



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Mid-Term Progress Report

North-East Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024



An initiative of the Department of
Enterprise, Trade and Employment

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Minister's Foreword

I am pleased to share this Progress Report on the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan, an ambitious initiative launched in 2022 to ignite economic growth, foster innovation, and lift the overall prosperity of the North-East Region. Since the inception of the Plan, the focus has been on tapping into the distinct potential of the North-East, ensuring not only its economic vitality but also its integral role in shaping the broader economic narrative of our country.

Strategic sectors, including advanced manufacturing, engineering, creative Industries, food, agri tech, bioeconomy and renewable energy, are central to the Plan's objectives. Through investment, innovative programmes, and collaborative partnerships, stakeholders have endeavoured to strengthen the competitiveness of these sectors, driving innovation and encouraging sustainable employment opportunities throughout the North-East.

Innovation stands as a cornerstone of the approach to help establish the North-East as a destination for investment. The Plan seeks to encourage a culture of creativity and entrepreneurship, an environment that actively supports research and development, and to nurture emerging industries.

Collaboration has been pivotal to the success to date. The partnership between government agencies, local authorities, businesses, educational institutions, and others has been crucial in overcoming challenges and seizing opportunities. The North-East has embraced a collective approach, pooling knowledge, insight and resources to address regional challenges.

To assist with the implementation of Regional Enterprise Plans, my department has secured up to €145 million in funding for the Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme, co-funded under the European Regional Development Fund, which will support projects aligned to the Regional Enterprise Plans. The first call of €35 million was announced in October 2023 with subsequent calls in the coming years.

This funding complements the objectives of the Regional Enterprise Plans and, with continued collaboration, the North-East is well positioned to compete for current and future funding calls to drive enterprise development in the region.

As we reflect on the achievements outlined in this Report, it is evident that the North-East is forging a unique path toward sustained growth and prosperity. I encourage all stakeholders to continue their active engagement and support as we build upon these accomplishments.

Finally, my sincere appreciation goes to Chair Richard Hanlon, the regional Steering Committee and all the regional stakeholders who have played a role in progressing the implementation of the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan. Their expertise and collaborative spirit have been indispensable in realising the successes highlighted in this Progress Report.

Neale Richmond TD

Minister of State for Business, Employment and Retail

Chair's Introduction

I am pleased to share this Progress Report on the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 which sets out the steps taken forward under our strategic objectives that build upon our existing and emerging strengths and to help realise the full economic potential of our North-East region.

The Report details the status of actions carried out which seek to complement and build upon the core activities of the development agencies across the region, with an emphasis on building a cohesive regional identity while acknowledging our diversity, leading the way in terms of our digital and decarbonisation transition, strengthening our SME ecosystem, and leveraging the potential of growth sectors across the region.

I would like to acknowledge the work of the Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee and our Working Groups for progress made and for their positive and active engagement. This is reflected in the number of key actions evaluated as being on target or complete. The progress to date will be invaluable and foundational in driving enterprise development across the North-East, serving us well in supporting entrepreneurs and in attracting investments including as part of the multi-year Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme.

We do have other actions where delivery has been delayed in some part arising from the absence of a full time Programme Manager. However, these actions are still being progressed and I'm confident that we will continue to make significant progress over the remainder of the Plan period.

I would like to record my appreciation to all the various stakeholders for their contributions and support including our three local authorities, our Enterprise Agencies, Higher Education and skills bodies and the private sector commitment through Working Groups and the Steering Committee. I look forward to our continued collaboration as we implement the final phase of our Regional Enterprise Plan.

Richard Hanlon

Chair of the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee

North-East Highlights

- A cross-border collaboration of five local authorities was successful in obtaining funding from the Shared Island Initiative. The *Sectoral Clusters Infrastructure Project Feasibility Report* will promote new levels of ambition and cross-border cooperation and address some economic and social concerns of the border area.
- €50,000 was secured under the Regional Enterprise Innovation Scoping Scheme feasibility grant to prepare a report, which was finalised in early 2023, to assess the challenges and opportunities faced by enterprises across the North-East region in the transition to a low carbon economy.
- The North-East Regional Enterprise Plan facilitated an industry engagement workshop on the barriers to digitalisation in September 2022 with 18 companies participating from across the region.
- Through affiliation with the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan as leverage for accreditation and approval, Dundalk Institute of Technology developed a Level 7 Diploma in Operational Excellence for Supply Chain Management. The course is expected to commence in January 2024.
- Three successful AI incubator programmes have been completed by the Data Value Hub between Q2 2022 and Q1 2023, with over 15 organisations in the region taking part and bringing ideas through to proof of concept on complex artificial intelligence projects.
- In consultation with the Agri Forum established in 2022, an *Economic analysis of the agri-food sector in the North-East Region* was completed in April 2023 and included an analysis of activity in the region along with recommendations for areas of future focus.
- In September 2023, Skillnet Ireland announced the partnership of the Innovation Exchange with the Mill Enterprise Hub in Drogheda. This partnership provides a dedicated resource to support and link SMEs, scale-up businesses and corporates in the region.
- The Connected Health & Wellbeing Cluster has grown to include 43 members across start-ups, SMEs, MNCs, healthcare providers, and academic institutes. Together with dConnect, the cluster co-hosted the Ireland and UK Digital Health Ecosystems Conference in March 2023 in partnership with the European Connected Health Alliance.

Smart Specialisation

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment published Ireland's *National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027 (S3)* in July 2022, which embraces a regional approach to addressing Ireland's Research, Development and Innovation (RD&I) challenges. It provides a bridge between regional and national innovation strategy building and decision making, bringing coherence to RD&I planning for the benefit of enterprise, and advancing the RD&I agenda regionally and nationally.

Smart Specialisation is a key component of the economic element of each of the three Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies for delivering balanced regional development in Ireland aligned with the objectives of Project Ireland 2040. S3 is also fundamental to developing smarter more competitive regions, one of the key strategic outcomes under Ireland's European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Programmes 2021-2027.

The Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme has a very particular focus on supporting the Regional Enterprise Plans. It aims to accelerate economic growth in all regions by working with regional stakeholders to deliver on their potential regional enterprise strengths and opportunities, and by strengthening the regional enterprise innovation system. The scheme opened for applications on 12 October 2023.

Each of the Regional Assemblies sit on the National S3 Implementation Group which has overall responsibility for the delivery of S3 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 North-East Region

At NUTS 2 level the North-East Region is part of Ireland's Eastern and Midlands Region (Louth) and the Northern and Western Region (Cavan and Monaghan).

The North-East Region has strong financial services and agri-food sectors with significant employment and research capability in health, energy and sustainability.

These sectors of strength align with the objectives of the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan and are being progressed through the work of the Connected Health and Wellbeing Cluster, dConnect, the CREDIT Tech Gateway for Energy Efficiency and Agri Forum.

This progress report documents implementation to end of Q3 2023 and has been prepared and signed off by the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee.

Action Status Key

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

Action on target: The Steering Committee has deemed that these actions are on target for completion by the deadline.

Action not on target: The Steering Committee notes that delivery of these actions has been delayed but is still being progressed.

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

New /Amended action: The Steering Committee has agreed to create a new action or revise an existing action.

Strategic Objective 1: Develop a strong and coherent messaging proposition for the North-East Region highlighting its unique attributes for investment including talent, sectoral strengths and placemaking and quality of life

Action 1.1: Coordinate and promote a coherent messaging proposition for the North-East Region

Action Leader: Regional Enterprise Plan Programme Manager

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action not on target

Action Update:

A range of activity is underway to develop enterprise in the North-East touching on the various strands listed in the original action from specific priority sectors to cross-border work.

- It was accepted at an early stage that in order to progress this action, the Working Group and Steering Committee would review progress across other actions within the Plan to identify opportunities to coordinate and coherently communicate the region's key value proposition. This work requires significant coordination and progress has been hindered without a full time Programme Manager in place.
- To date, themes of digitalisation, operational excellence, connected health and agri-food are emerging as sectors of strength in the North-East Region.
- Through the forthcoming Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs) 2023-2029, each of the North-East counties will set out their objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic development and the local and community development of the region. IDA Ireland can contribute to efforts aimed at achieving balanced economic growth by collaborating with local authorities through the LECP process to ensure that infrastructure development aligns with both local and national economic objectives.
- The National Clustering Programme (NCP) is currently being devised. There will be a consultation exercise to receive feedback from stakeholders in the clustering ecosystem. It is anticipated that the NCP will be published in 2024.

Action 1.2: Strengthen collaboration and the development of strategic partnerships among existing industry/enterprise fora across the North-East Region

Action Leader: Industry chair and public sector chair

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action not on target

Action Update:

- With a view to identifying areas for potential collaboration across the region, presentations on the ambitions of the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan have been made to the local authorities' Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) and to the Louth Economic Forum.
- The cross-border collaboration of five local authorities (Monaghan County Council, Cavan County Council, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Mid Ulster District Council) was successful in obtaining funding from the Shared Island Initiative.
- This partnership worked with a management consultancy company to conduct market research, site assessment and scoping for the development of sectoral SME innovation clusters across each of the five local authority areas. The Shared Island project, Sectoral Clusters Infrastructure Project Feasibility Report, is nearing completion.
- The project seeks to promote new levels of ambition and cross-border cooperation and communication at the local government level and address some of the border area's most pressing economic and regional development concerns.
- The five local authorities consider the project to be purposefully bold and ambitious. Its level of ambition reflects both the scale of the current challenges faced but also those ahead, the competition faced from others and the opportunity to make a generational change.
- In June 2022, delegates from businesses across Ireland and Northern Ireland attended the Advanced Manufacturing Training Centre of Excellence (AMTCE) inaugural Robotics+ event. The event brought together experts in robotics, manufacturing technology, systems integrators, and end users to discuss key robotic trends in manufacturing in addition to sharing practical knowledge, insights and building a business network. The event was delivered in collaboration with North-East Engineering, North-East Regional Skills, IDA Ireland, Irish Manufacturing Research and Enterprise Ireland.

Action 1.3: Deliver initiatives that will support the retention of talent in the region, particularly those who relocated to take advantage of remote working opportunities

Action Leader: Industry chair and public sector chair

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action not on target

Action Update:

While a North-East network of co-working hubs is yet to be established, significant initiatives are underway supporting skills and talent retention and promoting the remote working offerings in the region.

- The North-East Regional Skills Forum successfully ran a Logistics and Supply Chain Skills and Jobs Fair in partnership with the Department of Social Protection to promote the training, educational and jobs opportunities in the North-East. A regional enterprise engagement event called Boost Skills, Boost Business, in conjunction with Louth Meath Education and Training Board, was also held to provide skills information to business.
- Creative Spark Downtown Hub officially opened to local remote workers, start-up entrepreneurs and established businesses in Dundalk on 17 May 2022. Funded by Enterprise Ireland through the Border Enterprise Development Fund, the Hub offers affordable desk plans, meeting rooms, a podcasting studio and space for community events.
- Enterprising Monaghan's new Digi Hub facility at the M:Tek building in Monaghan officially opened on 3 October 2022 offering co-working space, privacy booths and podcasting facilities for entrepreneurs, businesses and remote workers. It is funded by Enterprise Ireland through the Regional Enterprise Development Fund and the Connected Hubs initiative of the Department of Rural and Community Development.
- Creative Spark, in conjunction with the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan, commissioned a study to complete a data mapping exercise of the creative industries in the region. This involved talent-mapping and a database of the region's capacity and potential in the creative industries and design sectors. The [Ireland's North-East Creative Industries and Design Technology Sectors](#) Report was published in November 2022.
- The North-East Creative Conversations Project commenced in June 2023 and runs until November 2023 with 43 companies from the design sector participating. The project is led by Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Monaghan/Monaghan County Council, with project partners including LEO Cavan, LEO Louth, DkIT, Creative Spark and the Creative Ireland Programme.

- The East Border Region is leading on two projects to be submitted under the PEACE PLUS Programme which is expected to open for calls shortly. Both projects are in the region of €7 to €8 million and cover the six local authority areas of the East Border Region.
- Cavan Digital Hub continues to grow and is home to a cluster of digital companies providing over 110 high quality jobs in addition to offering co-working and private hot desk space.
- CEAI is rolling out its QHubs Quality Development Programme for the National Hub Network.

Strategic Objective 2: Position the North-East Region as an exemplar in guiding and supporting digital transition for enterprise

Action 2.1: Enable enterprise across the North-East Region adapt to and maximise opportunities from digitalisation through:

- I. The promotion of digital readiness assessments, and
- II. Availing of targeted interventions to support their digital transition

Action Leader: Industry chair and public sector chair

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action not on target

Action Update:

Through this action, the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan seeks to play its part in assisting enterprise to harness digital technology to transform their business.

Through the Regional Enterprise Plan Working Group, an internal review of the region's digitalisation status was completed, and findings were used to inform future activities of the group.

- The North-East REP facilitated an industry engagement workshop on barriers to digitalisation on 14 September 2022, with a small number of actions and recommendations stemming from the event. Implementation of the actions has been delayed due to ongoing Programme Manager vacancy in the region.
- Discussions were held by the then Programme Manager with Enterprise Ireland and Skillnet Ireland regarding development of a training pilot initiative for enterprise. This will be a priority for the new Programme Manager when appointed.
- The LEOs in Monaghan, Cavan and Louth along with Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland continue to promote Digital Readiness Assessments and digital vouchers. An increase in uptake of targeted interventions supporting SME transition has been observed by all agencies.
- In April 2023, Regional Skills hosted a North-East business supports event, Boost Skills, Boost Business, aimed at promoting digital skills in conjunction with Louth and Meath Education and Training Board.
- Three successful Artificial Intelligence Incubator Programmes have been completed by the Data Value Hub between Q2 2022 and Q1 2023, with over 15 organisations in the region

taking part. These programmes brought ideas through to proof of concept on complex Artificial Intelligence projects like predictive analytics and preventative maintenance.

- The Data Value Hub became a consortium member of Factory X Change (FXC). FXC is a European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH) created to accelerate digital transformation for enterprises across Ireland. It serves as a one-stop shop for various services, including Digitalisation, Robotics, AI, Cybersecurity, Supply Chain Management, Data Strategy, Sustainability, and Funding. The Data Value Hub involvement will bring the provision of additional technology services to enterprises in the region.
- Advanced Manufacturing Training Centre of Excellence (AMTCE) launched two new microcredential programmes in 2023 in Logistics and Supply Chain and Operational Excellence as part of a new Level 6 Programme in Process Digitisation. These programmes are aimed at persons who are employed in a manufacturing environment or support services and wish to develop the knowledge, skills and competencies to take up roles as operators and technicians of the future.
- dConnect at Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT) was part of a consortium that delivered a new Skillnet Digital Health Industry Innovation Training programme in August 2023. This programme provided tailored, needs-led innovation training for employees and intrapreneurs in the health technology sector from the region and beyond.
- With a focus in the health technology sector, events in the region including the Ireland & UK Digital Health Ecosystems Conference and the Digitising Healthcare webinar that attracted 120 and 40 attendees respectively.
- The Student Digital Backpack (SDB) platform provides students across the Technological Higher Education sector with additional skills, including digital transformation, to complement their existing programmes of study is being offered to DKkT students. DKIT award Digital Badges upon completion.

Strategic Objective 3: Strengthen the Regional SME Ecosystem through collaboration, capability and capacity building

Action 3.1: Develop an operational excellence support programme for SMEs

Action Leader: Industry chair and public sector chair

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

***Original timeframe extended**

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

It is widely recognised that operations excellence is the bedrock upon which successful businesses are built, driving the pursuit of efficiency, quality, and continuous improvement in every facet of a company's operations. Operations excellence not only ensures the smooth functioning of day-to-day activities but also plays a pivotal role in enhancing productivity, customer satisfaction, cost efficiencies, maximising overall profitability and supporting a company's resilience facing macroeconomic shocks.

- Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) has developed, and put through the validation process, a Level 7 Diploma in *Operational Excellence for Supply Chain Management*. This is a stand-alone special purpose award of 60 credits and will be offered through part-time provision. The presence of this action in the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan was used to leverage accreditation and approval.
- DkIT is adding to the suite of Operational Excellence programmes focused on upskilling and have developed and are delivering the following:
 - Lean 6 *Sigma Green Belt* certification, also certified at Level 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications, delivered on and off campus in company.
 - Level 7 Certificate *Data Analytics for Business*, focusing on non-technical managers to utilise data for operational and strategic decision making in business and create business value. DkIT has provided an initiative to reduce fees by 70% to €150 to make it more attractive to SMEs.
 - Level 7 *Supply Chain Management* Certificate that offer individuals the opportunity to develop their knowledge, skills and competencies and impart a holistic understanding of the dynamics of supply chains. Additionally, DkIT has provided an initiative to reduce fees by 83% to €255.
 - Level 6 Certificate in *Management Fundamentals* - fees reduced by circa 80% to €185 - including managing people, leading change, conflict management and negotiation and professional communication.

- A new Level 9 Postgraduate Diploma in *Strategic Data Analytics for Business* has been developed with an expected start date of January 2024. This Springboard Human Capital Initiative funded course is a conversion programme providing graduates with a set of critical and highly employable skills in data analytics, strategic management and leadership.

Action 3.2: Improve linkages between SMEs and multinational/large enterprise in the North-East while supporting the development of enterprise leadership, management, and entrepreneurial skills

Action Leader: Industry chair and public sector chair

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action not on target

Action Update:

The Regional Enterprise Plan Working Group focused on activities that would foster collaboration between the region's small and larger business to both promote opportunities and to share expertise and experience.

- The Innovation Exchange, a national Skillnet Ireland initiative, launched its partnership for the North-East Region with the Mill Enterprise Centre in Drogheda in September 2023. This is a multi-year programme that facilitates collaboration between Irish SMEs and large multinationals to boost innovation. It will support companies between the years 2022-2025.
- The Athena STEM Programme, rebranded as THRIVE for Women, has run two full programmes since launching in September 2021 with 39 women participating including entrepreneurs, career changers, work returners and STEM women looking for career development. The programme is supported by a network of multinational, SMEs and start-ups, which meets every 10 weeks to discuss key challenges and promote local women in STEM for career networking and support. THRIVE was awarded the European Enterprise Promotion Awards (EEPA) National Winner in Ireland for 2023 and will represent Ireland at the EEPA Awards in November 2023.
- The Connected Health & Wellbeing (CH&W) cluster includes FDI companies and indigenous businesses, and improving linkages between them is a primary aim. There are currently 43 members including start-ups, SMEs, MNCs, healthcare providers, and academic institutes. The diverse membership benefit from interacting with other members with complementary expertise.
- The [eHealth Embark](#) programme, created by the dConnect Hub and the CH&W cluster initiative in partnership with Amazon Web Services, ran six one-day, in-person and online workshops between 23 March and 25 May 2023. This 2nd iteration of the programme,

supported an additional 10 start-ups, to the 9 start-ups in the 1st iteration held in 2022, from across Ireland as they developed their digital health proposition.

- Start-ups, MNCs, and healthcare providers have jointly contributed to other initiatives such as the multi-year European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) Health i-Days project at DkIT, where the most recent iteration had 80 students working on health challenges over two days, with mentoring from member volunteers.
- The North-East Regional Enterprise Plan led a masterclass and mentoring initiative was developed with three large companies in the region, namely, Kingspan, Wuxi and Combilift, with a number of LEO client participants. This initiative is ready to be rolled out but has stalled due to the ongoing Programme Manager vacancy in the region.

Strategic Objective 4: Support enterprise to mainstream climate action and transition to low carbon into their business planning and delivery

Action 4.1: Complete an assessment of enterprise’s knowledge and understanding of decarbonisation requirements and develop appropriate response to issues and opportunities emerging from the assessment

Action Leader: Industry chair and public sector chair

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

A Regional Enterprise Innovation Scoping Scheme (REISS) feasibility grant of €50,000 was secured in 2022 to complete the assessment set out under this action. The assessment, which was completed and signed off by the Working Group in March 2023, outlines the challenges and opportunities faced by new and existing enterprises across the North-East Region in the transition to a low carbon economy. Recommendations will be prioritised by the Working Group and progressed once a Programme Manager is appointed in the region.

Action 4.2: Leverage the opportunities presented by CREDIT Technology Gateway to promote energy efficiency in the region

Action Leader: Industry chair and public sector chair

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

The North-East’s CREDIT Technology Gateway, based in DKIT, is the only Gateway across the national network which has an energy focus. Through the Regional Enterprise Plan Working Group, members are seeking to maximise the Gateway’s potential to benefit enterprise locally and with its national reach.

- CREDIT Technology Gateway continues to reach out and support the regional industry sector to address the energy and sustainability challenge delivered through dedicated research programmes. This has been facilitated through the support of Enterprise Ireland funded Innovation Vouchers and Innovation Partnerships and has addressed challenges in wind profiling, small scale hydro on farms, geothermal, circular economy and construction, sustainable fisheries, turbine maintenance and energy efficiency and optimisation.

- CREDIT has presented at workshops at both Cavan's *Sustainable Energy Week* in March 2022 and Monaghan LEO's *Go Green* event in March 2023, on sustainable supports and encouraging companies to work with the Technology Gateway on sustainability and decarbonisation.
- In May 2023, CREDIT Technology Gateway secured funding under the European Regional Development Fund to continue its work until 2029 and to ensure the continuation of the highly successful Enterprise Ireland Technology Gateway Programme. Alignment with the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan was a key element in this funding application being successful. Over the next seven years the new Gateway will build on its previous achievements on project delivery and continue to connect the energy sector and sustainable businesses into its research system, driving innovation across the North-East and across all regions of Ireland.
- CREDIT Technology Gateway has secured capital grant funding from Enterprise Ireland to acquire new research equipment to support industry engagement in the region and nationally. This equipment includes a Highly Accelerated Life Testing (HALT)/Highly Accelerated Stress Screening (HASS) Environmental Testing Chamber and a Horizon Scanning LiDAR Wind Profiler. This equipment will enhance the specialist knowledge and design solutions for industry across a wide range of areas and can be accessed through the Gateway.

Strategic Objective 5: Leverage the full extent of existing and emerging growth sectors in the North-East

Action 5.1: Establish a North-East Agri Sector Innovation and Leadership Forum

Action Leader: Industry chair and public sector chair

Timeframe for delivery: Q3 2023

Status: Action complete

Action Update:

- The North-East Agri Sector Innovation and Leadership Forum was established in 2022. The group comprises of senior persons from major agri-food indigenous companies across counties Cavan, Monaghan and Louth.
- Following consultation with the Agri Forum, a Report was commissioned entitled *Economic analysis of the agri-food sector in the North-East Region*.
- The report includes an analysis of the current activity in the region and offered recommendations for areas of future focus to elevate this sector and take advantage of new opportunities. The report was completed in April 2023. Consideration around future projects or priority areas will be progressed further upon appointment of a new North-East Regional Enterprise Plan Programme Manager.

Action 5.2: Explore opportunities to promote and expand the reach of emerging growth sectors in the region

Action Leader: Industry chair and public sector chair

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

Through this action, the North-East Regional Enterprise Plan seeks to build on the success of funded initiatives to promote opportunities and cross-collaboration to support business in a variety of sectors.

- Through the Connected Health & Wellbeing (CH&W) cluster, funded through the Regional Technology Clustering Fund, linkages between FDI companies and indigenous businesses are strengthening. The cluster has 43 members across start-ups, SMEs, MNCs, healthcare providers, and academic institutes.

- The CH&W cluster led on an application with the HSE and cluster members to become an EU Reference Site for Active and Healthy Ageing, which was approved by the EU at an event in Brussels in October 2022.
- In August 2023, the cluster received funding from InterTradeIreland to organise an AI for Health training programme which will encourage collaboration across all stakeholders. This initiative is in partnership with the Data Value Hub in Monaghan and the Data Innovation Hub in Armagh and commenced in September 2023.
- The CH&W cluster has also led the development and delivery, in collaboration with dConnect, of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology health student innovation programme. The first programme in 2022 had 80 DkIT students participate.
- dConnect, which received €3.8 million through the Regional Enterprise Development Fund in 2019, aims to stimulate and foster innovation in digital health by collaborating with, and connecting, businesses, healthcare providers, universities, and others, to support the development of digital solutions for healthcare needs.
- dConnect, together with the CH&W cluster, co-hosted the Ireland and UK Digital Health Ecosystems Conference in Dundalk in March 2023 in partnership with the European Connected Health Alliance. With over 100 attendees, this is the first of a series of planned annual digital health conferences.
- The BioConnect Innovation Centre is at an advanced construction stage with completion expected by Q3 2024. The Centre was awarded €6.2 million in funding through the Regional Enterprise Development Fund in 2019 and 2023 and once open will support the performance of cutting-edge biotechnology research.
- The Drogheda Digital Innovation Hub project, funded through the Border Enterprise Development Fund, will operate a pre-accelerator programme to encourage high-potential future oriented tech projects. Aviation and travel tech sector is one of the areas to be explored for the pre-accelerator.
- Plans to complete a review of the DkIT talent pool in animation, augmented reality, virtual reality and in product design were not progressed as this requires a Regional Enterprise Plan Programme Manager to lead on implementation.

Action Status Table by Strategic Objectives

***Updated timeline agreed by Steering Committee**

Strategic Objective 1: Develop a strong and coherent messaging proposition for the North-East Region highlighting its unique attributes for investment including talent, sectoral strengths and placemaking and quality of life.	Status	For completion by
Action 1.1: Coordinate and promote a coherent messaging proposition for the North-East Region.	Action not on target	Q4 2024
Action 1.2: Strengthen collaboration and the development of strategic partnerships among existing industry/enterprise fora across the North-East Region.	Action not on target	Q4 2024
Action 1.3: Deliver initiatives that will support the retention of talent in the region, particularly those who relocated to take advantage of remote working opportunities.	Action not on target	Q4 2024

Strategic Objective 2: Position the North-East Region as an exemplar in guiding and supporting digital transition for enterprise.	Status	For completion by
Action 2.1: Enable enterprise across the North-East region adapt to and maximise opportunities from digitalisation through: (i) The promotion of digital readiness assessments, and (ii) Availing of targeted interventions to support their digital transition.	Action not on target	Q4 2024

Strategic Objective 3: Strengthen the Regional SME Ecosystem through	Status	For completion by

collaboration, capability and capacity building.		
Action 3.1: Develop an operational excellence support programme for SMEs.	Action on target	Q4 2024*
Action 3.2: Improve linkages between SMEs and multinational/large enterprise in the North-East, while supporting the development of enterprise leadership, management, and entrepreneurial skills.	Action not on target	Q4 2024

Strategic Objective 4: Support enterprise to mainstream climate action and transition to low carbon into their business planning and delivery.	Status	For completion by
Action 4.1: Complete an assessment of enterprise’s knowledge and understanding of decarbonisation requirements and develop appropriate response to issues and opportunities emerging from the assessment.	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 4.2: Leverage the opportunities presented by CREDIT Technology Gateway to promote energy efficiency in the region.	Action on target	Q4 2024

Strategic Objective 5: Leverage the full extent of existing and emerging growth sectors in the North-East.	Status	For completion by
Action 5.1: Establish a North-East Agri Sector Innovation and Leadership Forum.	Action complete	Q3 2023
Action 5.2: Explore opportunities to promote and expand the reach of emerging growth sectors in the region.	Action on target	Q4 2024