



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Mid-Term Progress Report

South-West 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 present this Progress Report on the implementation of the South-West Regional Enterprise Plan, a dynamic blueprint for enterprise development launched in 2022 to foster economic growth, innovation, and sustainable development across the South-West region of Ireland.

The South-West region, encompassing counties Cork and Kerry, has a rich cultural heritage, breathtaking landscapes, and a resilient community spirit. This Progress Report reflects our ongoing commitment to harnessing the unique strengths and potential of this region, ensuring it not only thrives economically but also contributes significantly to the overall prosperity of the country.

Since the Plan's launch, significant strides have been made in transforming its ambitious vision into tangible actions and outcomes. A cornerstone of these efforts has been the commitment to fostering a diverse and dynamic economy that reflects the unique strengths of the South-West. Sectors such as Food/Agritech, Marine, Circular and Bioeconomy and Renewable Energy continue to receive investment and targeted supports from key stakeholders. This approach has enhanced the competitiveness of these sectors, ensuring they remain at the forefront of innovation and job creation.

Innovation remains at the heart of these endeavours; by fostering a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship, the South-West has sought to create an ecosystem that nurtures new ideas, supports research and development, and drives the growth of high-value industries.

Critical to success to date has been the collaboration between government agencies, local authorities, business leaders and educational institutions. By working together, we are harnessing the collective knowledge, wisdom, energy, and resources of the region to address common challenges and seize shared opportunities. The holistic approach outlined in the Plan has ensured that economic progress is sustainable and inclusive.

To assist with the implementation of the 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 €35m was announced in October 2023 with subsequent calls in the coming years. This funding complements the Regional Enterprise Plans and with continued collaboration the South-West 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, I am confident that the South-West Regional Enterprise Plan will continue to guide our actions toward a brighter, more prosperous future for the region. While challenges persist, the progress made thus far demonstrates the resilience and determination of stakeholders in the South-West.

Finally, I extend my sincere thanks to Chair Patricia Quane, Programme Manager Aileen Hurley, and all the regional stakeholders involved for their dedication, expertise and collaborative spirit throughout the implementation of the Plan to date. This Progress Report is a testament to your commitment and the transformative impact of your collective efforts.

Simon Coveney TD

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Chair's Introduction

I am pleased to present the Mid-Term Progress Report of the South-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024. This Mid-Term Report details the progress made on each of the actions in the Plan to July 2023. I am delighted to say that great progress has been achieved in the first 18 months of this Plan under the six Strategic Objectives and I am confident that, with the continued drive and support of our stakeholders in the region, this success will continue as we move to the next stage of the Plan and beyond.

The ambition of the South-West Regional Enterprise Plan is to go beyond balanced regional development and position the South-West as a leading national and international centre for enterprise and this ambition is pursued through an emphasis on collaboration, partnership and focusing on the considerable strengths of the region.

The ambitions in this plan can only be realised with the support and cooperation of a strong Steering Committee and Working Groups. I wish therefore to acknowledge the considerable level of engagement from all the stakeholders in the South-West. The actions being undertaken by the stakeholders during the lifetime of this Plan will prove very beneficial to the South-West region in the long run as we transition to a low carbon and digital economy.

I would like therefore to thank the members of the Steering Committee and the six Working Groups who have driven the implementation of the actions in the South-West Regional Enterprise Plan to date. I would also like to thank the Programme Manager and the three local authorities in the region who continue to support the Plan through the Working Group Chairs, supporting the Programme Manager in addition to their unwavering commitment to the ambitions of the Plan.

Patricia Quane

Chair of the South-West Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee

South-West Highlights

- A Clusters Managers Forum was set up in February 2023 and all Clusters in the South-West region are engaged and driving forward with collaboration on projects into 2024.
- The iEd Hub is a new Human Capital Initiative, funded in collaboration with University College Cork, Munster Technological University and industry stakeholders providing training for unmet industry needs through a range of new postgraduate courses.
- The AgriTech Centre of Excellence and VistaMilk have collaborated on and completed one project with further projects planned, including a Memo of Understanding between Teagasc and Munster Technological University.
- Cork and Kerry Hub Networks have been successfully established and are working collaboratively on events and projects throughout 2023 and into 2024.
- The Impact Hub at the Crann Centre opened in 2022 and is serving as an exemplar of inclusivity in hubs. Training is available in connection with the Rubicon Centre in Munster Technological University and the Local Enterprise Offices.
- The Regional Enterprise Innovation Scoping Scheme has supported a number of regionally important studies including the Space Industry Cluster feasibility study and Re-Create Shandon Hub.
- The Munster Animation Forum completed a feasibility study which maps a path for progress towards a Munster Animation Cluster with a shared strategy and vision for the sector.

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 South-West Region

At NUTS 2 level the South-West region is part of Ireland's Southern Region along with the Mid-West and South-East regions.

Recent progress and ongoing efforts across the South-West have seen a number of key highlights that support the region's S3 priorities, notably:

Action 1.6 Smart Southern Region - The South-West REP is working with the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA) to progress the Smart Southern Region through the development of the Smart Southern Region project mapping tool, the development of a Smart Southern Region Action Plan and establishment a Smart Southern Region Network. The REP Working Group has to date, engaged directly with the SRA on Smart Region implementation, through the Smart Region project mapping tool and development of the Smart Region Action Plan. The Working Group is also supporting the application for an Expression of Interest through the SRA for the EU Regional Innovation Valley call in Q3 2023.

Action 1.10 Regional Development Monitor - The Regional Development Monitor (RDM), a joint initiative of the three Regional Assemblies and the All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO), was launched in November 2022. The RDM provides an online mapping viewer and hosts a range of socio-economic and environmental indicators to track progress under a Green, Liveable and Creative and Innovative Region. The REP Working Group are working with the SRA to promote the RDM across all stakeholders.

Actions 5.1, 5.3, 5.7 The Reference Observatory of Basins for International hydrological climate change detection (ROBIN) Project - The Horizon Europe funded ROBIN project aims to empower Europe's regions to adapt their governance models and structures in ways that accelerates the achievement of their circular bioeconomy targets while promoting social innovation and accounting for different regional contexts.

The SRA and Munster Technological University's (MTU) Circular Bioeconomy Research Group (CircBio) are working together as the Irish partners for the Southern Region on ROBIN.

In addition to primary producers, agriculture and industry, there are also a number of key actors in the bioeconomy located in the Southern Region who the ROBIN project is working with such as Shannon ABC, Irish Bioeconomy Foundation and Dingle Hub.

Action 6.4 Towards a Learning Region - The SRA launched its innovative report Towards a Learning Region as part of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) implementation on Lifelong Learning, which seeks to develop a Learning Region based on the UNESCO Learning City principles and sets out a series of evidence-based recommendations for strengthened support of the region's Higher and Further Education Institutes and stakeholders in skills, education, and training development across the region. The SRA and South-West REP have committed to support implementation of the report's recommendations.

This progress report documents implementation to end of Q3 2023 and has been prepared and signed off by the South-West 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: Enhance the enterprise eco-system across the region through innovation, entrepreneurship and digitalisation

Action 1.1: Develop programmes to support undergraduate and graduate entrepreneurship for the South-West

Action Leader: Munster Technological University (MTU) and University College Cork (UCC)

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

***Original timeframe extended**

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

This action has been well progressed, both *Student Inc.* and *Ignite* Programmes are ongoing in MTU and UCC, and both programmes are expanding. Awaiting the Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme (SREIS) funding call to sustain *Student Inc.* into 2024 and beyond.

- As part of the National Digital Research Centre (NDRC), the Research Development and Innovation (RDI) Hub runs a number of programmes open to undergraduate and graduate led start-ups to apply for *Office Hours*, *Founders Weekend* and *Pre-Accelerator*. There are 20 companies on the current RDI Hub NDRC *Pre-Accelerator*. In addition, the RDI Hub runs the *STEM Passport* involving 250 female secondary school students from the Munster region.
- The iEd Hub expects to launch a new UCC postgraduate programme in entrepreneurship for the life science sector in 2024.

Action 1.2: Support the growing animation and visual effects sector in the region

Action Leader: Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs)

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- Munster Animation Forum has carried out a feasibility study which maps a path for progress towards a Munster Animation Cluster with a shared strategy and vision for the sector. This involves developing a three-year strategic plan, for the systematic development of the animation sector in Munster. Building on the findings of the feasibility

study, the strategic plan will be progressed over the lifetime of the Regional Enterprise Plan (REP) to 2024.

Action 1.3: Increase the number of start-ups in technology with a focus on Cyber Security, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies through accelerator programmes

Action Leader: RDI Hub/Fexco

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

Significant work is ongoing in this area with RDI Hub/Fexco leading out on a number of projects alongside the NDRC as follows:

- 80 start-ups participated in the NDRC *Pre-Accelerator* programme both in 2022 and to Q3 2023. 14 start-ups are in the National Accelerator in 2023.
- A significant number of these were in cybersecurity and AI and other emerging technology sectors, such as crypto and augmented reality/virtual reality (AR/VR).
- Other programmes include the *Sustainability 2050 Accelerator*, *Talent Accelerator*, *HBAN Regional Partnership* with RDI Hub, and the *€1 million Mortgage Innovation Challenge* and the John McCarthy Summer School which was held over two days in September 2023.
- The RDI Hub have partnered with the Innovation Exchange which connects large businesses facing innovation challenges with ambitious SMEs to fast track solutions.

Action 1.4: Establish a South-West 'Thought Leaders' Forum to identify enterprise opportunities in emerging technology including sustainable finance, cybersecurity, AI and fintech

Action Leader: South-West Programme Manager

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- The South-West REP plans to host a *Thought Leaders Forum* event in 2024 which will connect industry and founders, leveraging the strengths of the region. This follows on from successful events such as *the Founders Forum*, *AI Summer School*, *John McCarthy weekend*, *South-West Smart Manufacturing Meetup* and *Irish Funds Forum* which have already taken place in the South-West since the launch of this Plan.

Action 1.5: Explore the opportunities for the region through research and innovation in travel/tourism technology and aquaculture technology

Action Leader: RDI Hub/Fexco

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

Fexco are leading out a number of projects in this area, including:

- RDI Hub/Fexco in conjunction with Kerry County Council, Munster Technological University (MTU) and Kerry Tourism Industry Federation (KTIF) ran a *TourismTech Hackathon* for over 20 participants. This resulted in two Augmented Reality (AR) tourism projects being supported and funded in the Killarney National Park and the Kerry Way. These projects act as pilots for future larger scale projects enhancing the digital tourism experience.
- The RDI Hub is currently leading on preparation of an INTERREG Atlantic Area funding submission for the *Digital Innovation Blue Economy Social Tourism* project.
- RDI Hub in conjunction with Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) and HATCH run an *Aquatech Accelerator* annually. There are 41 participants to date in this programme, four targeted at AI and the remaining 37 are emerging technologies around seaweed extraction, alternative seafoods, and novel engineering.
- €14.4 million has been raised through investment by some of these start-ups with 10 companies enrolled on the *Aquatech Accelerator Programme* for 2023.

Action 1.6: Develop a Southern Smart Region through partnership with regional stakeholders to implement recommendations of a Smart Region Maturity Framework

Action Leader: Southern Regional Assembly (SRA)

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

Following its launch in January 2023, the SRA are progressing the Smart Southern Region approach, which includes:

- Developing a regional approach for a Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) in the Southern Region.

- The development of a Smart Southern Region project mapping tool in consultation with the three local authorities and regional stakeholders.
- Development of a Smart Southern Region Action Plan and establishing a Smart Southern Region Network and progressing the Smart Region Maturity Framework assessment.
- The SRA with the support of the South-West REP is preparing an application for the EU Regional Innovation Valleys expression of interest. This call will identify a minimum of 100 regions across Europe which will commit to enhance the coordination and direction of research and innovation investment and policies at regional level. It will also facilitate collaboration on inter-regional innovation projects linked to key EU priorities.

Action 1.7: Explore new niche market opportunities for regional enterprises and new start-ups in the Silver Economy

Action Leader: MTU

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- The MTU Hincks Centre for Entrepreneurship Excellence, supported by the School of Business, is carrying out research on the Silver Economy, which is estimated to be worth €5.7 trillion by 2025. The Silver Economy is the economic opportunities that arise from expenditure related to population ageing and is potentially a lucrative market.
- MTU have led on a European wide project, *Silver SMEs*, which looks at awareness and opportunities in the Silver Economy.
- Stemming from the *Silver SMEs* project, a follow up project called *Senior Eco-Nect* has been undertaken by the Hincks Centre. *Senior Eco-Nect* aims to connect different aspects of the Silver Economy with a specific focus on integrated and inclusive policy development to maximise the benefits. Silver Economy designates the economy of the older population or the sum of all economic activities and the whole range of products and services that serve the needs of people aged 50 and over. The project consortium will work together to produce important policy outputs culminating in the publication of a Joint Action Plan and including regional SWOT analyses, stakeholder mapping and strategy development.
- Further work on this action is required to map out progress to Q4 2024.

Action 1.8: Develop shared workspace to support graduate and student start-ups in the region

Action Leader: UCC

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- As part of UCC's 2023-2028 Strategic Plan *Securing our Future*, it is a stated ambition to create an innovation culture and an entrepreneurial campus. UCC has committed to creating a new student Entrepreneurship/Start-up Hub on campus. This has buy-in from the university leadership team and initial scoping has commenced to identify a suitable location.
- UCC are looking at creating an on campus central entrepreneurship hub which is part of its overall strategic plan.

Action 1.9: Support the further development of the Scale Cork programme to support those who are in the indigenous MedTech, Agri-Tech, Digital and Connected Health and Life Sciences. This Action would include those who are part of the Supply Chain of these sectors

Action Leader: Cork County Council, Rubicon and MTU

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

MTU and Cork County Council continue to support Scale Cork companies, keeping the infrastructure for future Scale programmes in place.

- MTU and Cork County Council are examining the potential for further scaling programmes. Six companies in Co. Cork have completed the *Scale Cork* programme. The final report on the programme is under development with recommendations for future opportunities in the South-West.
- A 2023 review of participating companies in the *Scale Cork 2020* programme demonstrates that participants have grown in both turnover and employment. The adoption of digitalisation and international quality standards will provide a platform for the companies to continue to scale.

Action 1.10: Strengthen the Enterprise Ecosystem of the South-West Region through the regeneration of city, town and village centres creating an environment that is attractive for investment in enterprise, residential and community development

Action Leader: Local Authorities

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

Progress is ongoing through a range of projects and programmes across the South-West.

- There are a large number of regionally impactful projects in Cork City, Cork County and Kerry County Council areas which are contributing to the achievement of this action under the *Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF)*, *Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF)* and *Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF)* programmes.
- The SRA with the support of the South-West REP is preparing an application for the *EU Regional Innovation Valleys* expression of interest. This call will identify a minimum of 100 regions across Europe which will commit to enhance the coordination and direction of research and innovation investment and policies at regional level. It will also facilitate collaboration on inter-regional innovation projects linked to key EU priorities. This work also links with Action 1.6 above.
- The recent roll out of the RDM provides an online mapping tool featuring a range of socio economic and environmental indicators to monitor developments for a green, livable, creative and innovative region. The RDM will assist in providing an evidence base for progress across complementary plans including the South-West REP.
- The RDI Hub attended and presented at the European Commission's *European Start-up Villages Forum*. The RDI Hub were one of only three Hubs in Europe asked to present.

Action 1.11: Support Kerry Economic Development Growth Engine (Kerry EDGE)

Action Leader: Kerry County Council

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- The Kerry Economic Stakeholder Forum is an interagency and business forum, chaired by Kerry County Council. This forum has identified a number of key priorities for County

Kerry including the collective marketing and promotion of the county and identifying opportunities for Kerry as a second-site location.

- A subgroup of this forum is working together on a brand and marketing strategy for Kerry. This is working well in its current format and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between partners is in place. It is envisaged that this may be broadened out to consider a longer-term business model for marketing and identifying investment opportunities for Kerry and this is being explored with the partner bodies. A feasibility study may be required.

Action 1.12: Support the development of the film/creative industries

Action Leader: Local Authorities

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- Work within the three local authorities is progressing on further developing the film industry in the South-West. Kerry County Council and Cork City Council have a film officer and Cork County has an arts officer. There is an ambition across the region to work more closely to further this sector.
- In June 2023, West Cork Film Studios opened in Skibbereen with ambitions to grow and scale in the coming years.
- The REP Steering Committee will continue to examine ways to grow the sector in the region and enhance capability and talent/skills in this area.

Action 1.13: Explore the feasibility of developing an eHealth and Community Wellbeing Innovation District in the South-West Region 'Project An Oilean'

Action Leader: Kerry Innovation Centre

Timeframe for delivery: Q3 2022

Status: Action discontinued

Action Update:

REDF funding was not drawn down and the project is not going ahead. There were a number of organisational changes within Kerry Innovation Centre which resulted in the project being discontinued.

Strategic Objective 2: Maximise the potential of digital enterprise and innovation hubs to support digitalisation, business growth, climate action and smart working

Action 2.1: Strengthen the networks of digital hubs in the region and increase knowledge sharing among hubs

Action Leader: Munster Technological University (MTU)

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status Action on target

Action Update:

- Considerable progress has been made under this action. There are ongoing programmes and collaboration between hubs in the South-West on digitalisation, climate action training programmes, business development and growth. Roll out of the QHubs programme developed by the Community Enterprise Association Ireland (CEAI) will soon commence.
- The Cork and Kerry Hubs Networks have been established and are chaired by MTU Cork and Tralee. They are collaborating on a joint Cork and Kerry Hubs Network event planned for Q4 2023.
- As a result of significant investment by Enterprise Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta in Enterprise Centres and Hubs over a number of years a network of 27 hubs exists across the South-West region with the new Gteic hub in Ballyvourney scheduled to open in 2024 and the feasibility of developing an enterprise hub in Shandon in Cork City is being explored.
- The hub network meets regularly to share best practice across the region.

Action 2.2: Develop the research and evidence base of the benefit of hubs for job creation, climate action and digitalisation

Action Leader: Community Enterprise Association Ireland (CEAI)

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

***Original timeframe extended**

Status: Action not on target

Action Update:

- There is no centralised database on hubs and the impacts of the hubs. The Working Group is examining the possibility of undertaking a research piece on the impact of hubs on employment creation, climate action and digitalisation.

Action 2.3: Mainstream the role of sustainability, climate action and digitalisation in hubs

Action Leader: CEAI

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status Action on target

Action Update:

- The QHubs programme is considering the inclusion of training programmes around sustainability, climate action and digitalisation. This will be considered as part of the forthcoming National Hubs Strategy which is currently being developed.
- Many of the hubs in the South-West are engaging in climate action and digitalisation programmes on an ongoing basis. Cork Urban Enterprises, Ballingearry Hub and Dingle Hubs are all involved in multiple programmes around digital transformation, social enterprise/food and micro-enterprise.

Action 2.4: Foster and develop links between hubs in the South-West with international peers to support learning and knowledge exchange, collaboration, and investment

Action Leader: MTU

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- REP Working Group members are involved in a number of international programmes including, the *iEER Interreg flagship project*, *Horizon Europe*, and *Peace Plus*. Members

are sharing the knowledge and experience from those programmes across the region to other hubs, and the clients within those locations.

- MTU will be connecting with Cork County Council on EU projects linked to hubs and programmes.

Action 2.5: Investment in shared programmes across hubs for clients and training for Hub Managers and staff

Amended Action 2.5: Investment in shared programmes and training for Hub Managers and Staff

Action Leader: CEAI

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

Following discussion at Working Group level the action wording has been amended to clarify that the focus is on programmes to support hub managers and staff. Work to deliver this action includes:

- Assess the learning and development needs/opportunities for key personnel within centres and hubs in the South-West.
- Develop a learning pathway based on current needs/demands and in alignment with the Competency and Career Framework under development for the National Hub Network.
- Identify/develop suitable programmes; secure funding and deliver programmes for the region.

Action 2.6: Support the hub ecosystem within the region

Action Leader: Hub Network

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

Ongoing work under this action by the Cork and Kerry Hub Networks includes:

- Mapping the existing centre and hub infrastructure and service offerings across the South-West.

- Roll out of CEAI's QHubs quality and innovation management diagnostic to the South-West to evaluate current performance across key areas such as service offerings, programmatic supports, management, and operational performance.
- Continued work with key stakeholders in the South-West, including the hub networks to examine gaps and identify opportunities /solutions to further support best in class service offerings and programmatic delivery.

Action 2.7: Establish a new urban Centre of Excellence in the Northside of Cork City to support enterprise and job creation in the area whilst creating a positive impact both economically and socially

Action Leader: Recreate Shandon CLG and Cork City Council

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

Considerable preparatory work has been done on this project to date, including:

- A long-term lease has been granted by Cork City Council to Recreate Shandon CLG for the Shandon Buttermarket.
- A board of directors has been put in place for the company with membership including Cork City Council, UCC, MTU, KPMG, community representatives, and currently chaired by a former CEO of Cork University Hospital.
- Planning permission for the Tech and Innovation Hub has been granted to Recreate Shandon CLG.
- A more in-depth feasibility study of the Shandon Buttermarket project has been completed, supported by EI's Regional Enterprise Innovation Scoping Scheme (REISS), by consultants Bridgewater/Feasibility Studios.
- A detailed business plan and financial assessment is being completed to support an application under the Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme (SREIS).

Action 2.8: Pilot the establishment of an inclusive co-working space which creates opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate equally in the new world of co-working/remote working

Action Leader: The Crann Centre

Timeframe for delivery: Q2 2022

Status: Action complete

Action Update:

- The Impact Hub at the Crann Centre in Ballincollig, which opened in April 2022, is serving as an exemplar in inclusivity for persons with disabilities. Supports for business through a variety of training and mentoring programmes is available in collaboration with the Rubicon Centre/MTU and LEOs.
- Persons with disabilities are being supported to start and grow their own enterprises with occupational rehab, mentoring and networks.
- This enterprise hub continues to roll out programmes within the wider community, to demonstrate the impacts and to provide business supports.
- A Business Support Manager is needed to continue to expand the scope of the work and potential funding mechanisms for this position are being explore by the Impact Hub.

Strategic Objective 3: Support Cluster Organisations in driving the development and growth of enterprises

Action 3.1: Support the development and management of best-in-class cluster organisations in the South-West through the provision of cluster training and expertise

Action Leader: Munster Technological University (MTU) and University College Cork (UCC)

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

There has been a considerable level of activity with the Cluster organisations in the South-West since the launch of the REP.

- MTU and UCC delivered a full training module in Q4 2022 to the National Cluster Managers in conjunction with InterTrade Ireland.
- Supported by InterTrade Ireland's *Synergy* programme, an all-island cluster gap analysis report was completed by MTU and UCC in 2022. The project set out to gather the views and increase the transfer of knowledge between SMEs, Cluster Managers, Policy Makers, State Agencies, as well as between all-island cluster researchers and academics.
- The South-West Cluster Managers Forum members and South-West REP Clusters Working Group attended the Interreg Europe funded Accelerate GDT (Green and Digital Transition) launch at MTU in April 2023. The purpose of this programme is to reinvent national and regional cluster polices to support the twin green and digital transitions and SME competitiveness.
- Ongoing supports for Cluster Managers in the South-West are being examined by Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and third level institutions, this review looks to build on a number of existing cluster activities currently being funded by Enterprise Ireland. For example, TCI Network, a leading global network working in clusters and innovation ecosystems, is running a *Cluster Accelerator* programme open to Cluster Managers.

Action 3.2: Establish a South-West cluster forum to bring together cluster managers across the region to support cross-cluster collaboration as well as supporting stakeholders from academia and government

Action Leader: MTU and Cluster Organisations

Timeframe for delivery: Q1 2022

Status: Action complete

Action Update:

- Although later than initially planned, the South-West Cluster Managers Forum was established in February 2023 and met for the first time in April 2023. Terms of Reference were presented and agreed. All Clusters in the South-West are participating in the Forum. The Forum will support Clusters and Cluster Managers in the South-West as well as engaging with the forthcoming National Clustering Policy and supporting stakeholders in academia and agencies.
- This Forum is facilitating collaboration, networking and learning across the cluster network. An overview and baseline survey of Clusters in the South-West region will inform the future direction of the Clusters Managers Forum and will be considered at the upcoming meeting in October 2023.
- The cross-collaboration and partnering amongst Enterprise Ireland funded cluster organisations in the South-West is deepening. For example, Tech Industry Alliance, Cyber Ireland, Circular BioEconomy South-West and AgriTech Ireland collaborated at TechFest 2023 to showcase activities, programmes and initiatives being run in the South-West region to a wide business audience.

Action 3.3: Develop a new cluster organisation for Technology Innovation in Life Science, Medical/Health Sciences and Advanced Technologies (TILMHS Cluster)

Action Leader: UCC

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- This TILMHS Cluster supports the development of healthcare, including progressing a health innovation corridor in Ireland. It encompasses the i-Ed Hub, Syn Bio Hub DAC (trading as Cork-BioHub) and Health Innovation Hub Ireland. This Cluster is represented on the Cluster Managers Forum and Clusters REP Working Group.

- CorkBioHub, supported by UCC, Cork County Council and Enterprise Ireland's Regional Enterprise Development Fund, will provide a "one stop shop" growth and development system enabling life science start-up companies to thrive in a unique supportive environment custom designed to suit bio-based businesses.
- The iEd Hub, supported by the Higher Education Authority's Human Capital Initiative, provides training for unmet industry needs – helping to close the skills gap in biopharma and medical device sectors through a range of new postgraduate courses.

Action 3.4: Support the development and management of STEM South-West Cluster as an industry led cluster for the South-West region

Action Leader: MTU and Local Authorities

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- STEM South-West was formally established as a company limited by guarantee (CLG) in 2022 and has a full industry-led board in place. The Cluster is represented by its Chair on the South-West Clusters Forum and on the South-West REP Clusters Working Group.
- The Cluster is engaged in fostering collaborative synergies amongst its members and clients and is committed to advancing industry academic STEM activity with partners including the iEd Hub.
- The ambition in STEM South-West is to drive transformative advancements, attract top-tier talent, and catalyse sustainable development in the South-West region and further afield.

Action 3.5: Progress the Establishment of a National Space Industry Cluster

Action Leader: MTU

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- The National Space Industry Cluster is represented both on the South-West Cluster Managers Forum and on the South-West REP Clusters Working Group. A comprehensive report has been funded through an Enterprise Ireland Regional Enterprise Innovation

Scoping Scheme (REISS) Feasibility Grant. Compiled by KPMG it provides the evidence base for a space cluster or analogous infrastructure that will expand the number of companies engaged in the space domain.

- The uniqueness of the report lies in focusing on companies which have no current space pedigree or significant plans to embed space in their business roadmaps. The report highlights how this arises from a lack of awareness of the benefits of space and structures to provide the necessary educational, business and finance intelligence.

Strategic Objective 4: Bolster the South-West as a leader in sustainable Food Production and Agri-Tech through education, technology, and innovation

Action 4.1: Establish a Regional Innovation Incubator to develop technology solutions that will improve farm productivity enabling the production of more high-quality food while reducing the environmental impact

Action Leader: AgriTech cluster

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action not on target

Action Update:

- Enterprise Ireland's Regional Enterprise Innovation Scoping Scheme (REISS) provided funding to investigate the feasibility for a new physical space in the South-West as a national incubator. The report confirms an opportunity exists for an innovation facility to incubate technology related business opportunities for the sector.
- The plan is to develop a proposal for the Smart Regional Enterprise Innovation Scheme.

Action 4.2: Accelerate the adoption of Digitalisation in the AgriTech domain to include solutions for AgriTech companies and farmers.

Action Leader: AgriTech cluster and Agri service provider

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2023

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- The Enterprise Ireland funded Agritech Centre of Excellence (ACE) has been working with industry, academia, government agencies and local authorities to deliver a wide range of digitalisation services, including Digital Immersive Technology Specialists, ACE Virtual Reality Suite, Virtual Reality Training Content Creation ACE.
- The REP Working Group is focusing on knowledge sharing and other projects with the aim of increasing uptake in the adoption of digital technology in agriculture.
- The AgriTech cluster which has been supported through Enterprise Ireland's Regional technology Cluster Fund has developed a lean programme *Process Optimiser* engages companies through a collaborative workshop series to review existing processes and plan for a digitalised future using lean tools and techniques.

- The cluster organises events to engage Agri stakeholders in technology and digitalisation opportunities like the *AgriTech Industry Day* in March 2023 at RDI Hub in Killorglin with Munster Technological University (MTU) and the *Tech4Agri* event in May 2023 at Tyndall National Institute with ESA Space Solutions Ireland.

Action 4.3: Research and development of digitalisation and tech-based solutions

Action Leader: AgriTech cluster and IMaR research centre

Timeframe for delivery: Q3 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- Alliances have been developed with established Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs) through the EU Smart Agri Hubs network.
- Opportunities for innovation funding have been explored and will be pursued by the South-West stakeholders.
- The IMaR research centre has a comprehensive project portfolio in digitalisation and tech-based solutions for agriculture. ImaR, Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) research centre and Vistamilk are meeting on a regular basis to identify collaborative project opportunities.
- The AgriTech cluster is running a new service “AgriTEAM Innovator” with the aim of stimulating more RD&I in SMEs, connecting researchers with new opportunities, and building project teams.

Action 4.4: Skills development and training

Action Leader: MTU

Timeframe for delivery: Q2 2023

Status: Action complete

Action Update:

- MTU, UCC, ACE and Agritech partners are rolling out specific projects, particularly through AR and VR facilities through a connected network developed through the REP Working Group.

- Digitalisation and supports for existing businesses are rolled out through immersive learning – Working Group members such as Teagasc, Moorepark and Tyndall National Institute are working on training and skills programmes which will assist businesses developing and implementing successful digital training solutions.

Action 4.5: Set up Virtual Testing Facility in addition to testbed partners

Action Leader: MTU

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- There is considerable work being done under this action and knowledge in this area is being shared through the REP Working Group. Tyndall National Institute, MTU, UCC, ACE and Agritech Cluster partners are rolling out specific projects.
- Establishment of virtual testing facility ACE at MTU in 2022 which uses immersive learning technologies to enhance companies' capabilities in the region – working collaboratively with Teagasc and the Tyndall National Institute on programmes in this area.

Action 4.6: Support the development of food enterprises in the region

Action Leader: Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) and Local Development Companies

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- There is ongoing progress in this space and the local authorities, LEOs and ten Local Development Companies (seven in Co. Cork, three in Co. Kerry) are engaged with food producers across the South-West region.
- Programmes for food enterprises include, *Digital school of food, food starter programme, food academy programme, Cork Incubator Kitchens.*
- Flagship projects include the development and expansion of the Listowel and Fries food hubs, Cork Incubator Kitchens in Carrigaline, Moorepark Food Research Centre in Fermoy and the Corca Dhuibhne/Dingle Peninsula 2030 plan.

Action 4.7: Further develop both full-time and part-time education, training and executive education flexible pathways for food, agri-food and seafood industry personnel from artisan food producers to multinational companies in the South-West region. This includes both technical and food management initiatives at accredited and non-accredited levels

Action Leader: Food Industry Training Unit (FITU) UCC

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- Work is progressing in UCC's FITU, in conjunction with the LEOs and Skillnet, on developing flexible pathways for education and training, skills development and development of new learning pathways from diploma to PhD. FITU's flexible suite of offerings ensures that learners can opt to join a specialised webinar, a short course (often micro-credential accredited), or a full programme; FITU has recently introduced stackable qualifications where industry professionals can start with a short course and progress right through to a Masters.
- The LEOs have also been progressing a number of initiatives in the food sector including a *Digital School of Food*, *Food Starter Programme* and the *Food Academy Programme*.

New Action 4.8: Work with stakeholders to develop food tourism opportunities through the implementation of the Destination Experience Development Plans (DEDPs)

Action Leader: Fáilte Ireland

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- The REP Working Group, which includes representation from ACE, Fáilte Ireland, the LEOs in Cork and Kerry, the local authorities and Local Development Companies, is actively looking at ways to collaborate in rolling out specific projects in the South-West including through the DEDPs for Cork and Kerry as well as potential new projects through the *Digital that Delivers* Programme which help companies digitalise their offering or services to improve the visitor experience.

Strategic Objective 5: Embrace the opportunities of Climate Action in the Marine, Circular Bioeconomy, Tourism and Energy Sectors

Action 5.1: To increase the number of start-ups and SMEs with sustainable marine, circular bioeconomy and energy solutions through relevant accelerator programmes

Action Leader: MaREI, Circular Bioeconomy Cluster South-West and Energy Cork

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- A Working Group representative of the region and key sectors was established under this objective in March 2023. There is ongoing work, such as the Ignite and New Frontiers programmes, as well as projects through InterTrade Ireland and MaREI, the SFI Research Centre for Energy, Climate and Marine research and innovation coordinated by UCC's Environmental Research Institute.
- It is recognised that broader sectoral expertise is needed. The REP Working Group is identifying the gaps and expertise required that is not already provided within the existing accelerators.
- These projects and programmes together will strengthen the regional ecosystem which in turn support the development and growth of SMEs in this sector.

Action 5.2: Strengthen the links between the digital/ICT technology sector and the marine, agriculture, energy, forestry, tourism and industrial sectors to encourage collaboration between start-ups, SMEs and industry

Action Leader: it@Cork, Circular Bioeconomy Cluster South-West, MaREI and Energy Cork

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- This action is being progressed by the Clusters in the region through collaboration with industry and other regional stakeholders. There is a role for the Cluster organisations to signpost digitalisation for SMEs in relevant sectors to encourage collaboration with MNCs.

- The Skillsnet funded Innovation Exchange was hosted by RDI and Ludgate hubs and is enabling established companies to connect with SMEs in the region assisting them in accelerating their digital transformation. Participating SMEs get access to a customer pipeline and to a framework that develops the capability to navigate sales and procurement, accelerate expansion and achieve commercial success.
- it@Cork, now operating under the Tech Industry Alliance (a collaboration with KerrySciTech, continues its focus on sustainable practices within industry. Its flagship TechFest 2023 event is held each May, The Future of Power – Addressing the Energy Crisis, included leaders from academia and industry discussing opportunities and challenges for Ireland and the South-West region.

Action 5.3: Build greater collaboration in the energy sector and climate action sectors between enterprises in Cork and Kerry

Action Leader: Energy Cork, MaREI and Circular Bioeconomy Cluster South-West

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- The REP Working Group is working with the region's Clusters to plan and collaborate on sectoral events, together with the local authorities; work is continuing to develop supports for zero carbon and just transition across the region.
- Events such as Techfest and STEM South-West Expo are supported by other clusters in the region such as, Energy Cork, Tech Industry Alliance, Bio Economy Cluster and other Clusters with support from the region's Universities, State Agencies and local authorities on a regular basis.

Action 5.4: Support the work of the CARO/enterprise opportunities initiative. Consideration could be given to linking with decarbonisation zones in local authority areas

Action Leader: South-West Programme Manager

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

***Original timeframe extended**

Status: Action not on target

Action Update:

- The Climate Action Plans in each area have not yet been finalised. It was recommended that the REP Working Group might revert to CARO and the Climate Action Units in the local authorities to look at opportunities for business in the South-West.
- The REP Working Group is considering potential ways to work with the Clusters and CARO to collaborate on projects and events around decarbonisation.

Action 5.5: Collaborate with the Mid-West region to support economic development potential of the Shannon Estuary and surrounding region

Action Leader: Local Authorities

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- Shannon Estuary Economic Taskforce report was launched in June 2023. The report sets out recommendations to establish a road map to an Atlantic Green Digital Corridor through the delivery of up to 300GW of Atlantic Offshore Wind through the estuary by 2050. The report also contains proposed actions to maximise the deployment of onshore renewable energy across the region as well as new proposals for transport, logistics, connectivity and the tourism sector.
- Shannon Foynes Port Company Vision 2041 Review of Strategy published in November 2022 contains a strong emphasis on offshore wind energy enabling infrastructural development and the potential for supporting floating offshore wind delivery at scale. Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan II Public Consultation event was held in Foynes in May 2023.
- Public consultation events in 2022 and 2023 have been held by the ESB, DP Energy, Simply Blue and Mainstream in relation to the proposed offshore wind projects off west Clare and north Kerry.
- The South-West Working Group is engaging directly with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE) on the forthcoming National Industrial Strategy for Offshore Wind. DETE officials met with the REP Working Group in Ringaskiddy in June 2023 to outline proposals in this regard.

Action 5.6: Collaborate with the Mid-West Region to build regional research, education and training capacity for emerging renewable energy opportunities in the Shannon Estuary and surrounding region

Action Leader: Shannon Foynes Port Company, Mid-West Regional Enterprise Plan, University of Limerick, Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest and MTU Kerry

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

***Original timeframe extended**

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- Collaboration has been ongoing through the South-West and Mid-West REP Programme Managers, with the Mid-West region leading on this programme of work.
- In January 2023 the Mid-West Education and Training Providers presented to the Norwegian ambassador and discussed collaborative educational links. In June 2023 there was a bilateral meeting between the Midwest Education and Training Provider Group and the Canadian Marine Skills providers as part of the Oceans 23 delegation to share learnings and discuss collaboration opportunities. In February 2023 the National Maritime College of Ireland Seafarers conference was held in Limerick bringing together representatives from Ireland's maritime industry to explore the opportunities that exist to support and grow the fishing and offshore wind industries in Ireland.
- In June 2023 Oceans 23 International Conference was held at UL in association with the Marine Institute, IEEE Oceanic Engineering Society and the Marine Technology Society. This event attracted over 1,000 key delegates from industry, academia and government focusing on emerging technologies, research initiatives, new products, and investment strategies to address global challenges such as climate change, marine energy, and protecting and rejuvenating the world's oceans.
- Midwest education training group continues to meet quarterly and has grown in size and geographical reach with the South-West stakeholders such as the South-West Programme Manager now engaged to capitalise on the opportunities for North Kerry and the estuary. The cluster has created a mapping document showing all relevant course offerings currently available across providers in the region. This mapping exercise has been used the development of a range of new course and module offerings which it is hoped will be funded and offered in the coming years.

Action 5.7: Develop funding applications for Innovation Programmes and infrastructure facilities for Climate Action, Blue Economy, Circular Bioeconomy, Energy, Sustainable Port Activities, and Just Transition

Action Leader: MaREI, Energy Cork, Circular Bioeconomy Cluster South-West and IT@Cork

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

***Original timeframe extended**

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- There is ongoing work in this area through Interreg involving the Southern Regional Assembly, MTU and UCC. There have been a number of funding calls in the Blue Economy - Sustainable Green Procurement testbeds.

Action 5.8: Provide training and education supports to develop the necessary human capital, skills and competences required for the transition to a zero carbon and circular economy across a broad base of enterprise and industry within the South-West Region

Action Leader: Environmental Research Institute (ERI) - UCC

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- UCC are working with business through the *Sustainable Futures* project. *Sustainable Futures* is focused on climate action, environmental sustainability, and achieving net zero in industry and enterprise; its community, collaborative environment and educational programmes produce leaders equipped to lead the transition to a sustainable and net zero future. Funded by the Higher Education Authority's Human Capital Initiative, *Sustainable Futures* is led by UCC in collaboration with Maynooth University, Atlantic Technological University and multiple industry partners.
- The Working Group recognises that there are ongoing opportunities for companies in the renewable energy space and innovation programmes and skills training and education programmes are being developed to facilitate those requirements.

Action 5.9: Engage with stakeholders to scope out enterprise opportunities for coastal communities in the South-West arising from the post Brexit and Climate Transition

Action Leader: Local Authorities and LEOs

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

***Original timeframe extended**

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- The timeframe for this action has passed but there is ongoing work and engagement with the Working Group through the LEOs, MTU, the FLAGs which is a local fisheries group in the region, and the *Brexit Blue Economy Scheme*.
- New opportunities will arise in the lifetime of this Plan through the upcoming National Industrial Strategy for Offshore Wind and other initiatives, and these will form the basis for further engagement and supports for coastal communities in the South-West.

Action 5.10: Support the development of sustainable and green enterprise within the tourism economy

Action Leader: Fáilte Ireland

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action not on target

Action Update:

The Working Group intends to engage further with Fáilte Ireland on progressing the ambition of this action throughout 2024 with the intention of building on the existing initiatives in the region including;

- Sustainable tourism plan for the region – Cork and Kerry Convention Bureaus/Regenerative tourism programme
- Sustainable green procurement testbeds
- Visit Cork Strategy 2022-2026 [Visit Cork Strategy 2022-2026](#)
- Dingle Sustainable Energy Community (SEC) for Hospitality, supported by Fáilte Ireland and Kerry County Council
- MA in Regenerative Tourism delivered by MTU
- A range of sustainability projects such as Killarney Coffee Cup pilot and Dingle Food Festival waste free project [Discover Kerry](#)

New Action 5.11: Examine the potential of establishing an industry led cluster to develop a policy on exploiting the potential of offshore renewable energy in the Cork Harbour region

Action Leader: Working Group Chair and REP Programme Manager

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- A new unit was established in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in Q2 2023 tasked with developing a National Industrial Strategy for Offshore Wind with an ambition to publish in Q1 2024.
- The opportunities for the South-West to benefit from this new sector are significant and can be fully realised through coordinated and collaborative planning by regional stakeholders. In this context, the Steering Committee noted the absence of an action around the enterprise opportunities around Cork Harbour and added this action in Q2 2023 to enable strategic examination of the enterprise opportunities associated with offshore wind. A Working Group will be established to drive delivery of this action.
- Working being undertaken by the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA) and the South-West REP references at action 1.6 also aligns with this action.

Strategic Objective 6: Ensure a strong pipeline of talent in the region, focusing on sustainable high-quality jobs

Action 6.1: Develop Innovation and Design Thinking Training and Development Programmes to prepare SMEs to supply the South-West FDI companies

Action Leader: Munster Technological University (MTU)

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2023

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- The REP Working Group for this action has representation from across the agencies, academia, government and private sector. The group is collaborating on proposals around the supply chain space between start-ups, SMEs and MNCs in the South-West and pathways to form new relationships between the sectors.
- During Q2 - Q3 2023 RDI Hub and Ludgate hubs led out on the Innovation Exchange which is an initiative to connect and exploit the supply chain opportunities between SMEs and MNCs in the South-West. This initiative will be presented to the Working Group at the next meeting and work will continue on this action, particularly around the green supply chain.

Action 6.2: Introduce supports for the services industry to achieve resource efficiency through targeted training initiatives

Action Leader: Munster Technological University (MTU)

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2023

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- The REP Working Group is looking at mapping for SMEs around green and sustainable procurement and managing key resources such as water, waste and raw materials.
- Energy Cork and Cork Chamber have undertaken an Energy Champion feasibility study, supported by Enterprise Ireland's *Regional Enterprise Innovation Scoping Scheme*, and to date 12 SMEs have taken part. There is ambition to scale this up to 100 SMEs.

Action 6.3: Provide training and education supports in the synthesis and continuous processing of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) to meet the demand for highly skilled postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers in the pharmaceutical industry in the South-West Region

Action Leader: UCC Analytical & Biological Chemistry Research Facility (ABCRF)

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

- The ABCRF in UCC is a leading research facility focused on diverse aspects of synthetic organic chemistry, medicinal chemistry, analytical chemistry and biochemistry. The key role of the ABCRF is the training of early career researchers – PhD students and postdocs – in areas of the pharmaceutical sciences of direct relevance to the skills needed in the pharmaceutical industry. Central to this is a Structured PhD Programme in Organic and Pharmaceutical Chemistry.
- Recently the expertise within the ABCRF has been central to the launch of UCC Future Pharmaceuticals initiative. Strategic partners include NIBRT and SSPC hosted at UL.
- It should be noted that the i-Ed Hub (which is a collaboration between the two universities, enterprise stakeholders and leading industries in health and sciences, supported by the HEA Human Capital Initiative) is providing training for unmet industry needs and helping to close the skills gap in pharma, biopharma and medical devices sector through a range of new post graduate courses.
- A wide range of upskilling and education programmes have been developed by MTU and UCC to meet the needs of industry in facing challenges posed by digitalisation and sustainability. The programmes are funded through Springboard+ and were developed and promoted through the South-West Regional Skills Forum.
- A new four-year full-time Bachelor of Engineering (Hons) degree programme in Smart Product Engineering was successfully launched in September 2022 in MTU. The programme is designed to attract students who will be central to the design, development and manufacture of innovative connected devices, products and systems into the future. It will support existing and new companies in the region with the design and development of smart products and systems.

Action 6.4: Establish an agreed and coordinated approach to life-long learning, skills and talent development and retention across regional stakeholders

Action Leader: South-West Programme Manager

Timeframe for delivery: Q4 2024

Status: Action on target

Action Update:

The Working Group has been examining a number of pathways under this action.

- The Southern Regional Assembly's (SRA) Towards A Learning Region report seeks to develop a learning region based on the UNESCO Learning City principles. It sets out a series of evidence-based recommendations for strengthened support of the Higher and Further Education Institutes and stakeholders in skills, education, and training development across the region. The South-West REP and SRA have committed to working together to progress the recommendations of the report.
- The South-West REP is looking at apprenticeships and national qualifications for non-EEA nationals. Partners within the group are already working with the I-Ed hub for the benefit of meeting industry employment needs of the South-West.
- The REP Working Group is also looking at the feasibility of developing strategic partnerships to develop bridging programmes for skilled migrants into the workforce in the South-West.
- Tech Industry Alliance (TIA) through its talent forum has brought together stakeholders across industry, academia and cluster organisations to identify interventions to address talent issues. A particular focus is the retention of talent in the South-West – this includes consideration on flexible work practices through the TIA HR Leaders Forum, which has over 40 members across Kerry and Cork, diversity, equality and inclusion efforts such as a Diversity Conference, planned for October 2023, and place branding for Kerry.

Action Status Table by Strategic Objectives

*Updated timeline agreed by Steering Committee

Strategic Objective 1: Enhance the enterprise eco-system across the region through innovation, entrepreneurship and digitalisation	Status	For completion by
Action 1.1: Develop programmes to support undergraduate and graduate entrepreneurship for the South-West	Action on target	Q4 2024*
Action 1.2: Support the growing animation and visual effects sector in the region	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 1.3: Increase the number of start-ups in technology with a focus on Cyber Security, AI and other emerging technologies through accelerator programmes	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 1.4: Establish a South-West 'Thought Leaders' Forum' to identify enterprise opportunities in emerging technology including sustainable finance, cyber security, AI and fintec	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 1.5: Explore the opportunities for the region through research and innovation in travel/tourism technology and aquaculture technology	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 1.6: Develop a Southern Smart Region through partnership with regional stakeholders to implement recommendations of a Smart Region Maturity Framework	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 1.7: Explore new niche market opportunities for regional enterprises and new start-ups in the Silver Economy	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 1.8: Develop shared workspace to support graduate and student start-ups in the region	Action on target	Q4 2024

Action 1.9: Support the further development of the Scale Cork programme to support those who are in the indigenous MedTech, Agri-Tech, Digital and Connected Health and Life Sciences. This Action would include those who are part of the supply chain of these sectors	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 1.10: Strengthen the enterprise ecosystem of the South-West Region through the regeneration of city, town and village centres creating an environment that is attractive for investment in enterprise, residential and community development	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 1.11: Support Kerry Economic Development Growth Engine (Kerry EDGE)	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 1.12: Support the development of the film/creative industries	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 1.13: Explore the feasibility of developing an eHealth and Community Wellbeing Innovation District in the South-West region 'Project An Oilean'	Action discontinued	Q3 2022

Strategic Objective 2: Maximise the potential of digital enterprise and innovation hubs to support digitalisation, business growth, climate action and smart working	Status	For completion by
Action 2.1: Strengthen the networks of digital hubs in the region and increase knowledge sharing among hubs	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 2.2: Develop the research and evidence base of the benefit of hubs for job creation, climate action and digitalisation	Action not on target	Q4 2024*

Action 2.3: Mainstream the role of sustainability, climate action and digitalisation in hubs	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 2.4: Foster and develop links between hubs in the South-West with international peers to support learning and knowledge exchange, collaboration, and investment	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 2.5: Investment in shared programmes and training for Hub Managers and Staff [Amended]	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 2.6: Support the hub ecosystem within the region	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 2.7: Establish a new urban Centre of Excellence in the Northside of Cork City to support enterprise and job creation in the area whilst creating a positive impact both economically and socially	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 2.8: Pilot the establishment of an inclusive co-working space which creates opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate equally in the new world of co-working/remote working	Action complete	Q2 2022

Strategic Objective 3: Support Cluster Organisations in driving the development and growth of enterprises	Status	For completion by
Action 3.1: Support the development and management of best-in-class cluster organisations in the South-West through the provision of cluster training and expertise	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 3.2: Establish a South-West cluster forum to bring together cluster managers across the region to support cross-cluster	Action complete	Q1 2022

collaboration as well as supporting stakeholders from academia and government		
Action 3.3: Develop a new cluster organisation for Technology Innovation in Life Science, Medical/Health Sciences and Advanced Technologies (TILMHS Cluster)	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 3.4: Support the development and management of STEM South-West Cluster as an industry led cluster for the South-West region	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 3.5: Progress the Establishment of a National Space Industry Cluster.	Action on target	Q4 2024

Strategic Objective 4: Bolster the South-West as a leader in sustainable Food Production and Agri-Tech through education, technology, and innovation	Status	For completion by
Action 4.1: Establish a Regional Innovation Incubator to develop technology solutions that will improve farm productivity enabling the production of more high-quality food while reducing the environmental impact	Action not on target	Q4 2024
Action 4.2: Accelerate the adoption of Digitalisation in the AgriTech domain to include solutions for AgriTech companies and farmers	Action on target	Q4 2023
Action 4.3: Research and development of digitalisation and tech-based solutions	Action on target	Q3 2024
Action 4.4: Skills development and training	Action complete	Q2 2023
Action 4.5: Set up Virtual Testing Facility in addition to testbed partners	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 4.6: Support the development of food enterprises in the region	Action on target	Q4 2024

<p>Action 4.7: Further develop both full-time and part-time education, training and executive education flexible pathways for food, agri-food and seafood industry personnel from artisan food producers to multinational companies in the South-West Region. This includes both technical and food management initiatives at accredited and non-accredited levels</p>	<p>Action on target</p>	<p>Q4 2024</p>
<p>Action 4.8: Work with stakeholders to develop food tourism opportunities through the implementation of the Destination Experience Development Plans (DEDPs)</p>	<p>Action on target</p>	<p>Q4 2024</p>

<p>Strategic Objective 5: Embrace the opportunities of Climate Action in the Marine, Circular Bioeconomy, Tourism and Energy Sectors.</p>	<p>Status</p>	<p>For completion by</p>
<p>Action 5.1: To increase the number of start-ups and SMEs with sustainable marine, circular bioeconomy and energy solutions through relevant accelerator programmes.</p>	<p>Action on target</p>	<p>Q4 2024</p>
<p>Action 5.2: Strengthen the links between the digital/ICT technology sector and the marine, agriculture, energy, forestry, tourism and industrial sectors to encourage collaboration between start-ups, SMEs and industry.</p>	<p>Action on target</p>	<p>Q4 2024</p>
<p>Action 5.3: Build greater collaboration in the energy sector and climate action sectors between enterprises in Cork and Kerry.</p>	<p>Action on target</p>	<p>Q4 2024</p>
<p>Action 5.4: Support the work of the CARO/enterprise opportunities initiative. Consideration could be given to linking with decarbonization zones in local authority areas.</p>	<p>Action not on target</p>	<p>Q4 2024*</p>

<p>Action 5.5: Collaborate with the Mid-West Region to support economic development potential of the Shannon Estuary and surrounding region.</p>	<p>Action on target</p>	<p>Q4 2024</p>
<p>Action 5.6: Collaborate with the Mid-West Region to build regional research, education and training capacity for emerging renewable energy opportunities in the Shannon Estuary and surrounding region.</p>	<p>Action on target</p>	<p>Q4 2024*</p>
<p>Action 5.7: Develop funding applications for Innovation Programmes and infrastructure facilities for Climate Action, Blue Economy, Circular Bioeconomy, Energy, Sustainable Port Activities, and Just Transition.</p>	<p>Action on target</p>	<p>Q4 2024*</p>
<p>Action 5.8: Provide training and education supports to develop the necessary human capital, skills and competences required for the transition to a zero carbon and circular economy across a broad base of enterprise and industry within the South-West Region.</p>	<p>Action on target</p>	<p>Q4 2024</p>
<p>Action 5.9: Engage with stakeholders to scope out enterprise opportunities for coastal communities in the South-West arising from the post Brexit and Climate Transition</p>	<p>Action on target</p>	<p>Q4 2024*</p>
<p>Action 5.10: Support the development of sustainable and green enterprise within the tourism economy.</p>	<p>Action not on target</p>	<p>Q4 2024</p>
<p>Action 5.11: Examine the potential of establishing an industry led cluster to develop a policy on exploiting the potential of offshore renewable energy in the Cork Harbour region [New]</p>	<p>Action on target</p>	<p>Q4 2024</p>

Strategic Objective 6: Ensure a strong pipeline of talent in the region, focusing on sustainable high-quality jobs.	Status	For completion by
Action 6.1: Develop Innovation and Design Thinking Training and Development Programmes to prepare SMEs to supply the South-West FDI companies.	Action on target	Q4 2023
Action 6.2: Introduce supports for the services industry to achieve resource efficiency through targeted training initiatives.	Action on target	Q4 2023
Action 6.3: Provide training and education supports in the synthesis and continuous processing of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) to meet the demand for highly skilled postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers in the pharmaceutical industry in the South-West Region.	Action on target	Q4 2024
Action 6.4: Establish an agreed and coordinated approach to life-long learning, skills and talent development and retention across regional stakeholders.	Action on target	Q4 2024