to end of Q4 2025 and has been prepared and signed off by the West Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee*

# Action Status Table by Strategic Objectives

| Strategic Objective 1: Advance the development of the regional Entrepreneurship and Innovation Ecosystem. | Status | Completion Date |
|---|---|---|
| Action 1.1: Expand availability of incubation, acceleration, and sector-specific start-up infrastructure and programmes. | Action Complete | Q4 2025 |
| Action 1.2: Expand access to early stage and scaling capital. | Action Complete | Q4 2025 |
| Action 1.3: Drive forward the development of People and Skills. | Action Complete | Q4 2025 |
| Action 1.4: Harness the Connected Hubs and Grow Remote Initiatives to assist Placemaking and Talent Retention | Action Partially Complete (Ongoing) | Q4 2025 |
| Action 1.5: Advance the Enterprise Strategy for the Strategic Development Zone at the Ireland West Airport Knock. | Action Partially Complete (Ongoing) | Q4 2025 |
| Action 1.6: Continue to champion gender equality, inclusivity and diversity in innovation and entrepreneurship. | Action Complete | Q4 2025 |

| Strategic Objective 2: Strengthen and harness the Cultural and Creative Sector to attract new investment, commercialisation, and collaboration opportunities. | Status | Completion Date |
|---|---|---|
| Action 2.1: Build-up and scale the activities of CREW REDF project, to act as hub and spoke across the region, developing creative centres of excellence such as An Bealach, Roscommon. | Action Complete | Q4 2025 |
| Action 2.2: Develop clustering of the Creative and Cultural Sector, by creating new linkages and new collaborative opportunities and expand creative assets (e.g., film studio, production facilities) and capitalise on emerging development in immersive technology and animation. | Action Partially Complete (Ongoing) | Q4 2025 |
| Action 2.3: Further the collaboration between the industry, the academia, and the researchers, thereby supporting development and commercial exploitation of creative and cultural intellectual property. | Action Complete | Q4 2025 |

| Strategic Objective 3: Realise the Atlantic West Region's potential for enterprise and job creation in the Renewable Energy sector. | Status | Completion Date |
|---|---|---|
| Action 3.1: Engage in inter-regional collaboration for development of the supply-chain and upskilling programmes, in particular in offshore renewable energy. | Action Partially Complete (Ongoing) | Q4 2025 |
| Action 3.2: Develop smart specialisation of the region in the field of renewable energy, linked to natural and physical assets, e.g. AMETS while identifying suitable locations and investment opportunities for further development, including green hydrogen. | Action Partially Complete (Ongoing) | Q4 2025 |
| Action 3.3: Form a task force with the goal of enabling development and removing barriers to progress of critical infrastructure. | Action Discontinued | Q4 2024 |

| Strategic Objective 4: Drive the Global Competitiveness of the Life Sciences sector underpinned by an expanded regional footprint and coordination. | Status | Completion Date |
|---|---|---|
| Action 4.1: Further develop coordination activities and integration of the diverse elements and actors in the ecosystem. | Action Partially Complete (Ongoing) | Q4 2025 |
| Action 4.2: Scale and diversify sector specialisms and specialism-specific supports across the region, including access to necessary infrastructure in liaison with SO1. | Action Partially Complete (Ongoing) | Q4 2025 |

| Strategic Objective 5: Grow the AgTech and Food sector in the West, underpinned by an integrated innovation network, facilitating the transition towards a sustainable Bioeconomy. | Status | Completion Date |
|---|---|---|
| Action 5.1: Utilising the BIA Innovator Campus as a central engine for development of Agri-food and Ag-Tech, develop an integrated regional platform for innovation in conjunction with national and regional partners, ensuring proactive, joined-up approaches to identify and address ecosystem needs. | Action Complete | Q4 2025 |
| Action 5.2: Encourage Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the sector to clustering and intra-company collaboration. | Action Partially Complete (Ongoing) | Q4 2025 |
| Action 5.3: Expand the innovation, educational and entrepreneurial opportunities for AgTech. | Action Complete | Q4 2025 |
| Action 5.4: Develop industry-HEI collaboration and research further to facilitate transition to circular Bioeconomy, championing cross-sectoral, low-carbon and smart approaches. | Action Complete | Q4 2025 |
| Action 5.5: Further the development of enterprise and innovation in the Blue Bioeconomy. | Action Partially Complete (Ongoing) | Q4 2025 |

| Strategic Objective 6: Expand prospects for sustainable entrepreneurship, employment and upskilling in Tourism. | Status | Completion Date |
|---|---|---|
| Action 6.1: Develop a pilot accelerator programme based around the experience economy, underpinning companies with sector-specific supports and growth funding. | Action could not be completed | Q4 2025 |
| Action 6.2: Build out integrated, networked approaches for smarter, greener, connected, and a more sustainable tourism offering. | Action Partially Complete (Ongoing) | Q4 2025 |

| Strategic Objective 7: Facilitate an equitable digital and green transformation in the West. | Status | Completion Date |
|---|---|---|
| Action 7.1: Leverage the European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH) ecosystem to progress adaptation of the artificial intelligence, High Performance Computing and cybersecurity technologies by the industry and public sector. | Action Partially Complete (Ongoing) | Q4 2025 |
| Action 7.2: Develop initiative to encourage emergence of 'born sustainable, born circular' start-ups. | Action Complete | Q4 2025 |
| Action 7.3: Develop further capacity to stimulate circular economy adaptation by enterprise in collaboration with the public bodies, industry and HEIs. | Action Complete | Q4 2025 |

# Appendices

## Appendix 1 Membership of Regional Steering Committee

| **Chairperson of West Regional Enterprise Plan** |
|---|
| Elaine Murphy |
| **Programme Manager of West Regional Enterprise Plan** |
| Kenneth Deery |
| Membership of the Committee |
| Galway County Council |
| Roscommon County Council |
| Kevin Kelly |
| Mayo County Council |
| Local Enterprise Office, Roscommon |
| Local Enterprise Office, Galway |
| Galway City Council |
| National University of Ireland, Galway |
| CEO of Galway Culture Company |
| Údarás na Gaeltachta |
| Galway Convention Bureau |
| Galway City Innovation District |
| BIA Innovator Campus |
| Marine Institute |
| Galway Chamber |
| University of Galway |
| Further Education and Training (FET) Mayo, Sligo, and Leitrim Education and Training Board (MSLETB) |
| Northern and Western Regional Assembly |
| Western Development Commission |
| Connected Hubs & Digital Innovation |
| CREW, Ireland's digital & creative innovation hub |
| Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment |
| Ireland West Airport Knock (IWAK) |

| |
|---|
| WestBIC Technological University of the Shannon |
| West Regional Manager, IDA Ireland |
| West Regional Manager, Enterprise Ireland |
| Atlantic Technological University (ATU) |
| Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board (GRETB) |
| West Regional Skills Forum Manager |
| Teagasc, Connemara West |
| BWG Foods UC |
| South-West Mayo Development Company |
| Chair of the Life Sciences working group of the WREP |

## Appendix 2 Statistical Snapshot

| | |
|---|---|
| **Constituent counties** | Galway, Mayo and Roscommon |
| **West Population**[1] | 519,600 |
| **Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment**[2] | 266,200 |
| **ILO Participation Rate**[3] | 66.1% |
| **ILO Unemployment Rate**[4] | 6.7% |
| **Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment (Male)**[5] | 143,500 |
| **Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment (Female)**[6] | 122,700 |
| **Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment from Q1 2019**[7] | 213,700 |
| **Persons aged 15 years and over in Employment from Q3 2025**[8] | 266,200 |
| **Actual Increase in Employment from Q1 2019 – Q3 2025** | 52,500 |
| **Employment Growth Rate between Q1 2019 – Q3 2025** | 24.6% |
| **Persons aged 25 years and over on Live Register in the West region at 01/12/2025**[9] | 12,863 |
| **Irish-owned Companies – Agency Assisted Employment in the West Jobs 2019**[10] | 17,003 |
| **Irish-owned Companies – Agency Assisted Employment in the West Jobs 2025**[11] | 21,667 |
| **Change between 2019 - 2025**[12] | 4,664 |
| **Foreign-owned Companies – Agency Assisted Employment in the West, Jobs 2019**[13] | 28,063 |
| **Foreign-owned Companies – Agency Assisted Employment in the West, Jobs 2025**[14] | 33,330 |
| **Change between 2019 - 2025**[15] | 5,267 |

## Endnotes

1 CSO - Estimated Population (Persons in April) - https://data.cso.ie/table/PEA08
2 CSO - Labour Force Survey - https://data.cso.ie/table/QLF08
3 CSO - Labour Force Survey - https://data.cso.ie/table/QLF08
4 CSO - Labour Force Survey - https://data.cso.ie/table/QLF08
5 CSO - Labour Force Survey - https://data.cso.ie/table/QLF01
6 CSO - Labour Force Survey - https://data.cso.ie/table/QLF01
7 CSO - Labour Force Survey - https://data.cso.ie/table/QLF01
8 CSO - Labour Force Survey - https://data.cso.ie/table/QLF01
9 CSO Persons on Live Register - https://data.cso.ie/table/LRM17
10 DETE Annual Employment Survey - CSO - Estimated Population (Persons in April) - Annual Employment Survey 2024 -
11 DETE Annual Employment Survey - CSO - Estimated Population (Persons in April) - Annual Employment Survey 2024 -
12 DETE Annual Employment Survey - CSO - Estimated Population (Persons in April) - Annual Employment Survey 2024 -
13 DETE Annual Employment Survey - CSO - Estimated Population (Persons in April) - Annual Employment Survey 2024 -
14 DETE Annual Employment Survey - CSO - Estimated Population (Persons in April) - Annual Employment Survey 2024 -
15 DETE Annual Employment Survey - CSO - Estimated Population (Persons in April) - Annual Employment Survey 2024 -DETE

**An Roinn Fiontar, Turasóireachta agus Fostaíochta**
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